

Lead with Integrity

1 Timothy 3:1-13

Introduction

Following the Leader: Did you know that the song, “Following the Leader,” is a Disney original written for the animated 1953 classic (♪♪ We’re following the leader, the leader / We’re following the leader, wherever he may go ♪♪). And the lost boys march in “proper British” fashion, mimicking John’s leadership, only to be captured by the tribe they are searching for (depicted in a culturally outdated manner).

- Who you follow matters because they take you where they go. We’ve all followed the wrong person at some point. A Swedish couple in 2012 typed “Capri” into their GPS and drove to Carpi, Italy, 400 miles away from their intended island vacation. In 2018 a Washington State man drove onto a boat launch and into the water because his GPS told him to “turn right.” Sometimes we’re so eager to follow a voice with confidence that we never stop to ask if it knows the way.
- In the early 2000s, *everyone* wanted to follow Enron, the Houston-based energy company was voted “the most innovative company in America” six years in a row. Its leaders, Ken Lay and Jeff Skiller, were brilliant, bold, and magnetic. They had swagger, genius, and charisma. But what they didn’t have was **character**. Behind the scenes the whole company was built on deceit. They cooked the books to hide billions in debt. When it all collapsed, more than 20,000 employees lost their jobs and pensions, and investors lost billions.¹ **Competence without character always collapses.**

Leadership in the Church: Paul tells Timothy, that in God’s house, leadership isn’t about brilliance or personality or even *success*—it’s about integrity. If you’ve ever been burned by bad leadership, you know the damage it causes. But good leadership protects the health of the church and the credibility of the gospel.

- In God’s House:
 - House Rule #1: Guard the Gospel (1 Tim 1)
 - House Rule #2: Adorn the Gospel (1 Tim 2)
 - House Rule #3: **Lead with Integrity** (1 Tim 3)
- The church needs leaders whose lives reflect the gospel they teach.
- Faithful leadership protects the gospel witness of the church by reflecting gospel character.

¹ The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must

¹ One of the world’s largest accounting firms, Arthur Anderson, went under with it.

be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.¹³ 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.

Preliminary Comments:

(1) Offices: From this passage and others, we see the two recognized roles or positions in the church (i.e., “offices”): pastors and deacons.²

- **(a) Pastors:** Pastors are godly *men* who lead the congregation by teaching the Word, praying for the flock, and overseeing the spiritual health and direction of the church. There are three interchangeable words in the NT for this office that emphasize different aspects of the role:³
 - Elder (πρεσβύτερος)⁴ - spiritual maturity and wisdom
 - Shepherd (Lat. pastor) (ποιμήν) - nurture, care, and protection
 - Overseer (ἐπίσκοπος)⁵ - responsibility, leadership, and guidance
- **(b) Deacons:** If elders *lead* the church, deacons *serve* the church.⁶
 - The NT presents deacons as model servants, *men* and *women*⁷ who solve problems and meet tangible needs in the church.
 - By meeting these needs, they preserve the *unity* of the church and enable pastors to *focus* on preaching, prayer, and pastoral care.⁸
- *Together*, these offices highlight and embody the Christian pattern of leadership: truth and love, word and deed, teaching and service. Elders lead by teaching and caring for the flock. Deacons lead by serving and supporting that ministry. Both are essential for a healthy church.
- **In today’s sermon*, I’m going to focus mainly on vv. 1-7 (overseers).⁹

(2) Leadership: You might be saying, “What does this have to do with me?” I’m not a pastor or a deacon. Let me offer three reasons why this is essential for everyone.

² Cf. Phil 1:1, Acts 6:1-6

³ In Acts 20, Paul calls the elders of Ephesus (v. 17), reminds them they are overseers (v. 28) who are called to shepherd the church of God (v. 28). In 1 Pet 5, he encourages the elders (v. 1) to shepherd the flock (v. 2), exercising oversight (v. 2).

⁴ Cf. “Presbyterian”

⁵ Cf. “Episcopal”; ἐπί (over) + σκοπέω (look, watch), i.e., “to watch over” or “oversee”; *episkopos* (Gr) → *episcopus* (Lat). Simplify and drop unstressed syllables so *episcopus* started to sound like “biscopus”. In Old English, biscop pronounced roughly bish-cop. So biscop → bishcop → bishop.

⁶ The word “deacon” is simply a transliteration of the Greek term διάκονος which literally means servant (I bet you didn’t know you knew Greek).

⁷ The office of pastor is reserved for qualified men who can teach and exercise authority, the office of deacon may be held by qualified men or women.

