

God's Design for Servant-Leaders

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[0 : 00] Well, I want to encourage you to open up your Bibles, if you would please, to 1 Timothy chapter 3. We're continuing our study from last week and picking it up halfway through there at verse 8.

! Last week covering the first seven verses about elders and now trying to begin to work on the subject of deacons beginning in verse 8. If you're using the Pew Bible, I would encourage you to turn there with us. It's on page 992.

It would be beneficial for you to be able to follow along with us in your Bibles. Have you ever heard someone use the phrase, that's not my job? Anybody heard that phrase before?

I wish I could say I never used that phrase. And I wish I could say I've never heard that phrase. But even in the home, you know how this works in a home setting.

Hey, will you please pick up the dishes from the table? Well, that's not my job! Or, hey, would you be willing to help collect the trash and put it in the bin outside, please?

[1 : 06] Well, come on! That's just not my job! Maybe you've heard that phrase before. Maybe you've used that phrase before. Maybe even here in the church setting, you're encouraged to be a part of the ministry that's here.

And, of course, there's lots of opportunities in children's ministry. And like, hey, I don't have the gift of children. I don't have the gift of those little rugrats. Now, you may have one or two or three or four running around your house, but for some reason, you don't have the gift of it here.

I get it. Or maybe you don't have the spiritual gift of mowing a lawn, sitting on a tractor. You do it every week when you're mowing your lawn at home.

But we find different reasons not to be able to fulfill service opportunities here at church. And I get it, because there's lots to do. There's work to be done.

But as we're going to see in the passage today, that God has called every single one of you who is a follower of Jesus Christ, every single one of us that calls ourselves a disciple, those who have bowed the knee before Christ in faith, asked forgiveness of our sins, you are now a follower of Him.

[2 : 25] You are a servant. And the word for servant in the New Testament is the word deacon. We're going to press into that a little bit more as we go.

Here are some examples that I found on the Internet of people not doing their job. So this sign, illegally parked cars will be fine. I love that one.

How many people did that have to get through in order for it to get hung up? You know, the person who is writing the letters, the person who is editing the sign, the person who is actually hanging it up and reading to themselves, oh, I like this sign.

I can actually park here. I'll be fine. Or how about this? A person who is trying to connect pipes and realizes a rock is in the way. I don't know why that rock was so hard to move, but they're going to route the pipe around the rock.

Or this next one. If you can't see, that's a possum that's on the road. And the people who are painting lines decided, we don't move possums, we just paint lines.

[3 : 31] So there you have it, a possum with some lines. And then on the side of the road, there's some moss that is growing, line that's going right through. Final picture here. This is a sidewalk, and if you can't tell, you know, a bike lane and walking lane, but for some reason, you're not going to get too far on this sidewalk.

The tree is right in the way. And then finally, if you can't read this sign, it says this is a surgical lounge, and after hours, they are encouraged.

The visitors who are sitting in the lobby waiting for their turn are encouraged, will you please answer the phone for us? We need some help around here. And it's easy to say, hey, time out, not my job.

The truth is that God has given us a job to do. And it's not only a good job, a good work. It is a way for us to point to the one to whom we follow. It's a way for us as God's people to demonstrate that the work of Christ is happening in our life, that the preeminent servant that we're going to just look at and remember throughout this entire passage today, that the preeminent servant, Jesus Christ, has and should have done a work in our life to make us servants, to make us deacons, as it were.

[4 : 54] So if you're with me there, in 1 Timothy chapter 3, there's a phrase that I put on your outline. I want it to kind of guide our thinking today as we work through this passage.

And it's there on your outline. It says this, Elders serve by leading, and deacons lead by serving. Elders serve by leading, and deacons lead by serving.

And we're going to fill this out and kind of develop this thought for us as we work our way through this passage. So if you're there with me in 1 Timothy chapter 3, let me read the passage for us, and we'll dig in.

It says in verse 8, Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, and let them also be tested first.

Then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.

[6 : 06] For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. So similar to last week, I want to take this into sections.

First, I want us to see the ministry of servant leaders. What is it that they do? How do they benefit the church? What is the role that they play?

And so as we dig into this, I want us to recognize this first word likewise demonstrates to us that there are some similarities, but also some differences that they play.

A deacon's role is both similar but different. This may seem really obvious, but it's important for us to note. To explore this word likewise and to recognize that there are some similarities here.

And the fact that elders and deacons stand side by side in this passage will help us to recognize that there is something that they do, some distinction that they have in the church that allows it to play out in a healthy way.

