

God's Household, Part 7: "Recognizing Elders"

1 Timothy 3:1-7

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[SERMON TRANSCRIPT]

Introduction

Hello church family! I am privileged to be serving God's Word to us today! We're in a sermon series in the book of 1 Timothy, called "God's Household," and today we're on Part 7: "Recognizing Elders."

I want you to imagine this household with me: a man and a woman marry and partner in establishing a home. They both work very hard to do this. They work on their own relationship as husband and wife, learning how to resolve conflicts and growing to become better people over the years. Although they are both strong and competent individuals, the wife respects her husband and submits to his leadership. The husband loves his wife well: nourishing her spiritually, emotionally, and relationally; cherishing her as the apple of his eye. They have many children together- five girls and five boys. Even though raising children has its challenges, their childhood is full of positive experiences and they genuinely love and respect their parents.

Now as these ten children all get older, they face a choice: Will they choose to stay as children, under the care and supervision of their parents? Or will they choose to become adults: allowing themselves to be challenged to take responsibility for their personal growth, financial well-being, character development, and relationships with others? In other words, will they be mature enough to be entrusted with their own families- a spouse to partner with and children of their own to raise?

The scenario you would prefer is a no-brainer, isn't it? The other choice would get ugly: people who refuse to give up their childish ways and never become adults. But at least the latter would be ideal: Children choose to grow up, become adults who also have families and children of their own. This is how generations within healthy families are continued.

This is the same situation in God's household: every child of God must grow up! We'll always be God's children, but he expects us also to become mature, Christ-like people- mature, Christ-like people who will help other disciples of Jesus to mature and become Christ-like. No matter how old you are, there will be spiritual generations of disciples that will follow you!

So as we talk about the office of eldership in the local church- this isn't just for a handful of "special" people! Don't check out during this sermon! This is for all of us here to make the choice to grow up in Christ and become spiritual "parents" who will invest into the next generation- all by God's grace alone but also by the influence we have on them and the example in which we live.

Proposition

So here is the main message from 1 Timothy 3:1-7 for us today, what I want us to all take to heart.

The "one thing" from 1 Timothy 3:1-7:

***Let us raise up elders in the church
who are exemplary disciples of Christ.***

Scripture Reading

Remember that we're in this part of Paul's letter to Timothy in chapters 2-3 where he is giving instructions to God's household in light of conflicts that they were facing. He told the church to pray and to live for God's pleasure and purpose (in 2:1-7); he told men to focus on praying and women to focus on good works, as they submitted to the authority in the church of male eldership (in 2:8-15); today he addresses how to recognize those elders in the church in 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

1 Timothy 3:1-7 (ESV): *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 be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

Organizational Statement

There are three parts to how we'll work through this Scripture today:

1. The task of eldership (v. 1) - *Why is eldership a role to aspire for?*
2. The qualifications of eldership (vv. 2-5) - *Why is character the key for eldership?*
3. The hazards of eldership (vv. 6-7) - *Why is eldership a hazardous role?*

Prayer

Let's pray and ask for God's help to take this to heart today.

Heavenly Father, your word is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. Light our path now Lord, to develop as a church that raises up exemplary disciples of Jesus Christ- by your grace and for your glory, for generations until you return. In Jesus' name, Amen.

→ Let's go ahead and look at the first main point...

Sermon Outline

I. The Task of Eldership

A. Verse 1 answers the question, "Why is the office of eldership a role for men in the church to aspire for?"

1. Answer: Elders are responsible to shepherd God's church towards maturity.

1 Timothy 3:1 (ESV): *1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.*

- a) Paul started out with this "trustworthy saying," like he wants to get the attention of Timothy and the churches that are hearing this letter read to them. First, let's clarify what he's talking about. The "office of overseer" refers to eldership.
- b) The concept of "elder" is from the Old Testament; it was a title for leaders who represented smaller groups of the Israelite people. In Jesus' day, each city that had a

significant Jewish population had a Sanhedrin (a ruling counsel) that had twenty-three elders who were responsible for interpreting and enforcing the Law that was from Moses. So the early church borrowed the term “elder” from this background from Jewish religion and culture- which makes sense since most of the first generation of disciples of Christ had Jewish backgrounds.

