

A Beautiful Work (1 Timothy 3)

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Preacher: William HC

[0:00] And here shall be reading 1 Timothy chapter 3 from verse 1. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect.

If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a recent convert, for he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.

He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gains.

They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested, and then, if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers, but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be faithful to his wife, and must manage his children and household well.

[1:43] Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great. He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by the angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

This is the Word of God. Thank you, William. Thanks, Fran, and thanks, Isaac. Thanks, Daniel, for reading that wonderful part of God's Word.

Why don't we ask God to help us as we pay attention to what he has to teach us today out of this true and living Word. Let's pray. Our great God and Father, you lay before us a vision of what it looks like to beautifully serve your church, to guide the gospel, to oversee and to serve in ways that we're needed, as long as we're needed.

So help us now, whoever we are, to see what it might look like to be part of your plans in saving this world through the beautiful work of servant leadership.

[3:22] We pray all these things in Christ's precious name. Amen. For some of you sport fans, it's NBA final season, isn't it?

Yes. Yep. See some nods. Basketball might not be your thing. Maybe you're following the rugby. I know in our house, we've been cheering on Auckland FC, the soccer team, our local one.

So, yeah, I'm more of a football guy, the round ball version. So that's a team that I used to be part of. And so, back when I was younger and fitter, it was a weekly highlight to just get on the pitch, jump on the football field, yeah, Monday afternoons.

And the discussions kind of before and after the game were always the same, right? Who would you pick first for your team, you know? If you were the captain, if you had to kind of go, you know, I'll pick you, I'll pick you.

Who would be the first pick? So some of you, I'm sure, have joined in that kind of conversation. You get your kind of players and your tactics right. You get to win bragging rights because you get a good team going.

[4:25] Even a trophy could be won. Pick the wrong kind of team and you get pummeled on the pitch. It's a little bit shameful. You don't want to play again.

yeah, I don't know if you have had that kind of experience or those kinds of conversations. Well, I think church can be like a team sport sometimes, kind of. We have rosters and weekly fixtures. We train and we do a bit of team building from time to time. There are incredible highs and there are also disappointing lows. And sometimes we ask regularly, who would you pick, you know, to lead the worship?

Who would you pick to do the coffee? Who's your go-to person, you know, at the front desk? Who helps organize the youth camp? Who restocks the coffee beans?

The early church in Ephesus, they were, had to pick a team, right? And they had to pick a team early, but from what we know, it turned a bit messy.

[5:28] Seems like the people they picked to lead the church, certain ones had to be named and shamed for their wayward teaching. Paul had to kind of call the men and women to stop misusing power, right?

In ways that were like how the world would do it. And commit to prayerful, humble worship that pleases God, our Savior. But as we get to, you know, where we are, Paul writing Timothy in this letter, it's still a little bit messy still, isn't it?

And so, as we've been journeying through this letter, we've been hearing Paul remind Timothy, you've got to guard the gospel. You've got to know it and pass it on. And passing it on isn't just a verbal proclamation, it's how you live as well, how you pray, how you worship as guys and girls. Under the Lord Jesus. And from the passage we just read, chapter 3, now he turns his attention from the beautiful worship of God's people, chapter 2, to the beautiful work of shepherding and serving the church.

That's our focus here in chapter 3, as we've been hearing. Because if you were in the church of Ephesus right now, who would even want to put their hand up and say, yeah, I'll be a leader in this church?

[6:40] Right? So messy. And yet Paul says to Timothy in verse 1, actually, of chapter 3, here is a trustworthy saying, a faithful word.

Whoever aspires to be an overseer wants a noble task or more literally, a beautiful work. A beautiful work.

Have you ever thought about leadership in that way before? Serving in church? Brothers and sisters, to guard the gospel, to proclaim Jesus to a world that is dying, it requires Timothy, it requires the church of Ephesus to identify and appoint godly men and women devoted to the noble task of leading the church.

But what does this beautiful work look like? Who are the kinds of people we should pray for and appoint? Who are the people who we should be aspiring to ourselves by the power of the Holy Spirit?

That's what chapter 3 here is about. And here in chapter 3, Paul seems to explain everything in groups of twos. And so we have two points. Today we're going to look at a beautiful work and responsibility and then later on the beautiful assurance and foundation.

[7:54] So beautiful work and responsibility from the first 12 verses and later on we will look at a beautiful assurance and foundation that Paul grounds everything in.

Let's listen again from verse 2 and 3. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

So here Paul starts to lay out, you can read it in your Bibles, the qualifications for the first of two distinct leader roles in the church. Now, bear in mind what our Bibles, you know, in English, translate as an overseer in some of your translations, it's been translated a lot of different names over time and culture.

Eden's Bible says bishop, right? Others might say elder. We'll talk names and titles in a moment but what we want to notice though is this overseer has, you know, a list of kind of qualifications.

