

Deacons: Special Servants to God's People

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[0 : 00] All right, beloved. We're taking just a brief hiatus from 1 Peter as we work our way verse by verse through that book of the Bible.

Because today, as we set apart our deacons for service in our church and recognize these men, I want to, Greg and I talked about this, I wanted to come to a passage in Scripture that would outline some of the requirements and some of a little bit of the function of what deacons are all about.

And so that's going to be 1 Timothy chapter 3, if you turn there. 1 Timothy 3. 1 Timothy 3 would be the book of the Bible we would go to if we wanted to begin to talk more and learn more about the governance and structure of local church life.

As we come to 1 Timothy chapter 3, Paul then begins to outline the character qualifications for leadership in the church. And it breaks down into two offices, which we'll begin to talk about in just a moment.

The title of my message is Deacons, Special Servants to God's People. Let's read the text for this morning. Now, we'll be spending our time in verses 8 through 13, but let's start up in verse 1 just to get the context of what we're talking about.

[1 : 32] It is a trustworthy statement. If any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.

He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity. But if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God, and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil?

That would be pride. Deacons, likewise, must be men of dignity, not double-tongued or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested, then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Deacons must be husbands of only one wife and good managers of their children and their own households.

[3 : 32] For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Now, obviously, friends, verses 1 through 7 refer to pastors. In my translation, the New American Standard, it reads overseers.

But pastors, overseers, elders, shepherds, bishop, those are synonyms describing the same office and men who provide oversight or shepherding care for local churches, local assemblies.

Deacons, in verse 8, introduces us to a new category of persons serving in God's church. Again, obviously, they are not the same as elders, hence Paul giving us two separate categories of office here.

Both are indispensable to God's church. And so we need to carefully understand some distinctions as well as some similarities between these offices.

[4 : 46] The word that is translated deacons is used 29 times as a noun in the New Testament. Paul himself uses it 21 times in his epistles, in his letters to different churches.

So deacon, deacon comes from a family of words, meaning essentially to serve, to serve.

The various forms of this word are used about 100 times throughout the New Testament. So it's a common word, we would say, in the Bible.

Now, there are three categories of maybe usage, I could say, in terms of the word as it's made use of throughout the New Testament.

Three categories. And you would think that. I mean, if you've got a word that's used over 100 times, it's going to be nuanced in some ways. And so the context that it's used in will help us understand the meaning of the word, the application of the word.

[5 : 56] So we have three categories of usage for this family of words, deacon. The first is in general. So that would be servant, helper, minister, cared for, serve, preparations, terms like that.

Now, the second category, the second category, those especially equipped, those especially equipped or given a spiritual gift for, a divine enablement for, serving others in the church.

You'll find this in Romans 12, 6 through 8. That's the second usage in the New Testament. And the third use of deacon that Paul draws on is here in our text in 1 Timothy 3 to designate one of two spiritual offices of administration in God's church, you know, in the local churches.

So I want to provide this quote for you from Dr. MacArthur because it sums up well what we're talking about in these general categories, moving into the specific one in number two and then even more specific in number three.

Here it is from Dr. MacArthur. Everyone then, all Christians serving in the local church, living among one another in the local church, everyone is a deacon in a general sense.

[7 : 20] You're a deacon. You're all deacons in the general sense. Some are specially gifted by the Holy Spirit for service. You have the gift of service in the church.

But then there are still others who hold the office of deacon. They, that is, those holding the office of deacon, they model spiritual service for everyone else.

What a task. Deacons model service in the church for everybody else. If you can say, watch your deacon, and he will show you what sacrificial, humble service to Jesus in the church looks like.

He will show you the commitment of serving Christ in the local church. Watch his life. That's a high calling, isn't it? And these men that we're about to present to you take this very seriously, and we thank God for them and for that reality.

He goes on to say, they model spiritual service for everyone else, and they work alongside the elders, implementing their preaching, teaching, and oversight in the practical life of the church.

[8 : 34] Now, those two aspects of the role of deacons, friends, modeling spiritual service and applying the preaching, teaching, and oversight of the pastors in a practical way in the life of the church family, those two aspects are the hallmarks of faithful, deaconal service.

If deacons do anything, if they function in any way in the church, these are the two highlighted, most prominent and needful ways that deacons fulfill being a deacon.

They offer and model practical spiritual service to you to make sure that no one is overlooked in the needs of the church, and then they represent the elders by taking what the elders are teaching and preaching and discipling about and bring that into the practical living of the daily life of the people of our church.

Deacons help you live your faith. They come alongside the elders to help you do that, and it's very practical. So what we can see already is this.

Deacon is an entirely different word than that of pastor or elder or the different words that are used as synonyms to describe what Greg and I do as pastors of our church.

