

Authentic Leadership

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[0 : 00] Father, we've talked already about all kinds of different leaders, good ones and bad ones.

! Perhaps we've got our own ideas about how it all should work in the church. But we just pray that you'll help us to remember your word tells us how leaders should be, what their qualifications are, tells us a little about how they function. We pray you'll help us to listen, to look hard and to discover what your word says and that this might help us as we are in the process of looking for a new leader with Phil wanting to step back soon. So give us help and make us attentive and interested, although we see lots of patterns of leadership out there, to see how the church and leadership in the church should be different, centered on you and centered on caring for one another. So we ask your help in Jesus' name. Amen.

So if you noticed in the first verse of 1 Timothy 3, there is a trustworthy saying and does anyone, just to see if you've been listening over the last few weeks, does anyone remember earlier in 1 Timothy where we had another trustworthy saying? Now this is a real test. Mark's been listening. Anyone else been listening? Phil's been listening. Let's have David at the back. That's it, that's it. Yes, so that was it.

Back in, I'll give you the clue here. This is actually the second one. The first one was in chapter 1 and verse 15, I think when Steve was speaking on it. But it does just underline that although lots of things going on here are very important, this is underlined as a very trustworthy thing and it says, whoever aspires to be an overseer, now that's not a very common word for us, is it? An overseer desires a noble task.

So it made me think, first off, perhaps it's the same way you think, what is an overseer? We're not actually told. I'm going to divert a little bit to some other parts of the Bible before we come back and look at some of these qualifications because I just want to find out a little bit more about what an overseer might be so that we get a better picture.

[2 : 41] Someone who looks over something? What do you think, children? Do you think that's a good idea? Someone who looks over a wall, maybe? Could that be an overseer?

If he only had that word, that could be an overseer, couldn't it? Someone who just looks over something, yeah? Well, what were you going to say, Sammy? You look over.

Yeah, you've got that. Maybe you're standing at a distance and you can see well over. Is that what you mean? Okay. So, okay. All right. Go on then, Isaac. Yes.

Yes. But I think if it helps you think about this, I'm sure it has the idea of someone who can look over things. And if you remember, that good heart of a leader is very interested in other people, not just interested in themselves.

Looking out over people, that's kind of the idea, isn't it? But we don't get a lot from this passage on what it means. I just want to read a couple of things from elsewhere.

[3 : 44] This is in Acts 20. And we will come across here a couple of other words as well as overseer. And I just want to read, it says in Acts 20, and this is verses 17 and 28.

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. Now, we're quite familiar in talking about Phil as an elder. There's the word elder of the church.

And in verse 28, it says, keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. We've had that word before. Be shepherds of the church of God.

That's a different word. It's actually the same word. We'll come across this in a minute as for pastor. Shepherds, which he bought with his own blood. And here's another verse in 1 Peter 5.

It says, So we've got two other words, if you're trying to keep the idea.

[5 : 08] We've come across this word elder here. That's the Greek presbyter. It just has, originally, I think it had the idea of just being older, an older person who's got a lot of experience.

But the essence of this, I think, is just that you are spiritually mature. Some people translate bishop. The idea of seniority.

You've got to be careful, I think, with the way we think about that. It often has a hierarchy idea about rank. We'll come to that in a minute. The word for overseer is episkopos.

And we have got the essence of that already. The idea of someone who watches over. Yeah? And then the other one, which is translated shepherd.

Same word that could be translated pastor. And think of a shepherd. One who guides. Protects the flock. And think of a pastor standing in front of a church.

[6 : 12] And he's very much... So he's got to be mature. He has this watching over role. But he's interested, like a shepherd would be, in guiding. You know, when the sheep don't have enough food to give some food.

Leading and guiding. And teaching, I think, is very much the key of these things. So if you weren't quite sure what an overseer was, this is beginning to tell you something about what the Bible says a leader, an elder should do.

But I will just comment, as you look back on those verses, these words are used very interchangeably. So you don't have...

An elder is not someone who's above a pastor or something else. They're very much interchangeable words. It says in that first verse we looked at, someone's addressing the elders, keep watch, because you are these other things as well.

So very interchangeable. And so I think it just makes me... It reminds me that we should be cautious about setups where they put a whole load of different ranks on leaders.

[7 : 25] So how many elders should there be? Now the children might have to wake up here, because I'm going to give you something to read, and then you can answer the question, how many elders should there be, right?