We see it from verse 2 all the way down to verse 7 and did you notice what dominates this list here? It's not how many followers you have on social media nor how many A's you got at Bible school.

[9:20] It's not how many properties you own or how successful you are in the marketplace. It doesn't say anything about what career highlights you can name.

What does it say? Have a look again in your Bibles, right? Things like sober-minded, self-controlled, hospitable, literally foreigner-loving.

Overseers that God wants for his church are to manage their household and children well. That's what it says. And they're not to be recently converted. If we could arrange these kind of qualities or qualifications in some way, to me it seems like these are all marks of, firstly, how deeply he submits to Christ, how widely or broadly his loved ones and outsiders see it, and then how long, how consistently he's shown this over time, right?

How deep, how broad, how long his loyalty, his love for Jesus. And if we kind of scan down from verse 8 onwards to those qualifications there, now you actually see a similar story, don't you, with what Paul calls deacons.

It actually says deacons likewise, right, are to be dignified and not double-tongued. Likewise, they're to be controlled when it comes to alcohol.

[10:43] likewise, they're to be able to look after their households well. The end of verse 10 actually has this repeated phrase too. It says that potential deacons should show themselves to be blameless in my translation or more literally above reproach, just like the overseers in verse 2.

Now, if you're feeling like, oh, this is so hard, Paul isn't looking for perfect people. The gospel tells us God graciously saved us, not that we must earn his favor with a high-quality performance. And actually, next week, we'll hear that Paul encourages Timothy to make progress, to make progress as he matures. Rather, I think Paul lists character trait after character trait to make a very simple point.

When it comes to church leadership, character is what matters first and foremost. Don't be scammed by how worldly leadership works.

To carry out God's beautiful work here at PCBC, we're not to look to the most talented person. We're not to look to the most powerful or influential or most popular person, say, yep, they're our leaders.

[12:02] No. The Bible says we should care far more about their character, their conduct, than any other aspect. Because a highly talented preacher could end up stirring endless division, right?

A powerful CEO that you appoint to your church could start stealing from your church funds. people a popular leader might commit sexual immorality amongst us.

We get leadership wrong and we bring disgrace to our king of kings and the church that he bled and died for. Character matters in leadership.

I've been in a couple of churches. Our family have worshipped in a few different churches. At one of them, our previous churches, the team of elders or overseers included a car painter, a photocopy salesman, a retired builder, the owner of a cleaning company, all volunteers, all sinners saved like grace like you and me.

What impacted me most at the time was not their CV, it wasn't their charisma or chemistry when they served together. Of course, God helped them along the way with all that. It was their character in Christ.

[13:21] It was their ability to handle God's word that made them good at shepherding, overseeing God's people. Character matters.

Let's talk about able to teach for a moment as I brought up because that does seem to be the main distinction between what Paul calls an overseer and what Paul calls a deacon.

It's actually a single adjective. You look at verse 2 and that kind of list he talks about able to teach. The word literally there, if you translated it really badly, is that he needs to be teachery.

Whereas deacons, verse 9, need to hold or have the mystery of the Christian faith with a clear conscience, i.e. they have to be Christians, the overseers need to not just hold it but know how to teach it to make God's word plain, whether one-to-one, in small groups or bubbles, or in larger settings.

The apostle Peter, we know him from church history, as one of the first overseers of the church. He gave a very helpful distinction when it comes to church leadership.

[14:28] In 1 Peter 4, he calls everyone to administer God's grace to each other through their gifts. And then he says in 4.11, he says this, if anyone speaks, let him do it as one speaking the very words of God.

If anyone serves, let him do it with the strength that God provides. And so I think from here and from elsewhere in the Bible, I think we kind of get given kind of a two pronged approach to New Testament church leadership, as it were.

It seems like we get kind of overseers who teach and deacons who serve, but of course, you know, there's some overlap when it comes to the life of the church. Elders who shepherd and pass the flock with the word, alongside deacons, servant leaders who serve and manage God's household with their faith.

Both kinds of leadership call for sacrificial service, don't they? You need God-given wisdom and maturity, and so these leaders, potential leaders, are there to be tested.

Just as at your workplace, you wouldn't employ the first applicant with a pulse, Paul calls for biblical standards and prayerful consideration before we select our leaders, whether they're caring principals, whether they're church department leaders or cell group leaders or church treasurers or whatever the role.

[15:54] So hopefully that makes sense. It's a beautiful work in responsibility and there's two distinct roles and kind of split between serving and speaking. That's how the early church did it. Before we move on though, I think it's worth addressing a couple of issues that come up in the life of a church and when people talk about church leadership.

And please keep sending in your questions by the way because this is all direct from questions that people have asked. What's often debated here in church leadership, of course, is gender. We've talked about this a bit last week.