⁸ Cf. Acts 6:1-6. By so doing, they provide valuable spiritual leadership in the congregation.

⁹ While the job description between a pastor and deacon is different, the qualifications overlap significantly.

- (a) This church has pastors now and, Lord willing, will have more in the future. You need to know what kind of leaders to follow and support. A healthy church depends not just on *having* elders, but on members who *recognize* and *affirm* godly ones.
- (b) If God ever calls you away from this church, you need to know what to look for in another one. Too many believers join churches because of personality, programs, or production, and end up following bad leaders off a spiritual cliff. **Don't look for gifted leaders who impress; look for godly leaders who can be trusted.**
- (c) All of us lead in some capacity. Every Christian influences someone: at home, at work, in church, or even in how you steward your own life. And while pastors and deacons are called to *model* these virtues, nothing on these lists is off-limits to all believers.
 - It's not just pastors who should be faithful in marriage, self-controlled, and hospitable—we all should be! Because godly leadership isn't ultimately about position; it's about character formed by the gospel that reflects Christ.

Leadership:

- (1) Desire faithful leadership (v. 1)
- (2) Value character over charisma (vv. 2-3)
- (3) Reveal character when tested (vv. 4-7)

So whether you lead a ministry, a family, or just yourself, this matters. The character of leaders matters. That's why Paul starts not with what leaders do but with what they desire—because leadership in God's house isn't a grab for power, it's a call to serve.

1. Desire faithful leadership (v. 1)

Daily Leadership: ¹ The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

- A "faithful saying"¹⁰ means it's central to "the faith" and is dealing with a problem in the church. Some people are devaluing the office of overseer (e.g., the role of overseer is an ignoble or unimportant task).
- The *overseer* element of *pastoral* ministry emphasizes the directing and managing of day-to-day stuff. It is easy to be enamored by the public spectacle and forget that God is honored in the daily grind.
 - It's easy to picture ministry as preaching to packed conference crowds. But the *real* work looks more like hard conversations, hospital visits, marriage counseling, budget spreadsheets, and **tearful prayers that only God hears.**
 - A lot of people wants to preach from a stage, but not many want to shepherd in the shadows, but that's where, I'm convinced, God does his deepest work.

Desire: We need leaders who desire to serve, not shine. *This* is a *noble* thing to desire, not because it's glamorous, but because it's godly. Apparently, some in Ephesus thought this type of

¹⁰ πιστός ὁ λόγος.

work was beneath them.¹¹ It's easy to want to be a king or CEO, but God calls shepherds. The pulpit isn't a prize to win, it's a burden and blessing to steward.

- Pastoral ministry is a serious and noble task, one that is worth pursuing:
- Let the elders¹² who rule¹³ well be considered worthy of **double honor**, especially those who **labor** in preaching¹⁴ and teaching¹⁵ (1 Tim 5:17).
- **Not many** of you should become teachers,¹⁶ my brothers, for you know that we who **teach** will be judged with greater strictness (Jas 3:1)¹⁷

Leadership: Bad leadership is harmful, and many, *having been burned* by bad leaders, avoid submitting to any leaders at all. But good leadership is a gift from God and you need it to live faithfully in this world. **The solution to bad leadership isn't no leadership but good leadership.** Obey your leaders¹⁸ and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to **give an account** (Heb 13:17).

Because of the goodness and significance of the leadership role, a **certain type of person must hold it.**¹⁹ God isn't impressed by charisma or even skill; he cares about character. **Before a man can lead God's house, his own life must reflect God's heart.**

2. Value character over charisma (vv. 2-3)

² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

Necessary: Therefore²⁰ one must be (it is necessary)²¹ a certain type of person. He lists **eleven** character qualities, as representative of the kind of person who should lead God's church.

- This is not a *checklist* so much as a *portrait*.²² These are *representative*, not *exhaustive*.
- There's nothing exceptional here, not an impressive resumé or natural talent, just the steady integrity of a man others can trust. He isn't perfect, but he is a faithful example of the message he preaches.

¹¹ Lit. "a good deed" (καλοῦ ἔργου).

¹² πρεσβύτεροι

¹³ προεστῶτες

¹⁴ κοπιῶντες ἐν λόγῳ

¹⁵ διδασκαλία

¹⁶ διδάσκαλος

¹⁷ "For those who serve well as deacons (lit. deacon ell; καλῶς διακονήσαντες) gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 3:13).

¹⁸ ἡγήομαι

¹⁹ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth Publishers).