[10 : 05] It denotes an entirely different office in the church. It is so important that we understand that deacons and elders are not the same people. They don't function as the same people and as the same offices, or we wouldn't need two offices in the church.

And the word deacon and the idea of deacon highlights a different function than that of the pastors and elders in a very practical, nuanced series of ways.

However, in saying all of that, there are similarities between elders or pastors and deacons. There are similarities.

Now, friends, understanding the similarities and differences between elders and deacons will help you, as people of our congregation, help you better understand and support God's will for governance in his church.

All right? It's very important that we understand this as well. This is fundamental for all of us. Greg and I do not run Grace Church.

[11 : 16] Greg and I are not the CEOs of Grace Church. We are servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. So we have our role and we have our function in our church life.

And we do that as pastors or overseers. That's the first category you saw in 1 Timothy 3. That's how we serve you as we serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

That all comes together. The deacons, then they fulfill their role as well. The only boss of Grace Church is the Lord Jesus Christ.

He's the Lord of our church. So Greg and I get under the Lord to serve you as pastors. And we will give a double accounting of ourselves.

Now, I don't even know what that means, but it makes my knees do like that. And it should. It's very sobering, right? We will give a double account of the Lord for the doctrine that we present to you because what we're saying to you is, thus saith the Lord, now live by it.

[12:24] That's heavy stuff. That's what we do. But we do that under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That's very important for us to understand.

And then the deacons come alongside and help us do that on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ. So it's a hand-in-glove kind of enterprise.

And very important that we do it in this particular way. You can understand that chaos and confusion around how Grace Church should be governed would only make church life here miserable for everyone.

Now, I'm going to assume in a crowd this size, even though we're a smaller church, that some of you have come from backgrounds where you've seen this not done particularly well or maybe even not biblically.

And it has created just that. It's created little fiefdoms in little pockets, cliques in the church. People have fussed and argued. And it's just been a mess.

[13:26] Much of that can be laid at the feet of people not understanding and being biblical about how the church should be governed. It isn't rocket science, but it does require a certain discipline and understanding that we would all adhere to together to make sure that not the pastors, but the Lord Jesus is glorified in His church.

That's what we're all, whether we're elders or deacons or people showing up as congregants, you know, members of the church, we're all working together in this enterprise that God's designed called the local church to bring Jesus glory, to lift Jesus Christ up.

We are all laboring for that cause and purpose. That's what we want to see done. Now, there's a certain way that God has told us that we need to operate together to see that that's done.

So I'm not saying that the pastors don't carry a certain degree or amount of authority, but that authority is grounded in Scripture, not in us.

By the position of pastor, we don't hold a certain amount of authority over you. We hold authority over you as we call you to the great authority of Scripture and say to you, live this because thus saith the Lord.

[14:52] All right. Now, God has a plan for order in His church, and elders and deacons functioning within their respective biblical roles in the parameters that God's given them are a critically important part of God's plan.

Now, the way that I'm going to tackle this this morning is this. Let me give you a little caveat already. Normally, we would be working our way verse by verse through this book, and we would come to this section, and I will have already covered all the stuff about elders and all the other stuff before chapter 3, and we would just be walking in and taking our time, and I'd have a lot of things to say about this because there's a lot here.

But in this one-off kind of thing, before we jump back into 1 Peter, I'm just going to hit some of the highlights, enough to help you understand who are these men that we're putting forward and why. That's what I want to help you with. So much to your disappointment, we're going to get to the part about women, and I'm going to go right past it. Fast. Now, normally, I can't do that, but today, I'm going to do it.

All right. So don't worry, and I think the best way that we might handle this is I'll give you some similarities and some differences between elders and deacons according to the list that Paul has given us in this passage.

[16:16] So whatever similarities and differences we're going to talk about, they're all based on how Paul's listed them out for us. That's all. And there's lots of overlap, but I think you'll get the gist of this as we go along.

All right. Let's start with similarities. Similarities between pastors. That's what we mean by elders. Between pastors and deacons. 1 Timothy 3, 8 is where we start.

Now, my translation says it this way. Deacons likewise must be. That's how it starts. Deacons likewise must be.

Likewise means in like manner. After the same manner. So likewise isn't a throw-off word that you can just throw out and say, yeah, whatever.

Likewise is a transitional word introducing new material related to the previous material. Now, the question is, well, what is that relationship to the previous material?

[17 : 20] Likewise emphasizes what must be. Now, hang on to that. Likewise emphasizes what must be. For deacons to be deacons.

So these are the non-negotiables in this list. That's the connection being made with elders or pastors in chapter 3, verse 2.

An overseer then must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, etc., etc. But if you look at the way that it's worded, if any man in verse 1 aspires to the office of overseer, there's a fine work he must do.

An overseer then must be. You see sandwiched verse 1 and sandwiched in between that and then the list that he put. An overseer must be. That's what he's saying about deacons.

