

# An Overseer Must Be Above Reproach

Two Marks of Maturity in the  
Life of a Christian Leader

1 Timothy 3:1-7

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# Introduction

Is church leadership only for the elite, or is it for everyone? Is there a special, select group of people who get the privilege of being leaders?

What should we look for in a church leader? Is it your age? Do you have to be over 21, 40, or 65 years old to be looked at as a leader? Is it your accomplishments? Do you need to have served in VBS or go on a summer mission trip? Is it your academic achievements? Do you need to have a specialized degree in order to take the lead? What are the criteria for being a leader?

What about charisma? Does a church leader need to have a winning personality? Does he need to be a type-A leader, with the mentality and motivation of a CEO? Does he need to be clever, quick-witted, and funny? Does he need to be good looking? What does a leader look like?

## Context

Our passage today has Paul telling Timothy about who should be leading the church. He's doing several things at once: He's telling Timothy who to look for as he makes a leadership team, he's showing Timothy what he needs to exemplify, and he's reminding Timothy about how the false teachers fail to live up to the standard.

## Sermon Preview

Our sermon will share two marks of maturity in the life of a Christian leader.

1. Respectable
2. Reputable

These two marks can both be grouped under the heading of what it means to be above reproach:

*The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore **an overseer must be above reproach** (1 Timothy 3:1-2)*

Being above reproach is our overarching theme today – the leader must be blameless before God. This doesn't mean that the leader is perfect or sinless. It simply means that this leader lives a life that obviously honors the Lord.

To be clear, the passage speaks of pastors. The pastors are the elders – they hold the office of overseers in our text. They are to keep watch over the congregation. But just as this letter was read in public for everyone to hear, so it is that the pastors are to live a life that everyone can see. In this way, the pastors serve as an example for all to follow as we strive to live a life that honors Christ. We should all be aiming for these marks of maturity.

My sermon only has two points. I'm breaking our text into bigger units, and this will allow me to spend more time on certain sections – namely, the importance of being able to teach. Let's get started.





# 1. Respectable

The first mark of a mature Christian is that he is respectable:

*Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, **respectable**, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. (1 Timothy 3:2-3)*

There's a lot listed here, and I think *respectable* is a great word to tie them all together. Respectable means to be honorable. It literally means that when someone tells you about the way they live their life, you can say, as a Christian, "I respect that." Remember, these all fall under the heading of being above reproach. Let's take a quick look at them all. To be a husband of one wife means that the man must be faithful. It doesn't mean that you have to be married – but you cannot live as a flirt or philanderer. There is a purity in mind here, and that leads into being sober-minded and self-controlled. This means to have clear, sound thinking – and to be sure and steady in their behavior. He must show hospitality, showing gratefulness for what God has given him and sharing it with others without grumbling. To be not a drunkard and not violent goes against what the world tells us about supposedly strong leaders. God's leaders are to be gentle and not quarrelsome. We don't want to settle a score, we want to save souls. And a mature leader cannot love money. It must be clear that Christ himself makes him content. He must be in love with the Giver, not his gifts.

It's worth mentioning that these qualities seem to have the home in mind. You'll find that carry over as our passage continues, but you can still see it here: beginning with the husband of one wife – the heads of the household, sober-minded and self-controlled are expected in public but must be exercised in private, hospitable to welcome others in his home, able to teach (maybe most importantly) his family, and it goes on. This is a question that could be awkward if asked, but what would a wife say when asked if she respected her husband? What would the kids say? For the mature Christian leader, this is a question that shouldn't need to be asked. The answer should be clear. The mature Christian fit for leading is above reproach and respectable in the home.



## Honor God in Your Home

So, as you measure this mark of maturity in your life, will you honor God in your home? When I'm talking about the home, yes I'm talking about the physical place of where you live – but I'm also talking about the spiritual place of your heart. The private, inner life that maybe only those closest to you can see. We live in a time where cameras are constantly around us. My kids are very aware of this. One of my kids gets shy around the camera. Another one gets more animated and excited. They behave differently when they know they are being watched or recorded. How many of us can say that we live the same when our sovereign God is watching? To honor God in our homes means to not be a hypocrite. Do you praise God with your lips and then curse others when you're alone? Do you say you want to spend more time in the Word but are constantly scrolling on your phone? The mature Christian who is fit for leading always has Jesus on his mind, and strives to live in a way that is true to who he should be. It's not pretending to be perfect. It's not being a fake. It's doing your best to be faithful. Examine your life and see what areas you can be more authentic in when it comes to living for Christ.

The first mark of a mature Christian, fit for leadership, is that he is respectable, and honors God in the home.