²⁰ οὖν

²¹ δεῖ

²² There are similar lists of qualifications (1 Tim 5:17-23, Tit 1:5-9). Some words are the same; some concepts are the same; some are positively described, and some are negatively described. There are word-for-word agreements, conceptual parallels, etc. But these are not exactly the same lists because this is not a checklist.

Overarching Term: 1. Above reproach²³ This first characteristic is the summary of them all. The *overall concern* is that the right type of person is in this position. The type of person is more important than the vocational qualification.

- Their character is proven to the point that unwarranted criticism doesn't stick. They're not sinless, but they're not hypocrites. They are not morally compromised. Their life matches their message. When they *do* sin, they repent. When they fail, they take responsibility.²⁴

Home life: 2. The husband of one wife²⁵ Literally could be translated a "one-woman man." It's talking about being a faithful husband. A life characterized by faithful, covenant love of one's spouse as a demonstration of the gospel.²⁶

- If you can't be faithful at home, you cannot be faithful to lead the church. It doesn't matter how good a preacher you are if you are a lousy husband.
- *This cannot mean that you *have* to be married, as that would eliminate Paul, Timothy, and Jesus as qualified and would contradict Paul's direct instruction in 1 Cor 7.
- But it absolutely means that pastors must be examples of sexual fidelity. Few things ruin the reputation of the church than pastors caught in adultery, abuse, or sexual misconduct. And to our shame, there are more than I can count.²⁷
- Faithfulness at home is the most pressing test of godly character.

Inner Life: 3. Sober-minded²⁸ **4.** Self-controlled²⁹ **5.** Respectable³⁰

- Sober-minded: Clear-headed.³¹ You need to be able to make decisions without your judgment being compromised by ulterior motives, outside substances, or false opinions.³² You can trust he won't swing with the latest trend or panic with every problem.
- Self-controlled: A life that is "in order" and "decent." Things in your world should be in the proper place (e.g., priorities, schedules, finances). He knows how to say "no" to himself for the sake of saying "yes" to God.
- Respectable: Well-behaved, respectable, dignified.³³ A steadiness of character.
- These are the kind of men who have their wits about them and their priorities straight.
- The gospel doesn't just change *what* you believe, it orders *how* you live.

Open Life: 6. Hospitable

²³ ἀνεπίλημπτον

²⁴ See "proven blameless" (v. 10) and "faithful in all things" (v. 11).

²⁵ μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα; This is not necessarily saying he can never be divorced (an important secondary issue that can be discussed at a later date). Might have been a more significant issue because of the prevalence of polygamy in the ancient world. Also deacons in v. 12.

²⁶ Eph 5

²⁷ Ravi Zacharias, Bill Hybels, Carl Lentz, Brian Houston, Jerry Falwell Jr., Andy Savage, Ted Haggard, Jimmy Swaggart, etc.

²⁸ νηφάλιον

²⁹ σώφρονα

³⁰ κόσμιον

³¹ We sometimes use these terms related to alcohol, but that is not the usage here.

³² Used also of deacons in v. 11.

³³ Also deacons in v. 8 and 11. κόσμιον here and σεμνούς in v. 8 and 11. The former is more about external order, the latter more about internal order. I.e., decorum vs. reverence.

- Hospitality means opening your home and life so others can experience the welcome of Christ.
- It was vital in the early church but rare in ours; we prize privacy more than people.
- In **3 John**, Diotrephes is condemned for refusing to receive fellow believers; godly leaders do the opposite.
- A pastor's home is a part of his ministry.

Word of Life, Life of the Word: 7. Able to teach

- With false teaching everywhere, Paul insists that church leaders must handle God's Word faithfully.³⁴
- The word used *here* is unique to the NT and doesn't emphasize "ability" but as much as "teachability."³⁵ You can't teach God until you've been taught by God.³⁶ You do not teach the text until you have been mastered by it. You can't teach someone something you haven't learned. You can't teach what hasn't taken deep root in your life. You can't pass on what you have not received.
- We need leaders who "hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience" (v. 9). Not apologizing for Scripture, or discovering something new, but lovingly passing on the glorious gospel with which they've been entrusted.
- Do you care more about clever communication or faithful teaching?