It's why the New American Standard, my version, inserts must be into the text in their translation.

So look, it reads this way.

[18 : 23] In a similar way as that of pastors, deacons must be. Non-negotiable. And then he gives us nine qualifications listed in verses 8 through 13.

Now we can compare and contrast these qualifications with elders so that we can better understand God's will for how elders and deacons minister, how they serve among God's people in any given local church.

Here's the list as it's written out, copied over from the passage itself. Nine of these characteristics that you can see there. They are men of dignity.

They're not double-tongued. They're not addicted to much wine. They're not fond of sordid gain.

They do hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. They first need to be tested.

They are beyond reproach. They are the husband of one wife. They are rulers of their own household. So these requirements fit for men.

[19 : 26] In this particular instance, that's what we're dealing with. Now, as we think about the commonalities, here are the items elders and deacons share together or have in common.

Not addicted to much wine. Not fond of sordid gain. Beyond reproach. Husbands of one wife.

Rulers of their own households. Or rule their households well.

Now, to jump right into this, I'd like for you to notice off the bat, only one of these really, we can say, speaks to what could be a function.

A function. And that is the one that says he needs to rule his own household or his own family well.

This means he is proving himself to be a man who applies God's wisdom well to the practical matters of being a husband and a father.

I'll say it again. He is proving himself. He is in a continuing state of showing, demonstrating, proving that he is a man who can apply God's wisdom from Scripture.

[20 : 46] He is a man living by the Scriptures and leading his family in that wisdom well as he is a husband and a father.

Another way of saying it might be this. He is a man who is stable himself and has a stable, godly family. Now, you say, all right, does that mean that his kids can never misbehave?

If we see his kids around here and they misbehave, disqualified. We're going to slam him. No, because then Greg and I would have to step down, wouldn't we, brother? That's right.

None of us have perfect children, especially as those little sinners grow up. So we know that. We know it can't mean that. So what does it mean that he has a stable, godly family?

Well, it's all in what it says about ruling his family well. This is a man who is striving in his own life to live by the truth, and he's helping his family do the same.

[21 : 45] It's as simple as that. So this is a humble man. This is a humble man. This is a gentle man. This is a man who understands that himself, I'm a sinner, and so as my wife sins and as my kids sin, I need to move in and minister the wisdom and grace and kindness of the Lord in their lives.

Sometimes that will look like a rebuke. So I'll rebuke my kids. I'll discipline my kids. Sometimes it might mean a rebuke for my wife. But I'm doing it in a way that honors the Lord. So it's gentle and it's kind. You see? And you would see this. You hang around your pastors long enough, you're going to see how we treat our wives. You're going to see how we deal with our kids. Sometimes you may see us get irritated and impatient. Sometimes you might see Greg or myself say something that seems a little sharp. We all struggle with it. Those are not necessarily disqualifications. Ruling your household well means that you are trying to help your family learn to live in the truth of the Lord. [22 : 56] All right? So now I wanted to take care of that one right away because that's the closest we're going to come to some type of function in a deacon's life. It's very interesting.

Just like the list for elders, the list for deacons deal mostly, mainly with character. Character qualities. In other words, don't necessarily look for a guy who is a CEO or a brainiac or has lots of degrees or is really skilled in some area of outside life.

Mm-mm. God says, look for men of this caliber, this character. You want men with hearts like this. You want men who are seeking me and living out what they seek in me like this.

And then, you know, the other stuff can follow on. You see, Greg and I, we can't put that kind of heart into a man. God has to do that. But Greg and I can take that kind of heart and guide it and train it and focus it.

That's what pastors do. But that's the kind of men that we're looking for. These are not perfect men any more than Greg and I are perfect. These are not sinless men any more than Greg and I are sinless.

[24 : 21] But these are men who are repenters, men who come before the Lord and live a humble life before the Lord and they live that out in front of their people. I used to tell people when I would candidate at a church and I'm pretty sure I did this.

Greg was on the search team that brought me to the church. And I remember saying to them, I pastor a church just like I pastor my family.

I don't put on robes when I get in the pulpit. I don't dress in any special way. You show up, you know, this is about as... Well, I used to wear a coat and a tie. That is true.

That is true. All right, well, let me back up and start over again. But, you know, I don't get in the pulpit and put on the preacher voice. I don't do that. You just get Jeff.

And so that's what we're looking for in these guys. We're just looking for men who are being men in Christ. And there's no pretense. There's no hypocrisy. That kind of thing.

[25 : 19] Where is that most likely to show up first in their life? With their families. At home. Derek said at home. That's exactly right. At home.

So you be around these guys long enough, that's going to come. You can only fake it for so long, right? And we do not present to you today men who are fakers. All right, let's move on.

