

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

The Call to Lead the Church: Elders (Part 4)

INTRODUCTION

A. The Need for Spiritual Leadership

There is a tremendous need today for church leaders who are authoritative, sacrificial, Spirit-filled, dependent on God, and characterized by integrity. Paul discusses the qualifications for such leaders in 1 Timothy 3:2-7.

B. The Potential for Spiritual Leadership

1. The place of human potential

Before considering those qualifications, it will be helpful to identify personality traits and natural characteristics that indicate leadership potential on the human level.

Although those things should never be confused with spiritual leadership, all leadership demands some innate capabilities. Just as you can't effectively minister for the Lord through singing unless God gave you a pleasing voice, so we must assume that God grants some basic qualifications to all potential leaders. When those innate capabilities are refined and empowered by God's Spirit, they become important ingredients for church leadership.

a) From a military leader's perspective

Field Marshal Montgomery enunciated several ingredients necessary in a leader in war: (1) He should be able to sit back and avoid getting immersed in details. (2) He must not be petty. (3) He must be a good selector of men. (4) He should trust those under him and let them get on with their job without interference. (5) He must have the power of clear decision. (6) He should inspire confidence (7) He must have a proper sense of religious truth, and acknowledge it to his troops (Bernard L. Montgomery, *Memoirs of Field Marshal Montgomery* [Cleveland: World, 1958], pp. 74-83).

b) From an educator's perspective

These are some of the issues that John R. Mott, a world leader in student circles at the early part of this century, considered in determining a person's leadership potential: (1) Does he do little things well? (2) Has he learned the meaning of priorities? (3) How does he use his leisure? (4) Has he intensity? (5) Has he learned to take advantage of momentum? (6) Has he the power of growth? (7) What is his attitude toward discouragements? (8) How does he face impossible situations? (9) What

are his weakest points? (Basil Mathews, John R. Mott: World Citizen [N.Y.: Harper & Brothers, 1934]).

c) From a pastor's perspective

In his book *Spiritual Leadership* [Chicago: Moody, 1980], pp. 44-47, J. Oswald Sanders lists these questions and comments for determining whether someone has leadership potential:

- Have you ever broken yourself of a bad habit? To lead others, one must be master of oneself.

- Do you retain control of yourself when things go wrong? The leader who loses self-control in testing circumstances forfeits respect and loses influence. He must be calm in crisis and resilient in adversity and disappointment.

- Do you think independently? While using to the full the thought of others, the leader cannot afford to let others do his thinking or make his decisions for him.

- Can you handle criticism objectively and remain unmoved under it? Do you turn it to good account? The humble man can derive benefit from petty and even malicious criticism.

- Can you use disappointments creatively?

- Do you readily secure the cooperation and win the respect and confidence of others?

- Do you possess the ability to secure discipline without having to resort to a show of authority? True leadership is an internal quality of the spirit and requires no external show of force.

- Have you qualified for the beatitude pronounced on the peacemaker? It is much easier to keep the peace than to make peace where it has been shattered? An important function in leadership is conciliation the ability to discover common ground between opposing viewpoints and then induce both parties to accept it.

- Are you entrusted with the handling of difficult and delicate situations?

- Can you induce people to do happily some legitimate thing that they would not normally wish to do?

- Can you accept opposition to your viewpoint or decision without considering it a personal affront and reacting accordingly? Leaders must expect opposition and should not be offended by it.

- Do you find it easy to make and keep friends? Your circle of loyal friends is an index of the quality

and extent of your leadership.

-- Are you unduly dependent on the praise or approval of others? Can you hold a steady course in the face of disapproval and even temporary loss of confidence?

-- Are you at ease in the presence of your superiors or strangers?

-- Do your subordinates appear at ease in your presence? A leader should give an impression of sympathetic understanding and friendliness that will put others at ease.

-- Are you really interested in people? In people of all types and all races? Or do you entertain respect of persons? Is there hidden racial prejudice? An anti-social person is unlikely to make a good leader.

-- Do you possess tact? Can you anticipate the likely effect of a statement before you make it?

-- Do you possess a strong and steady will? A leader will not long retain his position if he is vacillating.

-- Do you nurse resentments, or do you readily forgive injuries done to you?

-- Are you reasonably optimistic? Pessimism is no asset to a leader.