Are there differences, people will ask, for men and women in church leadership? Of course, we need to read these instructions in context. What did we hear last week?

Men and women are called to beautiful worship, not an identical ways, in distinct God-honoring ways. And so I think it's pretty clear that Paul, at least, in his first century context, has older men in mind when he speaks of the overseers here in verses 2 to 7.

He actually literally says they need to be a one-woman man who manages his household and personal life. Well, so I think Paul has in mind mature godly men as overseers.

[17:04] And it wouldn't have been a surprise in the first century at least. Or in most of the majority world to this day. And later on he'll actually address in chapter 5, 17, elders as a specific leadership group.

My prayers are actually every man in leadership. Here at PCBC, whether pastors or group leaders, core group members, exemplifies these qualities of an overseer in his life.

people. But our passage does have a few quirks. Here in verse 11, the start of the verse actually says likewise women.

Or some translation might say likewise wives. What's going on here is that just like last week, there's a Greek word there that could be translated either way. I think it's best to translate here likewise women to keep it consistent as what we heard last week.

And so I think it actually gives us a picture of deacons who are male and female, who can both serve the church with their different gifts. And actually Paul himself names some of these women deacons.

[18:15] Romans 16 verse 1, he calls Phoebe the deacon. She carries the letter that Paul wrote to the Romans, to Rome. And no doubt would have been explaining and helping people understand it too.

He talks about lots of other women who lead. Junia the apostle, Iwodia and Syntyche are his fellow co-workers. The list goes on. And so ladies, please hear the invitation.

We need your different yet dignified, level-headed, faithful service in the leadership of our church.

Not just as a PCBC deacon, of course that would be wonderful, please feel free to nominate someone next time around, but in all kinds of other places too, surely.

Right? Behind the scenes, up the front, as a treasurer or secretary, as cell group leaders, as someone who just loves welcoming people, or coming alongside our youth. We need you, and we love that you are there and among us. And if you're wondering how that gels with all those instructions I laid out about women and preaching last week, well, you're not the only one that wonders.

[19:23] Some of these questions, we just have to work them out in the life of our church. And the answers do differ from one congregation to the next. And it all sometimes depends on your time, your culture, your place.

So we'll part that thought, what's debated, gender differences. And another thing that's what's not debated, but fluid, or that changes over time, are titles and names and structures.

Right? As I was thinking about this question, I realized that actually culture shapes a lot of how we see church leaders. Right? For example, if you're kind of more Kiwi, you might not realize, but Westerners get the word pastor from Latin, pastor, which means kind of shepherd, someone who looks after and oversees and shepherds the flock.

In the Kiwi church, so that means a pastor is someone who shepherds God's flock, really looks after them, oversees them. But when I joined this Chinese church here, I had a very quick history lesson and realized from other people how differently the word pastor sounds and feels for a lot of people from Asian backgrounds.

Apparently, the Chinese church has inherited the word pastor from a very complicated 200-year history, where there's kind of like a traditional two-title system, where someone who starts working for the church is a or someone who kind of preaches, shares good news, and then later on, they kind of get upgraded or ordained as!

[21:03] But in English, it's very confusing, right? Because the gets translated as pastor. So you have all these people who are evangelists, missionaries, and they get called pastor, so-and-so. And then sometimes they kind of then upgrade them and say, you're a reverend now.

It's confusing to me, too. Don't worry. And partly because also, it's natural in Chinese culture, too, for people to look to, like, one particular person at the top, we then add another layer, and then so if you have a senior pastor, oh, okay, right, he calls all the shots, right?

So when I say Moksi, you're not talking about me, you're talking about the Moksi in our church. He's away on holiday? No, he's at a missions conference, serving very hard. And someone who carries the spiritual authority of the whole church, as it were.

So can you see, just teasing it a little bit, so, yeah, titles, structures, it can vary a lot, can't it? So I want to encourage you, when it comes to specific titles or translations, traditions, time frames for all these leadership roles, we can only get so far when just reading the Bible here.

We get some principles, right? Two kinds of leadership and so on. But here at PCBC, how we divide and share some of these responsibilities, right, whether it's paid staff or volunteers, whether someone serves for a whole lifetime with a role or they just get a fixed term, whatever we call them in English or Chinese, what the right name is, these are all questions to discern together as a community, right, with lots of humility, knowing that we don't always have the right answers and we're not the only ones.

[22:40] We have to wrestle this question and that other churches may come to different answers on these fluid issues. But let's go also to what's most important, what's non-negotiable.

What's essential when it comes to godly leadership is that we are imaging and reflecting our chief overseer, that we are following and framing our lives around the servant king, Jesus Christ our Lord.

God is not concerned about how many sermons or lectures I share over my lifetime. He's not concerned about how many years you've led worship or how many groups you've been able to oversee or what your serving roles and titles have been or are right now.