These men are beyond reproach. So I dealt with the family one. I just wanted to go ahead and do that one. Now, beyond reproach. Beyond reproach. These men must also first be tested, then let them serve as deacons if, verse 10, they are beyond reproach.

Now, this sums up the character of a deacon just as it does with an elder, a pastor, an overseer. In other words, this is the quickest way to say this.

He is a man whose character is beyond accusation. Now, does that mean that he can never come under accusation for anything in his life? No. You know what?

[26 : 21] Leaders in the church are targets. People are always coming up with stuff to say about them. And folks, believe it or not, people will make up things about leaders.

They'll just make it up. Even people outside the church, they just make it up or taint it in a way that shades it to look good for them and make their point against the leader.

Even though that's not true. So it's not that these men will never be accused of things or have people point at them and say stuff. That, you just, if you're gonna step up into a role like this in the church, you're just gonna have to understand that comes with the territory.

Right? And you can't spend your life running around putting out all those fires and defending yourself. That's all you do. You just have to take it and move through it. You just have to trust that that stuff will fall off as you continue to live for Christ.

Otherwise, it'll consume you and it'll own you. Believe me. So these men are beyond accusation in the sense that if they are accused of something and their life is examined, there's no basis for it.

[27 : 30] It quickly becomes evident there's no basis for it. That's what we, we want men like that. Men who can stand the scrutiny. They're not perfect, but they can stand the scrutiny.

Okay? Then this next one. Now again, remember, I'm hitting the highlights. If we were gonna do this, I'd probably be breaking these up and you'd probably get two or three sermons here. We'd really go after this thing.

It's very important. Husband of one wife. Oh, here we go. Now I'm just gonna just jump right into this from verse 12. Deacons must be husbands of only one wife.

And then he goes in after that to being good managers of their children and their own household.

So let me just jump right into it. Can a deacon be a divorced man?

Yes. Short answer. Whoa. Why? While each case like this, a divorced man, while each case has to be carefully has to be carefully and prayerfully weighed against Scripture.

[28 : 34] Men are not automatically disqualified because they have been divorced. That would not be biblical. I'll just give you one case in point of many.

What about a man who was married and divorced before he was ever in Christ? We're gonna say to that man before he ever knew anything about the Lord or Christ, you can't serve in the church like that.

I don't think I could be a pastor, Greg. Not in the sense of divorce, but I was sinning before I came to know the Lord. Does that shock you? It shouldn't.

I wasn't living for Christ before Christ. So that's one example of how Greg and I would weigh up a special circumstance of what we would consider to be a unique nuance of a man's life if we're seeing him serving in the church and we recognize this guy, this guy's a deacon.

He's a deacon. And we want to set him apart to do this. And so we meet with that man and we talk with that man and we get the story and we understand and then we weigh that up against scripture and we come to a conclusion about how we want to approach that.

[29 : 49] That's just one example. Here's what I'm saying though about all of this. This verse, this verse in verse 12, notice husband and one wife, this verse says absolutely nothing about divorce.

Do you see divorce in that? No. Look, divorce is not even implied in that verse. Here's what it means. It means that the man is wholly devoted to the woman he's married to.

He is a one woman man in mind and in manner. So this is not a guy who is going around being impure in his mind toward other women.

This is a man who's got, he possesses himself, he's under control in his life. So this is a man who puts a premium on sexual purity. Now listen, you want to know why men in the church fall into adultery.

Now we're talking about men right now. Men and women do that. Why does that happen? I have actually heard guys say this. I don't know how it happened. It just happened. And man, I am quick to say, no sir.

[31 : 00] No sir. You may not understand or recognize what has happened in your life as you've come to this moment where you've been unfaithful to your wife. But I guarantee if you and I'll sit down and work together for a little while, we will begin to pick apart the ways that you set yourself up for failure so that this was inevitable.

You didn't guard your mind, you didn't guard your heart, and you put yourself in a position. This stuff doesn't just happen. Something's going on in your mind and in your heart, and you were being primed.

So what does that mean on the reverse of that? It means that men, we can safeguard ourselves against impurity. Isn't that the good news? If we can fall victim to that, there's a way that you and I can come back over here and say, all right, how can we begin to build these defenses that will keep us from exploiting, hear me, because this one gets me, from exploiting our Christian sisters?

These are your sisters. This is not your hunting ground. And if Greg and I sniff that out, we are on top of you and it's not going to be pretty. I guarantee you that. Now, look at me and hear me carefully.

We will not tolerate our sisters being exploited. Not for one millisecond. We are putting before you today men who believe that and men who are willing to give themselves in that.

[32 : 24] How do I know that? Because everything that I'm saying to you right now, we've seen in these men. We've already seen it or they wouldn't be presented to you. So the good news about all of that is God raises up men.