-- Are you in the grip of a master passion such as that of Paul, who said, "This one thing I do"? Such a singleness of motive will focus all one's energies and powers on the desired objective.

-- Do you welcome responsibility?

Those are provocative questions for determining natural leadership potential, and God's Spirit will refine, empower, and add specific gifts to those innate abilities to produce an effective spiritual leader. The process begins with a God given potential that is evident even before a man's calling, giftedness, or preparation for ministry.

2. The priority of divine power

Although innate leadership potential is an important ingredient in prospective leaders, we must not confuse potential for natural leadership with qualification for spiritual leadership. I have seen that principle illustrated in my own life as God has graciously and patiently prepared me for leadership in His church.

When I was in high school, some people thought I should run for student body president so they entered my name into the straw vote they were taking to determine the candidates for that office. All prospective candidates had to be approved by the school's administrators, so one day I was called into the principal's office. He said, "It's come to our attention that you might run for student-body president. Furthermore, the straw vote indicates that you might win. To prevent that from happening, we are withdrawing your name from the ballot." And that's exactly what they did! Although I demonstrated some capacity for leadership, the school administration knew I wasn't mature enough to act as a responsible leader.

During my college years I came home one summer to work. The YMCA was hiring young people to oversee recreational activities at various elementary schools in our area. They wanted young men to open the gate, set up the ping-pong and pool tables, supervise the kids until five o'clock, then put everything away and lock the gate. I applied for the job and had to fill out a rather lengthy application. They wanted to know everything possible about me. After submitting my application I received a phone call informing me of an interview with the panel of people who were evaluating the applicants.

I went to the local City Hall and sat before a panel of five people who quizzed me for nearly one hour. At the end of that time I was rejected as unsuitable for that position of leadership. I was devastated. That was a major trauma for me.

In my senior year in college I was very active in church ministry and sports. It was suggested that I run for student body vice-president. I decline the invitation, but a dear friend of mine said he was going to take it upon himself to put my name in the running anyway. I thought he was kidding, and that nothing would come of it, but he followed through.

On election day the various candidates were permitted to post banners and signs around the campus, and when I arrived at school I was shocked to see that my signs outnumbered the others ten to one! But there was something unusual about those signs. My friend who was so gracious and so concerned to see me run had a reading disorder a form of dyslexia that impaired his ability to spell. And as a result, my name was spelled wrong on every poster! Not only that, it was spelled differently on every poster. Because it was so funny, I won the election.

So the only place my natural talents ever got me in leadership was student body vice president because of a joke! I should add that I had the privilege of serving in a leadership role in seminary, but that was only after the Lord had graciously begun to blend the power of His Spirit with any natural abilities I may have had. That's always the point at which true spiritual leadership begins to develop.

So there are characteristics indicative of potential leaders, but they alone don't qualify a man for spiritual leadership. God's servants must be refined and specially gifted by His Spirit. So church leadership cannot be determined on the basis of human potential but on spiritual qualifications.

C. The Characteristics of Spiritual Leadership

1. In general

The New Testament tells us that spiritual leaders must be motivated by love, not constraint. They are to be gentle, not harsh or abusive in exercising their authority. They are to be humble and disciplined in the use of their time and resources. They must have a vision for God's redemptive plan, wisdom in God's Word, and uncompromising obedience to God's will.

They must also be willing to accept loneliness, failure, sacrifice, weariness, criticism, rejection, pressure, disappointment, and self sacrifice. And they must avoid comparing themselves to others because that can lead to pride or jealousy.

2. In specific

First Timothy 3:2-7 is a list of specific characteristics and qualifications for church leaders. We have already seen that the overarching qualification for an elder is blamelessness: his life must be above accusation (v. 2a).

REVIEW

An elder must be blameless in his moral character, home life, spiritual maturity, and public reputation.

I. AN ELDER MUST BE BLAMELESS IN HIS MORAL CHARACTER (vv. 2b 3)

A. "The Husband of One Wife" Sexually Pure (v. 2b)

B. "Temperate" Not Given to Excess (v. 2c)

LESSON

C. "Sober Minded" Self Disciplined (v. 2d)

1. Its definition

The Greek word translated "sober minded" is s[ma]ophr[ma]on, and speaks of discipline or self control. It's the result of being temperate (v. 2c). The temperate man avoids excess so that he can

see things clearly, and that clarity of thought leads to an orderly, disciplined life. He knows how to order his priorities.