## 2. Reputable

The second mark of a mature Christian is that he is reputable:

*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? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, **he must be well thought of by outsiders**, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (2 Timothy 3:4-7)*

To be well thought of means that you have a good reputation. It gives the impression of having a good Christian testimony. It carries the thought of having evidence in your life that you are living like a Christian. This section is about what can be obviously perceived in someone's life. When you look at his household, is it managed well? Is it in order? Is it well taken care of? There's a sense of stewardship: Just as God gives a man his home, so God gives pastors his people. He is to keep his children submissive, but that

does not mean that they have to be perfect. It doesn't even mean that his children have to be Christians. It simply means that the children know their father keeps and takes care of them. The mature leader must not be a recent convert. He cannot be a new Christian. The reasoning is because he may become puffed up with conceit – the pride and power that the devil knows how to deceive with. Right now might be a good time to remind that church leadership is servant leadership. Jesus set the example by washing the feet of his disciples. To be mature means to have a humble heart. The devil gets another mention at the end of this section, and he is said to set snares for those who fall into disgrace. Those who do not have a good reputation in the world may fall into disgrace, which is a trap laid by the devil to discourage. Like the false teachers, they may deviate from doctrine. Looking out for these marks of maturity in a Christian leader are safeguards against sin and from forsaking the faith.

It's worth mentioning that the passage states being well thought of by outsiders. This means outsiders to the gospel. Non-Christians. And this is a question that could be awkward if asked, but what would your unsaved friends say about your reputation? Would they say that you are kind and gracious? What would your unbelieving teachers say? Would they say that you have integrity? What would your enemies say? Would they say that you love them? For the mature Christian leader, this is a question that shouldn't need to be asked. The answer should be clear. The mature Christian fit for leading is above reproach and reputable in the world.

## **Witness Christ to the World**

So, as you measure this mark of maturity in your life, will you witness Christ to the world? Having a good reputation serves as being a good Christian witness. In his book *Disruptive Witness*, Alan Noble writes on speaking truth in a distracted age. He says that Christians have become distracted and secularized just like the world we live in. He argues that the gospel of Jesus is inherently disruptive. It goes against the status quo. Noble gives many ways to be a disruptive witness, but I want to highlight three. In regards to social media, he says that we can actually live aesthetically. This means living in such a way that recognizes the good, beautiful, and true – and redirecting praise to God. When thinking about the Sabbath, Noble says that we need to make it a personal practice to protect it. Keep Sunday mornings incredibly sacred. Let's take singing as a final example. As the church, we have the ability to engage in “embodied worship” – simply singing together should

shake up the sleeping stupor of visitors and those who don't know the joys of Jesus. Being reputable in the world does not mean flying under the radar. Don't mistake having a good reputation in the world with resignation from the world. We are salt and light. Be a Christian witness who boldly loves the Lord and our neighbors.

The second mark of a mature Christian, fit for leadership, is that he is reputable, and witnesses Christ to the world.

## Able to Teach

I want us to pause and take a closer look at what it means for the mature Christian leader to be able to teach. Now, of course this means being able to teach Christian doctrine. It means being able to teach the Bible in such a way so that people can hear what God is saying. The Christian leader does not lead from his own whims, but from the Word. The Bible is the basis. It's the shepherd's staff. I want to reiterate that this specific point of being able to teach is in the immediate context of holding the office of pastor. It's his distinguishing skill, responsibility, and duty. Nevertheless, I still believe that the concept of being able to teach can be applicable to all of you today.

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

Think about how Timothy might have received this message from Paul. Paul was an educated man, and studied under the great Gamaliel. Paul's stature in the Christian community would have been supreme. Everyone would have wanted to listen and learn from him. He had been given words directly from Jesus. He had written Romans by this time, a behemoth of a book. What could possibly empower Timothy's preaching and teaching, as he stands beneath the shadow of the Great Apostle Paul? Would he feel inadequate? Would he feel insecure?

The story is that I have struggled with insecurity and inadequacy with my own teaching abilities. They come from the fact that I am not academically trained to be a teacher. My schooling has nothing to do with being skilled in Scripture. My education is more in the scientific world than it is in the spiritual world. But God has given me opportunities to grow in preaching and teaching. And what I've learned is that you don't have to be academically



trained to be able to teach. It's not really about being fancy in your schooling, but being faithful to Scripture. Explaining and applying the Bible in winsome and wise ways are the basics of being able to teach.

So I rejoice in my weaknesses. I rejoice in the fact that I can rely on the Word of God to do the work. I rejoice that I do not come to you with words of eloquent wisdom, but with the beauty of the Bible. I rejoice in the fact that authority does not come from my schooling, but from Scripture. The Scriptures are sufficient. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. (2 Timothy 3:16-17) The Word of God is living and active. (Hebrews 4:12) For anyone who teaches the Bible, your confidence cannot come from your college education – it must come from the unapologetic, unashamed assurance of preaching Christ crucified.