And men know what it's like to stand in the gap and serve as protectors and help safeguard the congregation. And we want men like that, don't we? We want men like that. I certainly want men like that around me. So this is what it means. This is what it refers to. This is all about sexual purity characterizing a man's life. He is a one woman man. He's devoted to his wife. His wife. All right. Another similarity shared with elders. Not addicted to much wine is the way mine puts it. Not addicted to much wine. If you go over where we're talking about elders, that's the first thing listed in verse three. Not addicted to wine. And then you look at it in verse eight. [33 : 24] Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine. Very clear. Very plain. Oh, really? Then why this issue?

This is not a prohibition against alcohol. That is not what this is. It is a negative way of expressing a positive requirement to be controlled by the Holy Spirit and not by alcohol. In this particular instance, this specific substance is alcohol. But just previous, we saw he's a one woman man.

So he's not to be controlled by any kind of desire that would pull him away from being controlled by the Holy Spirit like sexual lust or impurity. Right?

So now we've got one that says, don't be involved with drink, with alcohol, in a way that clouds your judgment and pulls you away from being controlled by the Holy Spirit.

[34 : 32] Why, gentlemen? Because too much is at stake. We can't afford to have a guy who's got some secret life of taking alcohol to medicate himself or escape his problems or just for the sheer joy of getting high, as it were, getting a buzz, as it were.

We don't want, that's not a deacon. We don't want that. Now, here's what I'm not saying because I can't make a case for it from Scripture. I can't say, you can't drink.

Now, personally, I don't drink. That's the case for Greg. Now, we've made that choice because we recognize that we stand forward as examples.

And this actually happened to me one time before I was in the ministry. Had I surrendered to the ministry when we were in that restaurant when we were young? Maybe I had. I don't know.

It's been a while. But we were in a restaurant. We were, I think, probably engaged. I had surrendered to the ministry. I was in college. I had not gone into the ministry yet. I was being an intern in the church.

[35 : 36] We were out at a restaurant and we saw some people that ordered those big, daiquiris. Those big dudley look so good. They're big, they're huge, and they're cold.

We're in Arizona. And boy, they came out and they had the umbrella thing and the thing and I looked at that and lusted for it. And I said, oh, Suzanne, let's get one of those and share it.

So we did. And we said, we asked them, does that have alcohol in it? And they said, yes, we're babies. We didn't know anything. And they said, well, leave out the alcohol, bring the rest. We want to try that bad boy.

So we did. Long story short, there were some people from our church that saw us there doing that and you know what? That got back to the church leaders. Yeah. And so I was, we were told about that.

I was confronted. But you know what? That was a gift from the Lord because I have, see, I have never forgotten that. And I realized, you know what? There are some people who are going to be under my care that are not going to be able to handle that in their pastor.

[36 : 37] And it's an easy thing for me to say, okay, I won't do that. It's easy. You know, I don't even like alcohol, so it's easy. Now, there are others that I don't do that are a little harder.

But I understand. That just comes with the territory, right? You don't want to cause a weaker brother to stumble. And why put that stuff out there if you can avoid it? So Greg and I just choose.

Now, what if one of our deacons likes a beer every now and again? Fine. What if I like a little wine when we... Fine. What does this text tell us?

Don't be a drunkard. Don't be a man before even getting drunk that drinks in a way that you impair your judgment. Don't get into that. If you do that in this area of your life, it's probably going to weaken you to a point where in another area you're going to become vulnerable.

Don't do that. Don't underestimate your enemy. Don't underestimate your enemy. He will exploit anything he can. So I'm just saying be very, very careful about strong, excessive drink that clouds your judgment.

[37 : 43] The next one is not fond of sordid gain or in the text free from the love of money. Again, verses 3 for pastors and verse 8 for deacons.

Not materialistically driven. He doesn't use his position to embezzle money. Look, one of the things that deacons can do in a church. They don't have to do this.

It's not automatic. But usually deacons will be tasked by the elders to handle monies that relate to benevolence ministry. Like, we have a certain amount of money set aside as a church to help church members who get into financial trouble.

They can't pay their certain bill or something comes up or they need groceries, right? And we have monies we can say, here, deacons, please take care of this and make sure that they're cared for. And so they know how to weigh that up so that no one's taking advantage of it but at the same time needs are being met.

So deacons handle money. And so we want these men to be men above reproach, have integrity. We don't want them using their position to exploit and take money from God's people that have been earmarked for service among us.

[38 : 53] It's as straightforward as that, right? I think that one's pretty easy for us to understand. So avoiding strong drink, maintaining sexual purity, godly management of his home, and then finally, a godly relationship with money.

Those are qualities that deacons share with elders. You say, Jeff, as I read this, are there other characteristics that elders have that, you know, would be nice if deacons have or share? Sure, there's overlap here.

But these are the qualities that Paul lists that carry over almost word for word. And I think that's interesting. But even more interesting now comes the differences, the differences between elders and deacons.