The ancient Jewish scholar Philo defined s[ma]ophr[ma]on as "a certain limiting and ordering of the desires, which eliminates those which are external and excessive, and which adorns those which are necessary with timeliness and moderation" (cited by William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975], p. 80).

Self discipline is also required of older men (Titus 2:2) and women who serve as deaconesses in the church (1 Tim. 3:11).

2. Its application

a) Regarding humor

S[ma]ophr[ma]on also indicates a person who is serious about spiritual things. Such a man doesn't have the reputation of a clown. However that doesn't mean he avoids humor any good leader will be able to use and enjoy humor. But there is an appreciation for what really matters in life.

Some young men have a frivolous mentality, but the longer they serve Christ and observe life, the more they see things through God's perspective. As time passes, their frivolity is tempered by their increased understanding of man's lostness and disobedience toward God, and the inevitability of hell. That's part of being a sober-minded person.

That doesn't mean there's no joy or laughter in their lives, but it's accompanied by an acute awareness of the seriousness of life and ministry.

b) Regarding good judgment

In a broad sense, s[ma]ophr[ma]on speaks of a person with a sure and steady mind. Such a person is not rash but is thoughtful, earnest, and cautious in the judgments he or she makes.

c) Regarding right thinking

Such a disciplined life is the product of a disciplined mind. This kind of person thinks about what is really important, not what is foolish.

I recently received a letter from a lady who thanked me because our radio program helped her break a ten year addiction to soap operas. She had learned to study and meditate on God's Word rather than pursuing her five-hour a day viewing habit. She expressed her praise to God for His grace in her life. I rejoice with her because she is learning to set her mind on what is worthy of thought.

Paul said, "Whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8). That's the focus of an ordered and well-disciplined mind.

The sober minded person overcomes the lusts of the flesh by training his mind to respond to God's truth. That is possible only through Christ's power reigning in His life (Phil. 4:13).

D. "Good Behavior" Well Organized (v. 2e)

1. Its definition

The Greek word translated "good behavior" is kosmos. It comes from the root word kosmos, which in its general sense refers to a the interplay between human, divine, and satanic values. A man of "good behavior" approaches all the aspects of his life in a systematic, orderly manner.

2. Its application

This kind of person diligently fulfills his many duties and responsibilities. His disciplined mind produces disciplined actions "good behavior."

The opposite of kosmos is chaos. Elders can't have a chaotic life style. That's because their work involves administration, oversight, scheduling, and establishing priorities.

The ministry is no place for a man whose life is a continual confusion of unaccomplished plans and unorganized activities. Over the years I have seen many men who had difficulty ministering effectively because they couldn't get their lives into meaningful order. They couldn't concentrate on a task or systematically set and accomplish goals. Such disorder is a disqualification.

E. "Given to Hospitality" Hospitable (v. 2f)

1. Its definition

The Greek word translated "given to hospitality" is composed of the words xenos ("stranger") and phile[ma]o ("to love" or "show affection"). It means to love strangers.

Are You Hospitable in the Biblical Way?

Quite often I hear it said that so and so has the gift of hospitality because she is a great cook or because she likes to have friends over for a visit. As gracious and important as those virtues are, they

are not examples of biblical hospitality.

Biblical hospitality is showing kindness to strangers, not friends. In Luke 14:12-14 Jesus says, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and repayment come to you. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (NASB).

I realize that showing love toward strangers requires vulnerability, and can even be dangerous because some may take advantage of your kindness. While God doesn't ask us to discard wisdom and discernment in dealing with strangers (cf. Matt. 10:16), He does require us to love them. How about you? Do you practice biblical hospitality?

2. Its application

a) To the early church

The prevalence of persecution, poverty, orphans, and widows in the early church made it necessary for Christians to open their homes to others. In addition, traveling Christians were dependent on the hospitality of other Christians because most of the public inns were brothels in which lodgers were in danger of being robbed, beaten, or solicited to evil.