Apophatic Life ("Not"): **8.** Not a drunkard, **9.** Not violent but gentle, **10.** Not quarrelsome, **11.** Not a lover of money

- A cascading list of negatives. Sometimes we learn what something *is* better by learning what it is *not*.³⁷ Some of you have learned what kind of person to date by dating all the wrong kinds. Whatever I'm looking for is certainly *not* that!
- Not a drunkard³⁸
 - Drunkenness has been a problem both then and now. Alcohol can be a gift in moderation,³⁹ but drunkenness is always bad because it signals a loss of self-control, and opens the door to other excesses and lapses of judgment.
 - Deacons are also told not to be given to ***much*** wine (v. 8).⁴⁰
 - A leader must be clear-headed, not out of control or controlled by anything but the Spirit.
- Not violent but gentle⁴¹ Not a bully, but fair-minded and gracious.
 - Gentleness is not weakness; it's strength under control.

³⁴ 1 Tim 4:16, 5:17

³⁵ διδακτικός only used 1 Tim 3:2, 2 Tim 2:24; <https://margmowczko.com/didaktikos-teachable/> It is related but to the slightly more common διδακτός. Vulgate actually translated 2 Tim 2:24 as teachable (docibilis). That word is only used in Jn 6:45, 1 Cor 2:13, and 1 Thes 4:9 (all in the context as an adjective of "being taught," cf. θεοδίδακτοί, "God taught." The typical word in Greek for "able to teach" is didaskalikos (related to teacher).

³⁶ 1 Thess 4:9

³⁷ Just as theology can define God by what He is not—the apophatic way (God is infinite, not finite; immutable, not changeable; spirit, not physical)—Paul defines maturity by what the overseer refuses to be.

³⁸ μὴ πάροινον (lit. beside wine; always alongside wine; i.e., a heavy drinker).

³⁹ Ps 104:15; Ecc 9:7; Deut 14:26; Judg 9:13; Gen 27:28, 37; Prov 3:9-10; Amos 9:13-14; Joel 2:19, 24; Lev 23:13; Jn 2:1-11; Matt 11:18-19; Lk 22:17-20; 1 Cor 11:20-22; Is 25:6; Matt 26:29

⁴⁰ μὴ οἴνω πολλῶ προσέχοντας

⁴¹ μὴ πλήκτην, ἀλλὰ ἐπιεικῆ (lit: toward what is fitting, fair minded, gracious and forbearing).

- Paul still calls pastors to fight false doctrine, but to fight like Christ, the sacrificial Lamb, not like the world's warriors. If you fight error with worldly weapons, you lose gospel power.⁴²
- "Orthodoxy is not a war zone to continually lob grenades into, occasionally pulling out a few lucky survivors with the right flag on their doors. Orthodoxy is a garden to tend, occasionally pruning dead branches or weeds to keep the plants alive and visible" (Smith).⁴³
- Not quarrelsome⁴⁴ It's tragic how many, in the name of "defending the faith," violate the very faith they defend. Gregory of Nazianzus lamented 1,600 years ago:⁴⁵ "The first point we must consider is this: why do I hear this swollen and non-stop quarrelsomeness in speaking and sermonizing? What is this new illness of ravenous appetite for bickering? Why have we bound our hands and weaponized our tongues?"
 - Our job is not to argue, accuse, or attack, but to teach, correct, and care.
- Not a lover of money⁴⁶
 - "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils" (1 Tim 6:10). The danger isn't wealth itself but worshiping it. You can be poor and still love money if it owns your hopes.
 - False teachers in Ephesus treated ministry as a business.⁴⁷
 - It's a well-worn path of destruction. Even today, churches collapse when leaders prioritize financial gain over faithfulness.
 - Examples of pastors buying private jets or luxury vehicles are obvious (but perhaps not obvious enough, as people continue to fall for it). However, it can sometimes appear less overt. A famous example of one of the fastest-growing churches in America centered on financial mismanagement as they pursued brand influence and growth over humility and faithfulness. The figurehead pastor fled accountability and left 15,000 people devastated, and the church's reputation ruined. All because character couldn't keep up with ambition.⁴⁸

Character Counts: The church needs leaders whose character reflects the gospel they preach. Character over competency. Not flashy leaders, but faithful ones.⁴⁹

- "When you've got more anointing than character, a disaster is very close. It's power tools in the hands of a toddler" (Tyson).

⁴² "We must not be frightened or cajoled into accepting evil as our deliverance from evil; we must keep struggling to maintain our humanity though monsters of abstraction threaten and police us."... No matter what happens, you are never defeated; you must understand and see this in the light of eternity and find some way to love and laugh with each other (Colbert on Robert Hayden).

⁴³ "Pastoring a church is like watering a garden. Patience, tenderness, gradual change, gentle care—and occasionally rip out a weed" (Dane Ortlund).