He mentions that they need to be men of dignity, not double-tongued, holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, and to first be tested.

All right? Let's go through those real quickly. Men of dignity. Men of dignity or above reproach. deacons and elders do share God's high priority for Christ-like character.

[40 : 04] And certainly, elders are to be dignified. So that's not the issue. Being a man of dignity reflects a man who is in possession of himself.

I want to say a little bit more about that because this is the first one that Paul mentions about deacons. What does it mean to be a man who's in possession of himself?

Paul mentions this about deacons and not about elders. Most likely, he does this because he's stressing the close-knit nature of their work among the church family.

Deacons. They're all in our business. Deacons. Because that's who they are and that's what they do. In order to be able to care for us and care for our needs, they need to know us.

And so they're all in our life. That's a good thing. Now, they often deal with people in these kinds of needs so there is a certain vulnerability that deacons have to be very careful about.

[41 : 08] So you want men who are in possession of themselves. This is going to become very clear as we move through this, the remainder of this. A man who is dignified, self-possessed.

It requires, then, a man who is dignified. What does that mean? What does that mean? Did I go too far? Men of dignity, admirable.

Oh, well. Let me tell you what it means. He's not silly. He's not flippant. Did I go too far? Was that the last one? Oh, good. I get excited, Alonzo.

There it is. Not silly. Not silly. Not flippant. He's not clownish. He's not clownish. Everything in life isn't a joke.

This is the kind of man that you could come to and find that this man knows how to be serious about life. He knows how to listen about things that are going on in your life.

[42 : 11] So, he has an admirable way of going about his life with a good measure of seriousness and realism about the issues of life. So, in other words, I could say it this way, and you guys would understand this.

This is a man you can trust with your wife and children. Now, how important is that? You can trust this man with your wife and your kids as he moves about in the congregation meeting practical needs and doing acts of service for our families.

This is a man who doesn't exploit people. All right, now, not double-tongued. Not double-tongued. That's an interesting turn of phrase there from verse 8.

He doesn't say what's expedient. He doesn't just tell people what they want to hear. He doesn't tell you one thing about something going on and then run over here and tell somebody else something else about that same thing, and they're not the same story.

He doesn't do things like that. He doesn't play those kind of games. He doesn't tell people things based on what's best for him. So, he's not constantly talking to you to try to ingratiate himself to you so that you think highly of him and maybe have a sense that you need to become obligated to him for some way.

[43 : 36] Have you ever met folks like that? But when you talk to him for a little while, it's obvious that they're, you almost feel a little manipulated. He's not like that. That's a double-tongued man.

He has integrity of speech. He's not a busybody. He's not a busybody. So, in other words, this man doesn't use his ministry to get the lowdown on people and then use his knowledge to meddle or to sow seeds of dissension or to gossip.

So, this is not a troublemaker, but a peacemaker. Deacons are peacemakers. They're men who tell the truth and live the truth.

So, if he's involved in your life and you're recounting something to him and it becomes obvious to him that you're not being biblical and truthful and loving and kind, don't be surprised if your deacon rebukes you.

Okay, that's fine. But that's a form of encouragement because your deacon wants you to live faithfully to Christ. And so, when deacons are in your life, they can hear all kinds of things that are going on in your life.

[44 : 51] That's fine. That's good. So, a man who's not double-tongued is constantly trying to help the peace. Again, he's not placating. He's not covering over sin.

He's not patting you and saying, well, that's okay. You know, if you're standing there running the elders down and he looks at you and says, wait just a minute, have you talked to Greg and Jeff about this? Well, no.

Well, time out. Don't be saying this to me. That's gossip. You need to repent of that. You go talk to your pastors and then if you want to come talk to me after that, that's fine.

But make sure they understand we're doing that. You see how these men are working to keep everything above board? All their cards are out on the table. These are not men who are walking around like this with you.

Nah. That's not what we want. So they're not double-tongued troublemakers. All right. In this one, holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

[45 : 55] This may be a little bit more nebulous for us. Verse 9, they are men holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. In the most straightforward of terms, this means this.

the deacon possesses, oops, I keep going. The deacon possesses, safeguards, and lives out his faith in the gospel without hypocrisy.

So he's not a man that's using his mouth to say one thing and living something else in his heart. But he has a repenting heart towards the Lord and fellow believers.

And you can see it in him. You can see the humility of a man whom God is making aware of his sin. This is a man whose heart is becoming tender toward the Lord.

And so he's aware of times and moments when he's grieving the Lord. And it hurts his heart. And so he's quick to repent, to confess.

[46 : 54] See, this is a tender man. He's being made sensitive to his sin in a way that doesn't make him kick around and feel sorry for himself. He's sensitive toward his sin because God is working in his heart and he wants to be a repentor.