Commentator William Barclay wrote, "In the ancient world, inns were notoriously bad. In one of Aristophanes's plays Heracles asks his companion where they will lodge for the night; and the answer is: 'Where the fleas are fewest.' Plato speaks of the inn keeper being like a pirate who holds his guests to ransom. Inns tended to be dirty and expensive and, above all, immoral. "The ancient world had a system of what were called Guests Friendships. Over generations families had arrangements to give each other accommodation and hospitality. Often the members of the families came in the end to be unknown to each other by sight and identified themselves by means of what were called tallies. The stranger seeking accommodation would produce one half of some object; the host would possess the other half of the tally; and when the two halves fitted each other the host knew that he had found his guest, and the guest knew that the host was indeed the ancestral friend of his household.

"In the Christian Church there were wandering teachers and preachers who needed hospitality. There were also many slaves with no homes of their own to whom it was a great privilege to have the right of entry to a Christian home. It was of the greatest blessing that Christians should have Christian homes ever open to them in which they could meet people like minded to themselves."

"We live in a world where there are still many who are far from home, many who are strangers in a strange place, many who live in conditions where it is hard to be a Christian. The door of the Christian home and the welcome of the Christian heart should be open to all such" (The letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975], p. 82).

b) To the pastor and elder

The pastor must not be unapproachable or isolated from his people. Even his home is a tool for God's service. His availability makes it possible for his people to observe his true character as he interacts with the various aspects of life and ministry both inside and outside his home.

When I consider my responsibility to love strangers, I am reminded that God received into His family we who were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). Since those of us who are Gentiles have been welcomed by God, how can we fail to welcome strangers into our homes? After all, everything we have belongs to God. We are simply His stewards.

Yet we need to exercise discretion in the stewardship of what we have. If a couple shows up at my door with eight little children and four new boxes of Crayons, I will be a little leery! One time we had the walls of our home decorated by overzealous young artists, so we are sensitive to the problems that can arise from opening one's home to strangers. We don't want to be wasteful with the resources God has given us, but we must remember that those resources belong to Him. And He commands us to love strangers.

c) To all Christians

All Christians are commanded to show hospitality.

(1) Romans 12:13 Paul listed "given to hospitality" as a command for every true believer.

(2) Hebrews 13:2 "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it" (NASB). The writer has Abraham and Sarah in mind, who graciously served a meal to three strangers only to discover that they were none other than God Himself and two holy angels, who came in the form of men (Gen. 18:1-8).

(3) 1 Peter 4:9 "Use hospitality one to another without grudging." Our hospitality must flow from willing and gracious motives.

Hospitality goes beyond opening your home to strangers it includes opening your heart as well. Sometimes that's the best avenue for evangelism. We need to be sensitive to the spiritual and physical needs of others.

F. "Apt to Teach" Skilled in Teaching (v. 2g)

1. Its definition

The Greek word translated "apt to teach" (didaktikon) is used only two times in the New Testament (here and in 2 Tim. 2:24), and means "skilled in teaching." It's the only qualification listed here that relates to the function of an elder, and sets the elder apart from the deacon. An elder, like a deacon (vv. 8-10), is highly qualified morally and spiritually, and is skilled in teaching.

That qualification is listed with moral qualifications because teaching effectively is predicated on the character of the teacher. You cannot divorce what a teacher is from what he says when the content of his teaching is moral. He must exemplify what he teaches.

2. Its delineation

Paul repeatedly reminded Timothy of the priority of teaching.

a) 1 Timothy 5:17 "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine." The Greek word translated "labor" (kopia[ma]o) means "to work to the point of exhaustion."

It saddens me to see ministers overly concerned about adequate leisure time when God's Word constrains us to labor to the point of exhaustion. Obviously there is need for proper rest, but the priority is clear.

b) Ephesians 4:11-12 Christ provides the church with evangelists and teaching pastors, the equivalent of elders, to mature the saints. Teaching God's Word is their means to accomplishing that end (2 Tim. 3:17).

c) 1 Timothy 4:6, 11, 16 "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ. . . . These things command and teach. . . . Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine." A good minister reminds his people of divine truth by communicating God's Word.

d) 2 Timothy 1:13 "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me."

e) 2 Timothy 2:15 "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." The elder must labor to interpret God's Word correctly.

f) 2 Timothy 2:2 "The things that thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." As the church continued to grow and the apostles faded from the scene, there was a tremendous need for teachers. So Paul instructed

Timothy to teach men who could teach others. That was the primary role of the elder.