Here's a verse. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church. And another verse. This is in James 5. If any of you sick, let them call the elders. So question for the children. How many elders should there be in a church? Only Sammy?

A few. That's good. More than one is all it's really telling. It doesn't say seven or six or five, does it? More than one is pretty normal, okay? And I know Phil has often reminded us we have had, if you're new to the church, we've certainly had, not that long ago, three.

We're down to one at the moment. We're trying to find others. But the idea is that more than one is good. There is a plurality.

[8 : 31] That's kind of normal. Let me just touch on this one, too. What is their position in the church? And I want to come back to this broader idea of how God gives gifts, and that might make you think of 1 Corinthians 12.

But the New Testament, forgive my abbreviation there, the New Testament teaches that there is a unity involving a basic spiritual equality which characterizes the church.

All Christians in the church are spiritually gifted for the benefit of all. And if you wanted to look it up, 1 Corinthians 12 and verse 7 leads us into this.

Some people like to, if you're one of those people in the church who thinks, oh, I can't do anything, I'm not gifted, you can't get away from this verse. To each one of us who are believers, the manifestation of the Spirit has been given for the common good.

And it says, see to it that none of you have a sinful, unbelieving heart. This is in Hebrews 3, that turns away from the living God, but encourage one another. So just get this idea that God gives gifts.

[9 : 49] He gives gifts, and some are pastors. I think we'll find these verses come up in a minute. There are all sorts of gifts that God gives, and that's where we get them from.

But who is the head of the church? Is it the elder or the pastor? Isaac? God, yes. More specifically, Jesus.

But yes. So although we have these shepherds, these elders, they recognize that Jesus is the one in charge of the church. So in this whole array of gifts that God gives to the church, and just think for a minute, what sort of gifts are there?

Gifts of administration? Some lists are in the Bible, but you can think of all sorts. People who are quietly willing to clean, people who can stand at the front and do things.

There are all sorts of gifts, and you know for the healthy community of the church, we need all sorts. The elder or the leader's gifts, it's a bit in the nature of that gift that you're going to be more up the front doing things.

[10:56] You're going to be exercising your gift a bit more frequently. But I just want to make this point. It doesn't put the elder as the person right at the top who, without question, you follow him, because that's not how it is.

He, like all of us, is submissive to God and his word. So what is their work in the church? And Hebrews 13, there are a couple of words we haven't come across just yet.

This one uses the word leaders. It says in Hebrews 13, have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority. We'll explore that in a moment. because they watch over you as those who must give an account.

So we've talked about standing before, but the idea of giving a lead. And it says in 1 Timothy 5, the elders who direct the affairs or rule the church well are worthy of double honor.

And this again is a word, this around the direct the affairs or ruling. That's the word which really just means to stand before. So leading, that's a kind of easy one, isn't it?

[12:07] Teaching is a pretty fundamental part of what elders do. It says in Titus that he must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught so that he can encourage others.

That's a very positive thing by sound doctrine, but sometimes there are people you've got to stand against who are coming up with all kinds of strange ideas that are not in the Bible. And sometimes you have to use your wits to refute those who are opposing it.

So teaching is a very important ministry for elders. And the last key area is this pastoral care, which is summoned up by the idea of shepherd or pastor, that word.

And we have quoted that verse, I think, earlier. Be shepherds, watching over them, not because you must, but because you are willing. So if you had a picture of Boris Johnson or President Biden in your head, and you thought about what they do, and actually, by and large, when they just say, do this, people just do it, don't they?

This gives you a very different pattern of the Bible idea of a leader. Yes, they do have to guide and give a steer, but they are people who teach, they are people who care.

[13:27] Very important we get this whole idea. And then I just wanted to ask this question, what is their authority in the church? Because actually one of those verses we read talked about this.

And I want to quickly say that the authority that we're interested in is the authority of Jesus Christ, and it's not located in any man or group of men, but it's in his word.

And the authority of Christ is present in the church as assembled, and especially as that assembly is in accordance with his word.

Now actually, if you did look up 1 Corinthians 5 for you, you'll find that it's an example, actually. I think it's a discipline example. But the idea is that someone's bringing something to the gathered church, and where there is a decision to make, it is, you know, sometimes because of confidences, the leaders may have to make some things, but by and large, the authority of Christ is actually present in his church when gathered.

But I will qualify this, because it does need a little understanding, because there are two extremes to avoid. One is, and there probably are some churches, not the best ones, where it seems like the leaders make all the decisions, and the other members feel that they're never really part of anything, they're never really involved, and the leader's just saying, we're going to do this, we're going to do that.