[7 : 14] So, Paul introduces elders there in verse 1. I'm going to just draw your attention to verse 1 for a moment. It says, So, the likewise that is here draws attention to several similarities.

I want to just draw your attention to them briefly. First is they have a distinct function. They have a distinct function. The fact that elders qualifications and deacon qualifications are here means that deacons, like elders, have a specific role to fill.

Second, they provide some leadership in some way. Like elders, deacons provide a measure of leadership and service for the body. Third, they are selected on the basis of their character.

Meaning, you're not just looking for competencies. You're not just looking for somebody who can mow a straight line. You're looking for somebody who has a character quality about him.

He's leading a team of individuals. And you want to make sure that there is this spiritual maturity, this quality about his character that has been tested and it's demonstrated through his life.

[8 : 29] But unlike elders, there are some differences. First, they are not encouraged to aspire to the work. It's fascinating to me how simple and abrupt the very beginning of verse 8 is.

Having provided an introduction for elders in verse 1, to begin this section on deacons with just one word, likewise, before spilling into the characteristics, draws some attention and I just want to draw this out as an observation for us that whatever a deacon is supposed to do, he doesn't necessarily aspire to this role of deaconing.

Second, Paul does not mention a specific office like he does with elders. Aspire to the office of overseer, we see in verse 1.

No such correlation is made here for us in this verse, verse 8. Now, while they have a title and they have a role to play, Paul does not designate necessarily in this spot an office.

And I think that's important for us to notice. Third, while it's clear that deacons serve in some ways, Paul does not indicate a specific work for them to do, like he does with elders in verse 1.

[9 : 50] He desires a noble task. That is, the Greek words kalos ergon, which is the two words good work. Now, Paul could have talked about a work, which he does in Ephesians chapter 4.

Ephesians 4, 11 and 12, he talks about a work. Notice with me. And he gave the apostles, speaking of Christ, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work, that's ergon, of ministry, that is, diakonia, to building up the body of Christ.

There is a ministry work, a deaconing, serving work to do, but guess what? Guess who is supposed to fill out the deaconing work in a service-related way?

Every believer. And elders are in place, pastors are in place, to help equip the saints to do and carry out the function of serving, which is really just kind of the basic word for service throughout the New Testament, that we're all called to a measure of service, and pastors, elders, overseers are intended, they're put in place to help you serve better, to help you do what God has called you to do.

It's clear that deacons are important for the welfare of the church. Otherwise, they wouldn't be listed here side by side with an elder. So let's develop this some more.

[11 : 23] Let's kind of understand a little bit more about what a deacon is supposed to do. And now I'm speaking more specifically about kind of this function of leadership, this service kind of leader, this deacon.

We're going to look at their function in the early church from Acts chapter 6. If you've spent any time reading through the book of Acts, you understand how the church has developed.

It's developed significantly from Acts chapter 2. There at the day of Pentecost, where Peter is preaching his first sermon in front of the masses, we find in Acts chapter 2, verse 41, this incredible response.

It says, So that those who received the word were baptized, and there were added that day about 3,000 souls. Now, this church of 120 believers exploded overnight, and then exploded to this church of 3,000 at least individuals.

And then as the church begins to interact with one another, they're growing in a spiritual way. We find in verse 47 of chapter 2 that the Lord was adding to their number each day those who were being saved.

[12 : 37] This multiplication, this gospel work, these open hearts, the ministry of the Spirit and convicting hearts and drawing them to faith, this multiplying work that's happening.

Well, in Acts chapter 3, Peter and John will go to the temple. They go there to pray, and there at the temple, they meet a lame man, and they heal this lame man. They walk into the temple.

People recognize him and see the work of God in healing him, and they all are celebrating, and Peter capitalizes on the opportunity and preaches another message.

And then in Acts chapter 4, we find that 5,000 more are added to the number. So now we're at least at 8,000 plus. So that when the church is now in the process of laying down their possessions, selling their possessions, sharing with one another, we find from Acts chapter 5, verse 14, that more than ever, believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.

The church is exploding in a very good way. Numbers of people are being added. And then we turn our attention to Acts chapter 6. We find this in verse 1.

[13 : 54] It says, Now, in the days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint among the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

And that's the diakonia. That's the ministry of service that we find throughout the New Testament.

So now we've come to a crisis moment. Now we've come to a point of decision.

There's ministry to do, but there aren't enough people to go around. And a decision has to be made. What are the apostles going to do in terms of fulfilling the call to ministry that they've been given?

Well, so they devise a plan. The plan shows up in verse 2. It says, And that's our verbal form of deacon, this diakoneo.