Elders must be skilled in teaching. They must have the ability to communicate God's Word, and the integrity to make their teaching believable.

3. Its limitation

The role of teaching the church is limited to those who've been called and gifted for that task. There's nothing to be ashamed of if you're not gifted to teach. God simply wants you to be faithful in using whatever gifts He's given you.

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul discusses the gifts of the Spirit. Verse 28 says, "God hath set some in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." Church leadership is the work of God.

In verse 29 Paul asks, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?" The obvious answer is no. We are all teachers in an informal sense as we proclaim God's truth in our daily conversations, but not in the formal sense.

I believe that those called to teach will have innate human potential for leadership and will be refined and gifted by God's Spirit. They will then be nurtured through education and other means to be fully qualified to lead the church.

Conclusion

An elder clearly orders his priorities, has a well organized life, and has the gifts and integrity to be a skilled teacher of God's Word. That's the kind of person God has called to lead His church.

Establishing and maintaining godly leaders is the most important issue in the church because they set the pattern for the congregation to follow. Pray that God will maintain the purity of your church leaders and that He will raise up many more godly leaders for the church around the world.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What kind of leaders are needed in the church today?
2. What characteristics did Field Marshall Montgomery find necessary for an effective military leader?

3. What questions did John R. Mott use to determine leadership potential?
4. What questions and comments did J. Oswald Sanders offer for determining leadership potential?
5. What must occur before someone with natural leadership abilities is qualified to be an effective spiritual leader?
6. Church leadership cannot be determined on the basis of _____ but on _____ .
7. What are the general characteristics of spiritual leaders?
8. Define "sober minded" (v. 2d).
9. How does being sober minded relate to being temperate (v. 2c)?
10. In addition to elders, who else must be sober minded (1 Tim. 3:11; Titus 2:2)?
11. How does being sober minded relate to humor?
12. What should a person who wants disciplined mind dwell on (Phil. 4:8)?
13. The sober minded person overcomes the lusts of the flesh by training his mind to respond to _____ .
14. Define "good behavior" (v. 2e).
15. What is the relationship of good behavior to sober mindedness (see p. 10)?
16. Define "given to hospitality" (v. 2f).
17. How did Jesus define hospitality in Luke 14:12-14?
18. Why was hospitality especially important in the days of the early church ?
19. Who were the special recipients of Abraham and Sarah's hospitality in Genesis 18:1-8 (Heb. 13:2)?
20. What is the relationship of hospitality to evangelism?

21. Define "apt to teach" (v. 2g).
22. Why is "apt to teach" a moral qualification for elders?
23. Define "labor" in 1 Timothy 5:17.
24. What was the primary function of New Testament evangelists and teaching pastors (Eph. 4:12)?
25. Who is the role of teaching the church limited to?
26. Is there a sense in which all Christians are teachers? Explain.

Pondering the Principles

1. We have seen that God grants innate leadership potential to those He calls to lead the church. That potential is often evident even before one is called, gifted, and trained for a specific leadership role. Perhaps you are such a person. Carefully read through the questions and comments by J. Oswald Sanders (see pp. 2-4). Are you encouraged by your responses? Do you desire to see those characteristics increase in your life? If so, take every opportunity to cultivate your leadership potential, and carefully consider the qualifications for spiritual leaders (1 Tim. 3:1-7). Aim at being that kind of person. Share your desire with a pastor or elder who can encourage you, guide your training, and hold you accountable.
2. A disciplined mind is the key to a disciplined life. Cultivating a disciplined mind requires that you constantly expose it to what is good. Read the following passages, making a list of what the psalmist meditated on: Psalm 1:1-2; 63:6; 77:12; 119:15, 27, 48, 97, 105; 143:5. What kinds of things do you meditate on? Should some of those things be eliminated? If so, ask God to help you be more disciplined in your thinking as you learn to focus on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent, and worthy of praise (Phil. 4:8).
3. Biblical hospitality is showing love for strangers being sensitive to their needs and making sacrifices on their behalf when necessary. Can you think of some practical ways that you can express Christ's love to strangers? Pray for opportunities to do so, and take advantage of them as they arise. Remember, hospitality is an attitude as much as an action, and your sensitivity to a stranger's needs can bring opportunities for evangelism.

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/MeetGTU/Copyright>).