As Asian Americans, we put a lot of emphasis on our academics. But the study of Scripture is not only for those who go to seminary. God's Word is to be learned, cherished, and hidden in the hearts of all of his children. I've been encouraged and blessed by our church as a preacher and teacher, and I hope to do the same for some of you here today: You don't need to go to seminary to get serious about studying the Bible. With reverence and humility, you can learn to love God's Word in such a way that you are able to confidently and competently explain it to others. If you want to be a pastor, by all means go to seminary! If you are inclined, eager, or apt to teach – then you must get as much training as possible. The Bible says so itself that not many of you should be teachers since they will receive heavier judgment. But for those of you who think that you can only study Scripture if you go to school for it – that's not true. The church needs pastors, but we also need men and women who can lead small groups, teach Sunday School, counsel, and disciple. I'm still learning, and I believe you can learn, too.

## **Aim at Being Able to Teach**

So, will you aim at being able to teach? I must make mention that we sit in an indisputably privileged position. To have the Bible available to us, and the resources we have to study it and share it are incredible. Let's not waste it. Here are some practical applications. Start by reading. Obviously, you need to read the Bible. You need to read the whole Bible, multiple times, over and over again. But there are also books that can help you better understand the Bible and apply its truths to your life. Read every single page of the study notes in your study Bible. Read commentaries. Read systematic



theologies. I have benefitted by the good, faithful, and needed work that is done at a scholarly level. There's an entire education bound in books. Next, begin writing. You don't have to write in a personal blog or be published on a website. Start by writing in a journal. Work on words and integrating ideas. Share a story about what you've been learning from Scripture. When you're ready, put a piece together and pitch it to me for our church website. I promise that I'll be open to reading it. Finally, practice reciting. Weave the Word into your prayers, share Scripture in your small groups. Take our Speaker's Tournament seriously. Be open to whatever opportunities come your way to declare, proclaim, and herald the truth. Trust God that your work in his Word will not be in vain. His Word will not return empty.

## The Gospel

I want us to zoom out for a bit. We've been looking very carefully at the standard for pastors. But we know that pastors don't always meet these measures. In fact, some pastors can grossly misrepresent God with abusive authority, toxic traits, and secret sins. Is there any hope?

We must remember that our earthly shepherds here are still sinful men. There is only one Chief Shepherd, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep:

*Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, **the great shepherd of the sheep**, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20–21)*

This beautiful benediction from the book of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is Lord. All of us are sheep who have gone astray. We sin against God. We disobey him. We rebel against him. We deserve to be punished, but God has made a way to save us. Admit that you are a sinner, and believe that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross for your sins. Confess him as the resurrected King and Lord over your life. Follow him on earth and you will follow him into Heaven. You will be adopted into God's family and have eternal rest in his Heavenly home. Look to Jesus as the ultimate example of what it means to be a true leader. He does not disappoint.



# Big Idea

Today we studied what it means to be above reproach. Here is our big idea for today: The mature Christian leader lives a life that is above reproach: respectable in private and reputable in public. And while the immediate context of our passage speaks to pastors, we are all meant to aim at following their examples of living a mature, holy, and humble life with Christ.

# Conclusion

Let's go back to the beginning again for our conclusion. I asked you: Is leadership only for the elite, or is it for everyone? It's not about age. Paul told Timothy to not let anyone look down on him because he was young, but that he was to set an example. It's not about your accomplishments. Paul says he counts it all, everything on his resume, as rubbish when compared to resting in the Gospel. It's not your academic achievements. Paul reminded Timothy that Timothy had learned these truths as an infant from his mother and grandmother.

After studying this passage, I see that being a leader is not so much about criteria or charisma, but about character. It's not about *what* he looks like, but *who* he looks like. Man looks at the outside, but the Lord looks at the heart. A mature Christian leader lives a life that is above reproach: respectable in private and reputable in public.

I want to take us back to where our passage began:

*The saying is trustworthy: If anyone **aspires** to the office of overseer, he **desires** a noble task. (1 Timothy 3:1-2)*

Our text talks about aspiring and desiring. Men should be encouraged and exhorted to grow in maturity. This passage was not meant to intimidate, but to inspire. Don't get me wrong: We've clearly seen that there are conditions to being a leader. And our church has very clear parameters as to who can and cannot be a pastor. For the record, I am grateful for the leaders and pastors that God has given us. But what I want you to take away from our conclusion is that anyone can aspire and aim for these character qualities in their life. And not only that, but it's a good thing to desire it. We should all want to grow in our maturity. Not for self-improvement, but for our Savior. I pray that you will continue to grow up to be godly men and women who are certain that there is nothing better in this world than to know and love Jesus Christ, our Chief Shepherd – and that you are greatly known and loved by Him.



# The Great Shepherd of the Sheep

Humble in his heart —  
The Son of God and man.  
He is the way, the truth, the life.  
He holds us in his hands.

Prophet, priest, and king —  
And blameless as he stands —  
He sheds his blood to save our life  
As our Passover lamb.

Shepherding his people,  
His word — his rod and staff.  
To win the prize: eternal life —  
We follow in his paths.

Glory be to God!  
His promise and his plans  
Are kept. And Christ, our hope in life,  
Will lead us home at last!

## References

Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age by Alan Noble

The ESV Study Bible by Crossway

The Gospel Coalition Bible Commentary on 1 Timothy by Paul Jeon

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