- c) The word “overseer”- as used here in v. 1- is a Roman concept that means a leader of a colony. The words “elders” and “overseers” are both used to describe this office in the church: “elder” to more Jewish audiences and “overseers” for more Gentile audiences (which makes sense since the Jewish concept of “elder” would not necessarily mean anything to Gentiles).
- d) In terms of what an “elder” or “overseer” exactly meant for the church, we can look at a few passages in the New Testament. Let’s first read Acts 20:28-30.

Acts 20:28-30 (ESV): 28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Paul addressed the elders here, saying that it was the Holy Spirit’s calling for them to be in that role to “care for God’s church.” Specifically, that meant to protect the church from false teachers by instilling right doctrine. This was also Timothy’s role, as Paul said earlier in his letter!

- e) Second, he said it is a “noble task”- it is work that is good and praiseworthy. In one sense, Paul wrote that because this office of eldership was a “noble task,” it was worth aspiring for. It was something that “anyone” could aspire for. We know from our last sermon in 1 Timothy- in 2:8-15- that only men were to be elders in the church, as those in the role of authority and special teaching. The spiritual family was to parallel the biological family as God designed it, with the husband as the head of the family.
 - f) In our church, we use the word “pastor” to for the role of “elder” described here. Our church’s stance is that “elders” can be pastors- that is, those who are in pastoral ministry as a profession and paid job. But there can also be “lay elders”- elders who work other paid jobs but are called to serve the church in this leadership office. In fact, our goal and prayer is that we raise up both more pastors and lay elders in our churches in the next 5-10 years. Let’s work towards that together and pray for that together! I’ll explain “how” further as I go along in this sermon!
 - g) Now of course, in God’s household, there were character requirements (that Paul would elaborate on in vv. 2-5)- so only qualified men could be elders in the church. But elders were not “special” people who were the only ones expected to pursue godliness- all disciples of Jesus Christ were to pursue these characteristics.
 - h) As I mentioned earlier, the culture of God’s household was that of developing the next generation to be mature men and women who would make more disciples of Jesus Christ- their spiritual “sons” and “daughters.” That included younger men raised up to fill the shoes of elders that would come before them, as Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2.
- 2 Timothy 2:2 (ESV): 2 ...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.*
- i) In any quality organization or business, this is the expectation, isn’t it? In the best ones, they expect their employees to progress upwards in positions and responsibilities or they are gone after some time. The leadership of these

organizations or businesses invest heavily in their people resources so that they develop into more valuable contributors to their corporate success.

- j) We do have to clarify that the church is not a business or just some organization- it is God's household! But at the same time, why do we expect less? Why not aspire for every member to be an influencer? This is what Jesus himself says, is it not? Every disciple is "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (Matthew 6:13-16). There is no such thing as "just a member"- every member of the church should strive to grow and develop!

→ **Transition:** So verse 1 answers the question, "Why is the office of eldership a role for men in the church to aspire for?" with the truth that elders are responsible to shepherd God's church towards maturity. Now, let's go to the second main point...

Sermon Outline (continued)

II. The Qualifications of Eldership (vv. 2-5)

A. Verses 2-5 answer the question, "Why is Christ-like character the key for eldership in God's household?"

1. Answer: Elders are Spirit-filled, solid models of Christ's disciples for the church.

1 Timothy 3:2-5 (ESV): *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?*

- a) Let's think about our own family of origin. But instead of thinking about our own fallen families, let's dream about an ideal family. What would an ideal husband and father look like and how would he lead his family? I would imagine that this man would be a person of integrity- someone who consistently upheld values and principles no matter if people were around or not. He is fiercely loyal, faithful, and devoted to his wife, doing his absolute best to nourish and cherish his beloved. He responds to all situations and people with sober-mindedness, self-control, and respectability. He is approachable and open-hearted to anyone- to his children and to strangers alike. He explains about God and how the world works with clarity and conviction. He doesn't ever get drunk but is still fun-loving; he doesn't get violent but handles stresses gently; he avoids quarrels skillfully and patiently. He provides everything his family needs but isn't greedy for wealth. That sounds like a great dad, doesn't it?
- b) The truth is, no human being can be like this- it is truly a fantasy! As a husband and dad myself- if I were without Christ- I would get an F-minus on this scorecard. If we are at all proud or thinking we're good people, then it might be a sobering and healthy exercise to do a character inventory from verses 2-5:
- o "Above reproach": Do you consistently uphold your values and principles no matter if people are around or not?
 - o "Husband of one wife": Are you loyal, faithful, and devoted to your wife- in body, mind, and heart?
 - o "Sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable": Do you behave in a restrained, moderate, and proper manner in all situations?
 - o "Hospitable": Are you loving and approachable to all sorts of people- family, friends and especially strangers?