[14:57] So there's an extreme to avoid, but there's another one, and that is that we think the church is just like a democracy, and so whatever the issue we might want to talk about and make a decision about, we just quickly raise the issue, and we say, let's have a vote on it, and whatever the majority is, we win, you know.

And I just want to, having touched on those things, this is quite a carefully worded sentence here, the authority of Christ is present not when a majority decision is taken, but when the assembled church has sought to discern the mind of Christ as revealed in his word.

So you get the idea that you're getting some people who are always listening and gaining the word of God. Now, when those people are talking together, trying to work out a way forward, that is where you find the authority of Christ.

So this is why, this is a slight aside, but it does help you understand how leaders work. As a church, we strive to find unanimity on decisions, but because we're sinful, we're never going to quite get there.

So for example, I will just say this, like when we're voting, if we've got a new leader in mind, I think we say we're trying to get at least 80% on a fairly major decision, because we know we probably won't.

[16:14] But it's not a good thing when you've only got about 51% and you go for a major decision. So we strive for unanimity. You try and give time to let people talk. So there's an idea of where the authority is, primarily in the word and in the word as it settles in the church.

How are elders appointed in the church? Well, we've had some answers from the verses we've seen. One is that they are called by God.

If you look in Ephesians 4 and verse 11, it says very clearly that Christ gave, and it talks about a few other gifts. Christ gave the pastors and teachers. It also gives another hint here on one of the, to prepare people for works of service.

But fundamentally, God gives these people. They are called by God. But in that very opening verse we had in 1 Timothy 3 verse 1, says whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.

So there's something in a person that wants it. So there is an inner aspiration that perhaps needs to be there as well. And then this leads us on to the, we'll be back in 1 Timothy 3 in a moment, a conscientious screening by the church, the other thing, against all these qualifications that we read.

[17:41] So we'll go on to those. And if you're thumbing between it, as well as the passage you're looking at, you could look ahead to Titus 1 and verses 6 to 9, because we'll just pull some of these out from looking at this.

But you might come back to thinking this is quite a high standard by the time we get through this list. What qualities should elders have? Generally, and we are just, by and large, we're looking at 2 to 7. It says in verse 2, now the overseer is to be above reproach. I think if you looked in the Titus verse, you'd find the blameless idea. Now, this doesn't mean that they're super, super perfect.

But in a general way, there is no grounds to find an overall criticism of their character. So there's a blameless, above reproach idea here.

On the personal side, there is a faithfulness in marriage. Literally, the idea of a one-wife husband. Doesn't mean you have to be married to be an elder or a pastor, but if you are, there is a faithfulness in your marriage.

[18:59] And then these other words come out. Temperate, self-controlled. This idea of being free from an excess in any area.

Sensible, orderly, not a lover of money. Respectable.

Respectable. And then, in the family life area, it says in verse 4, he must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect.

But the obvious comment on this is if he can't manage his own family, how can he really be expected to manage God's family? So, he's got to prove himself in the way he manages his family before he's automatically...

Now, I don't know if some of you, if some of you are on a search committee thinking about, you know, how you're going to get to the truth of someone you've never met before, how you're going to try and get to the root of how he really is in the family, there's a challenge.

[20:17] But it's... Ideally, yeah, we should be aware of how things function. Then relationships kind of qualifications says in verse 3, not given to drunkenness, which is certainly an example of an excess.

Not violent, but gentle. And that's very related, I think, to the idea of not being quarrelsome. quarrelsome. So, not someone who's easily wound up, not someone who easily loses their rag, not someone who binges on getting out of control in their mind.

So, in relationships, this is... this is the kind of person... And there is this thing about being hospitable in verse 2, and it's certainly worth understanding that in the days that this was written, there weren't lots of B&Bs, places to stay, and people did travel around, and it was very important that people could find somewhere to stay when they'd been traveling.

So, the leaders needed to be hospitable. Good reputation with outsiders. This is in verse 7. Must have a good reputation with outsiders so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

And then there are some faith qualifications in verse 6. Did you notice it said he must not be a recent convert? Not someone who's recently become a Christian.

[22 : 03] Why? Because he might become conceited, more prone to get puffed up and fall under the same judgment. the danger for someone who's quite early in their walking God that you, yes, sometimes you're still doing something good for God, but you get, there's always a difficulty standing at the front because if you do do it well and people praise you, you've got to be, you know, young people can be quite easily thrown by that and you mustn't.