⁴⁴ ἄμαχον (alpha privative)

⁴⁵ Hence deacons are not slanderers (μὴ διαβόλους) or double-tongued (μὴ διλόγους).

⁴⁶ Ἀφιλάργυρον (alpha privative)

⁴⁷ 1 Tim 6:3-10

⁴⁸ Mars Hill Church, Seattle

⁴⁹ Daniel Goleman, writing in the Harvard Business Review, studied nearly two hundred companies and found that the greatest leaders weren't defined by IQ or technical skill, but by character—by traits like self-awareness, integrity, and empathy.

- “We...are more enamored with anointing than character. We run after healings and miracles, even if they are questionably manufactured. We chase gold dust, feathers, goosebumps, and smackdowns instead of holiness, biblical revelation, and true repentance. We are addicted to hype” (Grady). Be careful that your public gifts don’t outpace your private character (cf. character = skeleton; good bones).
- “Here’s your biggest contribution to God’s new world. Just be a man of growing integrity. Who you are deep in your heart empowers what you do out in the public eye” (Ortlund). God cares more about who you are than what you accomplish.

Character at the core shows up where it’s hardest to fake, at home, over time, and to the watching world.

3. Reveal character when tested (vv. 4-7)

⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

- If these eleven characteristics represent *what* a leader should be, *how* do you
(1) Home: ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity⁵⁰ keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?

- If you can’t shepherd a family, you can’t shepherd a flock. The place where your weakness cannot hide is at home. You must be able to lead at home if you aspire to lead the church. Your integrity should be seen where you’re most known.⁵¹
 - “Many resent church because their parents were good at church but not good at life. They struggle attending a place that consumed their parents’ time but never transformed their parents’ private lives” (Anonymous).
 - “Any time you feel the urge to critique the next generation, remember: they are not rebellious weeds, but the fruit of the seeds we planted” (Miller). “If they are snowflakes, you’re the cloud they came from” (Leake).
- And lead *in a way* that maintains your respect (not just raw authoritarianism). You can’t control the beliefs of your children, but you can earn their respect.⁵²

- (2) Time:** ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

⁵⁰ Recurring: σεμνότητος (cf. v. 8, 11)

⁵¹ Cf. Deacons v. 12

⁵² The same in the church.

- True maturity takes time. Quick advancement can feed pride (e.g., “I’m special,” “I’m better,” etc.). The danger of quick success is that you think it’s your doing instead of God’s!⁵³
- Don’t platform *giftedness* faster than *godliness*. Spiritual depth requires time. We need proven godliness and tested character.⁵⁴ That’s why we seek *proven* character, not polished resumes.
- Quick advancement will feed the sin of pride (“I must be good or better”). And pride is the sin of Satan. Time humbles all of us. And humility is essential for leadership.
 - I can think of a particular, prominent pastor with a large following who was boosted to leadership with no previous pastoral experience, famously boasting about his lack of theological training.⁵⁵ Almost weekly he would espouse some problematic theological take or promote a new unwise or immature behavior. But with growing crowds, few question it. Because results matter. But hitting the target doesn’t matter if you’re aiming at the wrong one. When charisma outruns character the fallout is inevitable, in this life or the next.

(3) Witness:⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

- The watching world often believes (or dismisses) the gospel based on the messenger.
- Your reputation outside the church can either reinforce or ruin your witness.
- The devil loves a scandal because it distracts from the credibility of Jesus’ witnesses.

Conclusion

Logic: Paul’s logic is straightforward: Noble calling → Proven character → Credible witness.

- God’s church is protected by holy lives, not flashy gifts.
- Godliness is tested over time, proven to those closest to us, and recognized by the watching world.
- Jesus is the leader we all need. He alone is truly above reproach, a faithful groom to his bride, his church. He is gentle steady. Where leaders fail, Christ does not.
 - No human leader can be what only Jesus is, but bad leaders can obscure this vision of Jesus. We want to be those that point to him by our lives.⁵⁶

Questions:

1. Does your inward character match your outward performance?
2. Are there areas of your life, that are not above reproach? A relationship, online behavior, financial dealings, etc.
3. Do you desire to humbly serve God’s people?

⁵³ Consider fast growing church plants.

⁵⁴ Cf. deacons v. 10

⁵⁵ Mike Todd

⁵⁶ House Rule #3: Lead with Integrity. For the honor of Jesus, the health of His church, and the good of our city—let’s follow the Good Shepherd and become the kind of people who make the gospel beautiful.