Now, you may be saying by now at this, you know, where are men like this? We're going to put four of them in front of you or we wouldn't do it. We are not, we, leaders, we are not perfect men.

But we are seeking to be faithful to our perfect Savior. No hypocrisy, repenting toward God. And then first tested, you saw it come up from verse 10.

These men must also be first tested. Now, he does not say that about elders, but he does imply it.

He does imply it because how in the world are you going to know all of this about elders in the qualifications if you're not with them and around them and look at their lives for a while, right?

But, but he specifically mentions first tested. It can relate to the idea of an elder not being a new convert. He does say that in verse 6.

[48 : 09] Make sure that your pastors are not new converts. Why? Why is it so important not to put a really young man or a young convert guy, a young Christian, into these positions as overseers, pastors, preachers, and teachers in the church so that he will not become conceited.

Pride is the issue. Getting puffed up and full of himself is the issue. That's the same issue that was incurred by the devil. And we don't want that. So now that same idea comes over into what we're going to do with deacons.

It's with the idea that the only way to know if an elder meets the qualifications is to watch his life. With deacons, the idea is that they are, they are approved over time.

By the clear demonstration of living in our midst, we come to know, trust, and admire these men because they live with us and serve with us.

And we see the example of their lives. And so that's how they're tested. Now it's fine if some churches have some formalized way of testing these men.

[49 : 18] I went through that. When I was ordained into ministry, I went through that. But that was for pastoral ministry. Some churches have formal testing procedures that they provide for deacons.

Okay, that's fine. For us, I take this more as this guy's living among our lives and he's first tested by living with us. He's in the trenches with us. And we see him with his family and with his kids and all these different things that are required of a man.

You know, we see that reflected. It's the obvious godliness in all areas of their lives over the course of time. So I think I've said it this way.

They have been tested by proving themselves in the trenches. Then, then, and only then can they be considered for serving as deacons. Now here's what you don't do.

You don't have some type of need in the church, some function that needs to be taken care of that nobody's doing. And so you go out and find a warm body, a guy, and you say, hey, we want to make you a deacon and make you do this.

[50 : 25] No, you don't do that. That, that happens. The, the, the, the, the, the urgency of the thing dictates what, and we, no.

These men have, okay, so let me just say this. This is why we're, we're a church three, I've been here seven years as Greg said, but we've only been constituted as Grace Church Williamsburg for three years.

What you're sitting in now, visitors is three years old. We, we, we were another thing. Now we're this thing. We have a new core of people. This is a whole new thing. And so Greg and I have been shepherding together in this new work for three years.

It is just now that we are putting forward these four men. Does that say something to you? Why? It's time. It's the right time in the Lord.

And the men that we're putting forward, we've watched their lives for that time or at least a good bit of that time. And so they've been in the trenches with us. They've first been tested.

[51 : 27] So I'll go ahead and tell you, Greg and I recognize the men that we're putting forward to you today, they've been deaconing for a while without any title or recognition. That's who you want.

When, when we approached every one of these men, they all went, oh, I don't know. And they had various reasons, but they all shared a common concern.

They were sober-minded about the role. They took it seriously. That was only more confirmation for us that we were selecting the right guys.

Doesn't mean there aren't other men in the congregation we can look at, but we've seen these guys, we've known these guys. So we're putting forward these men after this three-year period of time because we feel like they have been tested, they have proven themselves, they've been deaconing for some time.

So you say, well, we haven't had deacons for three years. No, we have. We've been watching and they've been deaconing and you've been served and you've been helped. Well, then why give them a title and put them forward?

[52 : 33] Because that's what they said. We don't want a title. Why do this? And this is what we told them because our congregation needs it. This will be encouraging for our congregation to know we've grown to this point.

God's brought us to this place and this is an office in the church. It's indispensable and we need to put you guys forward so that they know who you are and they can come to you.

That's why. It's healthy, it's good, it's wonderful. All right. So they've been tested. Now let's just do real quickly some functional differences.

I'm almost finished. Some functional differences. The differences that we've been talking about can be explained by observing the functional roles between the two offices and here's where it gets just a little bit hairy.

So let me just put this up here for you to see. I'm only going to mention it. Again, had we been going verse by verse, I would have covered all that I'm about to put up here for you in detail.

[53 : 34] Elders. Here's what pastors do different, very different from deacons in terms of the way pastors minister, function, serve in the church. They rule.

There's your references. They shepherd. They teach. They pray for. Now stay with me in 1 Peter because when we get to 1 Peter 5, we're going to talk about elders shepherding because it's mentioned.

So we'll deal with some of that. But there's a basic overview of what elders do in the church of the Lord. That is what Greg and I are primarily called to.

This is our role. Our role is, look, I am not beyond cutting grass. I've cut a lot of grass for churches and otherwise. That's great. And you know, I like it. It's mindless.