Not a recent convert and it says, and we have touched on it, able to teach. So, have you got an idea of this person overall in your head?

Yeah? Now, I almost, I didn't, I did, I almost had a picture of Phil's face on this, but I thought I'd spare you that one. I'd just leave it as a question mark on this. But this, what sort of person are we looking for?

Well, you're going to tick all these boxes? It is something like that, isn't it? But as I say, I think we did say it on one or two of those things. These are general standards.

You're not looking for total perfection, but you certainly can't have people who have a key weakness that is going to drag them down. So, there we are.

[23 : 20] There are the qualifications talked about. And then the last bit, and I don't want to spend so much time on this, but it does go on in our verse to talk about deacons. And I just want to read these things.

But if deacons, we had the idea of leading, caring for, overseeing. The key word behind deacon is diakonos, and that very much is an idea of serving.

There is a sense in which all of us should be deaconing, not necessarily as a capital D, appointed as a deacon, but this idea of constantly serving, we're all called to it.

But it says here specifically, in the same way deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, not pursuing dishonest gain, they must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscious.

They must first be tested. That's an interesting chance. So, if you're queuing up to be a deacon, we've got some severe tests that we can set you. And then, if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

[24 : 26] And then it goes on, now I noticed Julie's translation did say their wives.

This is probably more easily said in the same way the women are. And quite honestly, the most likely, I won't go into proving every part of it, but the most likely explanation, it is talking about the idea that you can have a women deacon.

It's not just talking about elders or deacons' wives. could be translated that way, but in the whole context, it makes more sense that the women who might be deacons are also to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers, but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

So, that's in 3, verse 11. And then the last bit of our passage, it says a deacon must be, it says those who served well, this is verse 13, those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

So, although actually being a deacon might involve you with a lot of extra hard work, in the end, there is a promise here that you gain an excellent standing in your faith if you can just stick with it and be willing to serve.

[25 : 46] So, that has covered our passage. I will just sum up where we've got to in all of that, but otherwise I think we've got a lot of children present.

I didn't want to go overly too long, so let's go back to this comment at the front, the first verse.

Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.

And we touched on some of these words that help us to understand this is a person who is spiritually mature. This is someone who watches over the people of God, watches over the flock, one who guides and protects.

Not a person who is in charge because Jesus is. Their authority is primarily in the word, so that's the idea of you persuade people through the word, that's what you're trying to do, to draw everyone into the same line because you're seeing something clearly in the world and you're trying to get people alongside.

And there are these five areas of qualification, general ones, personal ones, family life, relationships and faith. Deacons are more about serving than leading, but they do actually, in a

general way, you'll find they have very similar qualifications on their godliness.

[27 : 15] So that covers where I wanted to be, but just if I could throw, knowing that there is discussion tonight, I'm just trying to think, when you just picture this idea of the church as just look out amongst you, turn your head around, and although you don't know a lot of how everyone is, but think, God has given each one here a gift, and that is to blossom and to be used in the church.

Now there are some fundamental things, we often come at things that have to be done, the finances have to be done, the toilets have to be cleaned, and you think of getting people to do it, but think a little bit bigger than this, and there is this interest in getting everybody to shine in whatever way God has given them gifts, and I'm sure, especially when we've only got one elder, it's not always possible that the leaders are able to think about everybody, but this is the ideal, especially when you have more than one elder, that you're getting a community that is empowered, and we're finding out the things that everyone can do that is enriching our lives together, and I just throw this slight comment out to you, might provoke some discussion this evening, but I wonder if being a leader in a church, especially when you think how God has given gifts, I think it's a little bit like being a gardener, and God has put all these seeds in the church, and the job of the leader is to tend, watch over, feed, nurture, but you know, on day one, you don't always know how these seeds are going to grow, and exactly what they're going to look like at the end, because God's doing that, so there is a humbleness about saying

I don't quite predict all the outcome of how this is going to look, but my job is to try and fan into flame what God is doing, I just throw that out, it's a discussion, but just be careful about the idea of thinking a church always functions like this, because we've always done it like that, but there is a sort of blossoming of the gifts, and trying to discover what it is that God has given, and getting it all working, so I'll just throw that out in closing, so let's sing, and remember if you want to, there is an opportunity to come tonight, please come if you can, to discuss some of this tonight, and Phil will be sharing that.

Thank you.