And so they recognized that the ministry that was in front of them was a significant work. But the ministry that they've been called to was also a significant work.

[15 : 03] It wasn't that the apostles had to make a decision between the more important ministry and the less important ministry and to prioritize that, but to say, No, both ministries need to happen in this crisis moment of the church.

And so we need to distribute the load of ministry to other qualified men to help lead in this effort so all the ministry within the church can happen.

Which, by the way, is really shocking to me that here we are, a church of 15,000, 20,000 or more, and now finally the apostles are recognizing, This is too big a load for us to handle.

We need to draw in some other people to help us with this. And so that's what they do. This word to serve that we find in verse 2 is the verbal form of deacon.

So the apostles are not going to oversee this ministry anymore. They're going to entrust this delegated ministry to a group of faithful men.

[16:07] That's what we find in verse 3. Therefore, it says, Brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry, that's important, diakonia of the word. There is a ministry to do. There is a ministry of the word.

There is a ministry to these Hellenistic widows. Both ministries are vital for the health and progress of the church. And so raising up leaders to help fulfill that ministry was essential to ensure that God's work was being done.

These two ministries taking place here, both important, both by qualified men to fulfill. But I want to draw your attention to this phrase here at the beginning of verse 3, Pick out from among you.

And I think that's significant for us. It means that these men have already shown a heart to serve. It means that these men are already doing the work.

[17:12] It means that these men have already demonstrated their proven character, their dependability, their leadership, their spiritual maturity. They are vested.

They are trusted. They are engaged. They are active. They are dependable. In a very real way, they've already established themselves as servant kind of leaders.

The title of deacon wasn't going to change anything about the way that they engaged the people, these Hellenistic widows. It was only going to activate the work that they were already doing and help to enhance it in some way so that the widows knew who to look to for this kind of help and leadership.

It was to ensure that that work was going to continue. It was going to be done. It wasn't that the title of deacon was going to change anything about that work, but just recognize the work that was already taking place.

All this process was meant to identify these servant leaders who were already engaged. And notice the primary purpose of their ministry.

[18:22] There in the verse 4, we will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. It was a compatibility between elders and deacons to allow the ministry of teaching and praying to continue.

That focus that the apostles had to continue to be enhanced. So overseeing this ministry, the apostles was to free them up, as it were, to preach and to pray.

We find this throughout the New Testament, these kinds of examples of faithful men who were willing to fill this kind of responsibility and serving in this kind of way.

But it does beg the question, then who is a deacon? And the scripture is clear about this too. So the goal for every believer is serving the body.

Who is a deacon? And I want to confuse the subject, but I want to just suggest that everybody who is a follower of Jesus is a servant, and thus, in a very technical sense, is a deacon in that God has called them to servant kind of leadership.

[19:33] Of course, we find this preeminently in our Savior Jesus. You remember when the disciples, they're on this road, and they're arguing about who is first and who is the greatest, and Jesus turns his attention to them, and he confronts them, and he says, he sits down, he calls the disciples in Mark 9, verse 35, if anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant diakonos of all.

God calls his people to be servants. And by the way, service is the building block of Christianity. Service is at the foundation and at the heart of spiritual maturity.

It's what God has called every one of us to do because it is preeminently a picture of Christ, as we find in Mark 10, 45, where Jesus says of himself, for even the Son of Man came not to be served diakono, but to serve diakono and to give his life a ransom for many.

You want to be like Christ? You want to pattern your life so that it looks like Jesus? Wear the robe of service. Choose to be, for lack of a better word, a deacon. Choose to serve in a deacon kind of way. Expend yourself like Jesus. Serve to the end like Jesus. Grow in service like Jesus.

[21 : 08] That's what we're all called to. We see examples throughout the New Testament. We don't have time for this this morning, but Timothy is referred to in 2 Timothy 4, 5, he's referred to as a deacon.

His ministry is deacon-like. Stephanas and his family was referred to in 1 Corinthians chapter 16. It was a deaconing kind of ministry. The apostle Paul actually referred to himself in 1 Timothy 1, 12 as he's filling out his own credentials.

He speaks of himself. His service was the deaconing kind of service because foundationally every single believer is a servant.

Deacon. You are a deacon in that you are called to serve the body. You are called to look like Jesus, to serve in that way.

We find this in the church. We saw this verse already, but I want to bring it back up. Ephesians chapter 4 verses 11 and 12. He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers why?

[22 : 18] Well, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, diakonia, for the building up the body of Christ. So, we as pastors, elders, overseers, are preeminently called to equip you to serve like a deacon.