- o “Able to teach”: Are you able to explain truths about God and how the world works so that others understand?
 - o “Not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome”: Are you able to control yourself when drinking, stressed, or confronted?
 - o “Not a lover of money”: Are you greedy for wealth, driven to accumulate and achieve for selfish gain?
- c) The good news is that Jesus Christ is, as Paul said in Ephesians 5:23, the head of the church- the perfect leader for God’s household! The good news is that Jesus Christ is, as Peter said in 1 Peter 5:4, the Chief Shepherd- the perfect Shepherd for God’s household!
- d) Jesus Christ was approachable and open-hearted to anyone who came to him. He taught God’s heart and purpose with perfect clarity and conviction. He was never drunk but still fun-loving; he didn’t get violent but handled stresses gently; he avoided quarrels skillfully and patiently. He had all the resources in the world but let them go to serve others. He responded to his arrest and beating with sober-mindedness, self-control, and respectability. He was a man of perfect integrity- never swaying from obeying and pleasing the Father. Mostly, Jesus is fiercely loyal, faithful, and devoted to his beloved bride, the church. In fact, he gave his life to sanctify her, redeeming her with his own blood and making her his own for eternity.
- e) The great news for “anyone” is that being saved by Jesus also means that he will be sanctified by Jesus- made more and more like him by the Holy Spirit residing inside him. God calls those Spirit-filled men to be under-shepherds and stewards of the church, God’s household.
- f) Elders are disciples of Jesus Christ who are growing towards being like Christ and have some track record of progress in these areas. I think this is the spirit of what is said in vv. 4-5: *He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?*
- g) I want you to notice that there are no specific details of what this means- to manage one’s household well. In the wisdom of God, the Bible’s instructions go beyond just cultural norms and expectations and sticks to the principle and heart of this. Households can figure out how the cooking, cleaning, finances, and decision-making happens as the husband and father leads in managing how things function.
- h) Caring for God’s household (the church) and caring for his own household (his family- notably his children) are parallel responsibilities. The word “manage” that is used twice in these verses and literally means “to stand before.” So just imagine a husband and father “standing before” his family: he protects them; he provides for them; he represents for them a role model to follow; he goes ahead and leads them. And does this “with all dignity”- which means with seriousness and gravity, aware of the responsibility that it is. Now this doesn’t mean that elders’ children must be perfect or even believers in Jesus Christ themselves- there is the personal responsibility and choice that they have to make themselves. But it also means that this man- as husband and father- is an exemplary model of a disciple of Jesus for his children to follow and invites his children to follow him as he follows Christ.
- i) *Show running-mob.jpg*. It’s like we are all running together- as a church family- following Jesus. This is what we’re all supposed to be doing- this is for the whole church to follow THIS Jesus that I just described, amen? We are saved by Christ (our status before God is reconciled and secure as his children) and being sanctified by Christ (being changed to be more and more like him). So we are pursuing him- his heart, his presence, his mission. And as we’re running, there are some that rise up and stand before the group of us (or I guess running before us). These are the elders, Spirit-filled and solid models for the rest of us- they are the pacesetters!

→ **Transition:** So verses 2-5 answer the question, “Why is Christ-like character the key for eldership in God’s household?” with the truth that elders are Spirit-filled, solid models of Christ’s disciples for the church. Now, let’s go to the third and final point...

Sermon Outline (continued)