You get out there and you can pray and think. It's great. But when I'm out there cutting grass, what am I not doing?

[54 : 33] So I'm not above it. I'm not above it. It's just not the best use. So God brings men into our lives to help us with things like that so that we can stay focused on what we are called to be and do.

We're called to be shepherds. And shepherding the church means we rule well, we teach well, we pray well. That takes time. You'd be surprised how much time and effort is involved in that.

And somebody's got to do that and do it well. So God gives us deacons to come alongside and help us to make sure that the needs of the congregation are met while we're doing these things.

We are called to equip the saints for the work of ministry, not to do everything. And that, you know, somewhere along the line, this all got really confused.

And I don't pretend to know how all that happened, but it did. Nowhere in Scripture, now here's where it gets a little hairy, nowhere in Scripture are deacons commanded to do any of those things with regard to the church, not one place.

[55 : 42] In fact, nowhere in the Bible is the role of a deacon specifically spelled out for us. Even in Acts 6, if you adhere to Acts 6 being the initial place where deacons began to serve and be formed, which, okay, that's fine.

Even in that, it doesn't tell us in specific terms what these deacons would then do in each local church. Now, what am I saying in this?

There is latitude for how deacons are assigned tasks by the pastors from church to church to church. So deacons in one church may not look exactly like what deacons do in our church.

That's fine. There's latitude. There's flexibility there because deacons are all about serving the pastors and helping the pastors so they can focus on their ministry.

The deacons do their thing in conjunction with the pastors. It's a hand-in-glove thing as I mentioned. And as the deacons do that, you win. All right, one last horror story before I close.

[56 : 48] Well, it just happens. And this is the kind of stuff that can go on. I think I mentioned this to you before. I was actually in a church where we had several women who were older and they would, now this was a church of 1,400 people.

So we had five staff members. We needed five more. And we had a cadre of deacons and that kind of thing. And these women, particularly, there was a cluster of them, whenever they got sick and went in the hospital, they would hide it from the pastors.

They didn't want anybody to know so that they could get out and say that the pastors never visited them. And they used it as a weapon. And we had to go talk to them and say, will y'all stop doing this?

You're making people think that we don't care. And that's not the case. We didn't know because you didn't tell us. That happened several times that they would do this.

We also had some other people who would go into the hospital and if one of the staff pastors didn't visit them, they had not been visited. Even though we sent 55 deacons to go see them.

[57 : 56] To take care of them. Right? Now I understand that it's meaningful for your pastor to take time to come and say, but when you, you just, anyway. Cut us some slack.

So it's all good and it works hand in glove and so, you know, we just, we have to be careful not to let ourselves get miffed by these little things. I'm trying to say this. It is responsible and loving and caring for pastors to institute deacons and work with those deacons so that on behalf of the pastors, pastors, you are well cared for.

It would be irresponsible for Greg and I to try to do everything because we will, we will miss something and then you'll lose and we don't want that.

So deacons are a way that we're trying to love you well as pastors and we're thanking God for them. All right. Now from this brief analysis of the passage that we've seen before, set before us, we can see that, we can see two things coming out.

Deacons, number one, serve the pastors of the church. Deacons serve the pastors. You say, how? I was just explaining how? By representing the pastors in a practical ministry of meeting the needs of the congregation across the spectrum of church life.

[59 : 23] That's what deacons do. It's not just about deacons helping the poor or giving money to people who show up that are homeless or whatever. Those can be things but deacons are about moving in and out of the congregation, keeping their fingers on the pulse of what's going on and helping in these different areas, representing the pastors in that role.

And then that's the second one. It grows right out of the first one and it is a reason that that one is number one. And then number two, deacons serve the practical needs of the congregation as they seek to serve the pastors.

Now you can see that not just any man is going to fit this bill because not just any man is going to have the humility to live a life like that. We're so thankful for these guys.

Alright? So fulfilling these two primary roles means the congregation's needs are not being overlooked and the pastors are being kept free to focus on their primary role of ministering the word.

That is preaching, teaching, discipleship, equipping the saints and prayer. So friends, verse 13 tells us that these special servants of God who have served well, we're referring to them as deacons, they will be rewarded for their selfless sacrificial ministry to God's people.

[60 : 49] for those, it says, for those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

First, they will be honored and respected by the congregation for serving well. Second, they will see the fruit of their service in the growing faith and confidence of the people as well as finding their own faith bolstered.

And this will be an outgrowth of their faithful, careful practice to serve the Lord's people. Kindness and tenderness and sober-mindedness. And that's what we're looking for in these men.

So again, I emphasize to you these are not perfect men any more than Greg and I are perfect, but they are men that we have seen in their lives that hold to this kind of character and we're grateful for them.

So what Greg and I would like to do now, if you've never been a part of this, it's very straightforward and simple.