We're called to help build out in your life a heart and affection for serving others. In 2 Corinthians chapter 9, verse 12, Paul, in speaking about the gift that was given by the church of Corinth to the church in Jerusalem, says this, for this ministry, diakonia, of this service, leturgia, which is another word for service, is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but also is overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

This expression of ministry and service and pouring out and spending self for the sake of serving the body. in 1 Peter chapter 4, verses 10 and 11, we find this, as each has received a gift, and how many of us have received a gift?

Every one of you in this room who has the Holy Spirit, who has asked forgiveness for sin, has confessed your faith in God, you have the Spirit, so you have a spiritual gift.

So, this applies to everybody in this room who has the Holy Spirit, okay? So, as you have received a gift, use it to serve diakanao, one another, as a good steward of God's varied grace.

[23 : 56] Whoever speaks is one who speaks the oracles of God. Whoever serves diakanao as one who serves by the strength that God supplies. And here's the glorious privilege of our service.

It's this, in order that, in everything, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen. When we put the spiritual gifts that God has given to us, when we put them to work, we glorify God.

Which, I think we can make the correlation without being in jeopardy or danger that if we choose to shelve our gift, if we choose to push it to the side, if we choose to just let it languish, then at least as it relates to service and being a good steward, we are not bringing glory to God.

What a privilege, what a responsibility. We are servants. The joy of that entrustment, the joy of that stewardship to put to work, the gift to serve as a deacon as it were.

[25 : 14] The church, serving the church but especially and preeminently serving Christ. Maybe you're listening and you're like, okay, thank you Andrew, I get all that but I still don't know who this deacon is here in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and I don't know what this deacon is supposed to do.

So let's try to build that out a little bit more. We're going to see that deacons are there to multiply the work of pastors. A deacon multiplies the work of pastors.

The Bible says, by the way, almost nothing about deacons. We find no job description. We find no roles and responsibilities. We only get a glimpse of the prototype of deacons from Acts chapter 6 and we only have these qualifications for deacons in one place in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and we only get a glimpse of maybe what they do through the use of the word servant.

Diaconess is servant and so it's still a little fuzzy as it were. What is it specifically that a deacon is meant to do? I think the best way to answer this question is to understand that we've just begun chapter 3 in a discussion about elders.

And so I think we can say with a fair amount of certainty and without any pushback that a deacon is not an elder.

[26 : 47] Would you agree? I think that's pretty clear from the text. A deacon is not an elder. It's a separate category, a separate function. So just to review from last week in understanding what elders are meant to do, we come to realize that elders are there to exercise spiritual oversight.

1 Timothy chapter 5. They're there to preach and to teach. 1 Timothy chapter 5. They are tasked with equipping the saints for ministry. Ephesians chapter 4. They are to guard the flock from false teachers in Acts chapter 20.

They're to shepherd the flock by providing some measure of spiritual oversight in 1 Peter chapter 5. They're to hold firm the trustworthy word in order to give instruction and rebuke those who contradict.

Titus chapter 1. We understand from 1 Timothy chapter 1 that leaders and spiritual pastors are there to charge some if they teach no other doctrine.

They're also to set an example for the believers. 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 12. They're to have nothing to do with foolish controversies or quarrels but to be kind, enduring evil, correcting opponents with gentleness.

[28 : 01] 2 Timothy chapter 2 verse 23 and 24. That is the function and role of a pastor, leader, overseer. It is not the role of a deacon.

But the function that deacons have, although different from an elder, is compatible with an elder. and so they are side by side in this passage for a significant reason because pastors and elders need the support and the help in ministry of others.

There are times when ministry gets to be unwieldy and they need the supportive help and service of other gifted and qualified men to come alongside them.

It is then with the discretion of the elders then to determine how the deacons will be put to work. As I have said in the opening, elders will serve by leading and deacons will lead by serving.

Deacon multiplies the work of pastors by carrying various ministry burdens so that the church can remain healthy and pastors can continue to devote themselves to the primary work of equipping and discipling and teaching and preaching.

[29 : 27] It's not that every pastor, especially, it's not that any pastor will be independent of service because at the foundational level, since we're all called to service kind of ministry, you would expect your pastors to serve as well.

But the deacons come alongside to help support that effort. We don't have time this morning to build out this next point, the life of a servant leader.

We find in verses 8 to 13, we're going to turn our attention to that a little bit more next week, but I just want to kind of give you a preview of what we're talking about. The life of a servant leader.

Let me read this passage one more time and then I'll show you a couple of tables that demonstrate the similarities and the differences between an elder and a deacon so you can see that for yourself and then like I said we'll explain it more next week.