III. The Hazards of Eldership (vv. 6-7)

A. Verses 6-7 answer the question, “Why is eldership a hazardous but necessary role for God’s household?”

1. Answer: Elders face “spiritual battle” in shepherding the church towards maturity.

1 Timothy 3:6-7 (ESV): *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.*

- a) There are two more “qualifications” that Paul gave that sheds interesting light on the office of eldership in the church. First, he wrote in v. 6 that, *He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.* There is no assigned number of years given as a minimum requirement of time being a believer. But there is the risk for any person to be “puffed up with conceit.”
- b) The temptation is very real for a man who wields authority and gains recognition from others to become conceited- to become proud and self-important. It’s especially dangerous because usually it’s hard to see in yourself that you don’t realize that your conceitedness is determining how you lead. You might have experienced being under someone who is like this (you don’t need to raise your hands or anything- I know most of us have)- and even if it’s so obvious to a bystander, it’s hard to see your own head swelling bigger and bigger!
- c) I have seen many who start in eldership or pastoral ministry with a good heart but are fast-tracked because of their talents and giftedness. But outside of the grace of God, authority and recognition terribly poisons the hearts of even the best people. This is a temptation for anyone, isn’t it?
- d) The solution and preventative measure to take for the church is the test of character that comes in God’s passing of time. This is actually a gift that Christ gives to his disciples! Any situation or relationship that humbles us deeply, makes us aware of our great need for Christ, and compels us to be more dependent on him is really good for our souls! You know, Genesis 32 recounts how God confronted Jacob regarding all of his past mistakes. Jacob wrestled with God alone, all night on the banks of the Jabbok River. At the end of it, Jacob’s hip was wrenched and he had a lifelong limp because of it. But it was actually a grace of God- it would be a lifelong reminder of his need for God and of God’s faithfulness in his life.
- e) The flipside is scary. You see, the occupational hazard, according to Paul, was the threat of falling into the condemnation of the devil. This was something that was fresh in the minds of Paul and Timothy both, as they were just remembering how Hymenaeus and Alexander had made shipwreck of their faith and had to be handed over to Satan (1:20). God’s grace is when he brings us through tests and trials and we bear the scars that remind us to be humble and dependent on Christ.
- f) Second, he wrote in v. 7 the final “qualification” for eldership: *Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.* For outsiders looking at the church, the hope would be that they see something unique about the elders of the church. Not just that he’s a “good guy” but more like,

“Hey, I have known this person before, but now he met Jesus and he changed- he has grown up! How did he change like that?” This is a man who is real and open about his shortcomings, who is sincere in his love for God and desire to honor him, who is accessible to outsiders in such a way that people can see this within his life.

- g) Being an elder is a difficult position because in many ways it is a “public” position. No matter how big or small the church is, the lives of elders are open to criticism. When elders preach, they are speaking in a public forum and are subject to responses from others. It is similar- not exactly but similar- to individuals in politics: their wives and children are often also scrutinized, as is also their spending, housing, clothing, and associations.
- h) The “snare of the devil” is real: he would plot to get God’s people to fall into disgrace- to be disparaged and disregarded by outsiders and thus ruin their witness. So this is why elders need to have this good standing and reputation among outsiders- so that people can’t talk badly about them or question their integrity and ultimately so that the name of Jesus Christ will be held up high in the world.
- i) OMG- I can just say it as a true prayer: Oh my God! There is such a great need for the church to raise up elders of the church like this. There are enough so-called leaders of churches who run Jesus’ name through the mud because of their own foolishness and selfishness. This is a “snare” because it engulfs the God’s households in unnecessary controversies and distracts us from our mission- our mission to disciple each other towards maturity in Christ and our mission to make new disciples of Christ in the world around us.
- j) In light of this “spiritual battle,” pray for your elders! Pray for them that their own faith and character will be shaped by the Gospel, changing them to be more like Christ. Pray for them as husbands and fathers, that they will become better shepherds for their families at home. Pray for them as elders of God’s church, that they will be God-fearing, protected from the enemy, and faithful shepherds. Church family, I want to be a better elder in this way. Please keep me in prayer; please keep me accountable.

→ **Transition:** So verses 6-7 answer the question, “Why is eldership a hazardous but necessary role for God’s household?” with the truth that elders face “spiritual battle” in shepherding the church towards maturity. Now let’s conclude with the “life application” for today’s sermon...

Conclusion

IV. Life Application

A. Here’s the “life application” for today’s sermon from 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

1. Take steps of growing up by discipling others in your life.
 - a) First of all, run hard after Jesus, growing in faith and character and purpose for him! Then bring others along with you as you run after him.
 - b) Let’s not make it too complicated or worry that we don’t know how to do it right- let’s get moving and try! Just be real, honest, and open. Help that person also live in the Gospel.
 - c) Do this in your LIFE group. Do this in your families and friendships that you have with each other. Take the responsibility to help your brother and sister in Christ to also run hard after Jesus.

- d) Do this persistently, not just this week, but this month, this year, and for years to come. You see, this kind of disciple-making culture will produce the leadership culture we are striving for and the elders that we are praying for and aiming to raise up in the years to come. Church...

***Let us raise up elders in the church
who are exemplary disciples of Christ.***

→ **Transition:** Let's go back to our live online gathering now and respond to God's Word together. May the Holy Spirit be at work in our church family!

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