It says deacons likewise must be dignified, not double tongue, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience and let them also first be tested then let them serve as deacons.

[30 : 41] If they prove themselves blameless, their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things, let the deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their households well.

For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. There are 15 qualifications for elder, there are nine qualifications that are given to us here for deacons and there are five qualifications that find really good comparison and overlap with one another.

There are things that are similar. What is the same? And here's a table that will demonstrate several of those things that are the same. They are above reproach.

They have the kind of character that is not guilty of blame. They're blameless. There is this essence of their character that you can't attach blame to.

These are individuals who are faithful to their wife. They're a one woman man. We talked about that last week. There is this faithfulness to their partner.

[32 : 00] There is a desire of their heart to make sure that they're guarding their eye as Job says in his book. He guards his eye. He has a single mind and a single heart for the woman that God gave to him.

He's not given to much wine. He's not greedy for gain. He manages his house well. You can see the quality of leadership and service that echoes itself through his family.

You can recognize that their needs are met, that they're cared for, that dad has paid attention to them. There's a measure of stability and respect in the home.

But there are some things that are different. What is different? And this next table will help show some comparisons. While elders have some qualifications regarding their tongue at not being quarrelsome, deacons are told not to be double-tongued.

They're not to be hypocrites in the way they speak. Speaking one way to one person a different way to a different person. For elders, they're not violent but gentle. And for deacons, they hold the mystery of the faith.

[33 : 14] And we'll talk about that some more next week, especially in light of the mission that God has called us as a church to be on. They're not a recent convert. And for deacons, there's not a qualification for how soon they can become a deacon because essentially, we're all to be deacons the moment we become Christians in following after Jesus.

But of course, we're building and growing through that process of doing it better. But they do need to be tested. We find this qualification, it's actually in verse 11, for their wives.

And we'll develop that some more next week as well. But there's nothing about hospitality. There's nothing about a good reputation. Not that those things don't matter. And again, as we come back to this next week, we'll see the significance of the way Paul describes their function.

But I do want to end with this. There is a reward. What is the reward? And the reward is found for us in verse 13. Those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

They gain a good standing for themselves. One commentator says, this linear aspect of this verb to gain or to inquire helps us understand this ongoing process.

[34 : 40] There is this process of growing and developing and being sanctified through serving others. And as people watch and evaluate their life, they're going to see this growing concern for individuals, this growing heart to spend themselves for others, this desire to be useful to Jesus and especially to point to his perfect service.

And as they are moving and growing in this good standing, they're growing in confidence and faith as well. And the reason for that is because as they see the Lord working in their life and helping them to grow in their expression of service for others, they're recognizing that the process of Philippians chapter 1 verse 6 is playing out.

That he who began a good work in them has been faithful to complete it, is being faithful to complete it. This growing process of God sanctifying their life helps to confirm the fact that they have the fruit of the spirit, they're loving God's people, and they're growing in service for others. But as we turn our attention now to the preeminent servant to Jesus, we remember what Jesus demonstrates to us again from Mark chapter 10 verse 45.

Even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. Jesus has demonstrated for us the foundational level of growing in spiritual maturity.

[36 : 20] it begins with recognizing who Jesus is, and begins with recognizing what we really deserve in light of judgment, and the privilege that we have of now being united in Christ, and being able to serve Christ's body.

Do you realize, as you look around, you'll be the people who are sitting with you on your pew. the people who are sitting before you and behind you. That they are part of God's family.

So when you serve the family of God, when you serve God's children, you are serving God. What an incredible privilege.

What an incredible responsibility. And so as we do this, as we grow in service for others, we have the joy through service of pointing to Christ.

Because let me tell you, our world does not serve. They don't serve by their own desire. They don't choose to serve. But when we follow in the footsteps of Christ, when we choose to do the things that really we don't get attention for, we don't get promoted for, we demonstrate that there is a work of God in our lives, and we point to Christ, the gospel through our service.

[37 : 47] I'm going to pray for us. I'm going to invite the men to come forward. We'll commemorate and remember this work of Christ, of drawing us into himself. And then we'll close our time together. Father, thank you for sending Jesus. Thank you for overcoming our sin. Thank you for making a way of forgiveness, in salvation, in cleansing, and relationship with you. Thank you that that new relationship, that new position that we enjoy because of Jesus, has not only drawn us in to this rich union with God, but has drawn us in to fellowship with one another. And the distinct joy that we have because of the work of the Spirit in our life to serve those around us and to point to Christ. Oh God, may we grow in this service. And may all glory and praise redound to you because of it. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.