Because if leading and serving in any ministry doesn't come out of you submitting to the Lord Jesus deeply, broadly, consistently, maybe that's the area that you and I need to work on first.

Far better to aspire to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus week after week than to have titles and roles and leadership positions and fall into the devil's trap in the world, as it were, of doing things without delighting in it or of serving while you're sinking in your faith.

[24:09] What's essential when it comes to leadership is that the whole point of it is to make us more like Jesus, to reflect him more in our hearts and eyes. I get messaged all the time, right, and this usually comes from the other congregations.

We need more ES people in our leadership teams. Can you find some for me? From a functional level, I get it, right? Okay? There's a lot of work to do in our church, and there's so many wonderful opportunities to serve, but maybe that's not our first priority in this season.

My prayer, often, constantly, is for people in our congregation, not just to fill rosters and stack leadership teams. I'm sure the church in Ephesus had a stacked roster to start with.

How did it turn out for them? My prayer is that every one of us aspires to image Jesus, our Savior first. That's the true goal of Christian leadership, isn't it?

To lead how Jesus leads us. To live like how he lived and died for us. Brothers and sisters, as we reflect Jesus more deeply, more consistently, we then naturally become the godly leaders that guard the glorious gospel like God calls us to.

[25:33] Church leadership is a beautiful work. Don't get me wrong. It's also weighty, isn't it, for those of you who have been there, done that. Paul gets this. And so that's why I think he doesn't just give us the leadership briefing and the picture in chapter three, but he also points us, not just to the briefing and the qualifications, but he points us to the leadership blessings.

And that's what we see from verses 13 to 16. Because we need to know, too, right? Leading and serving in the church, it's not just a beautiful work that we should join in with. It also comes with a beautiful assurance and foundation, verses 13 to 16.

Let's look first at the two assurances of biblical leadership. Firstly, verse 13 tells us we get a good standing and confident faith in Christ Jesus as we join in, church leadership, right?

What does it say there, verse 13? Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

You see, amidst all the difficulties and controversies that Timothy was facing, a leading God's church, that the church of Ephesus was facing, that we face, Paul wants us to remember those who serve well, literally those who deacon well, which basically means those who serve well, gain a good standing and confident faith in Christ Jesus.

[27:02] One of the joys I have in ministry is to watch new Christians, nervous leaders flourish into capable, confident Christians and leaders, to see their lives grow as they take on the pressures and challenges of carrying more spiritual responsibility.

people in, you know, the secular world, they sometimes talk about intrinsic motivation, don't they, right? What really drives you from the inside when it comes to, I don't know, career and so on? What comes from the role itself that keeps you interested? Let's be honest, when it comes to serving in church, intrinsic motivation can be hard to find, right?

There's no money in it if you show up early and leave late. It will take time and capacity to pour yourself out for others. But hear this assurance.

As you serve beautifully and faithfully in Christ Jesus, he can grow and strengthen your faith in him. And it says that you'll gain a good standing before him.

[28:08] Not in a saving way, Christ has already died for you, but in a strengthening way. Christ is pleased with you. Your work honors him. He delights in you.

He loves how you're growing and maturing. Here in verse 13 are two wonderful assurances, motivations that come with the beautiful work, the noble task of joining and leading God's church. But finally, Paul also notes that there are two foundations that kind of ground biblical leadership. two foundations. Firstly, there's God's household, verses 14 to 15.

And then the gospel message that she proclaims. Right? And listen again, right? Although I hope to come to you soon, I'm writing you these instructions so that if I'm delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

As I briefly mentioned last week, they called the temple of Artemis in the city of Ephesus one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

[29:22] Here's a kind of seven wonders version of it. You can see it, you know, the picture doesn't do it justice. Because it was said that, you know, when the roof was kind of reflecting the sun, you could see this temple from hundreds of kilometers away.

I don't know if that's true or not, I wasn't there, but people knew that this place existed. And yet Paul, I think, is borrowing kind of the image of this temple, you know, stuck in the Ephesians minds. And then he says, you know what's more beautiful than this bag of bricks? What's more foundational than the goddess Artemis that's been worshipped here? It's this building. The church. It's God's household. You are the building that God is most concerned about. You are the church of the living God.

Right? That's what he says here in these two verses. And as Paul compares the men and women of the church to the pillars of a temple, we get this wonderful picture, don't we, right?

[30:32] Pillars hold up, right? Okay? You can see them right there. They hold up, you know, the building. And he's saying, look, as you deeply, widely, consistently love people like Jesus and serve them, it's going to make you like the pillars of a house, holding up the roof, as it were, strengthening the truth and credibility of the gospel.

And if the church, right, God's people, if we're made up of, you know, kind of human bricks, as it were, but we're like pillars, then what are we holding up?

What's our roof? It's got to be the gospel, isn't it? The good news of Jesus. That's what we hold up high, we shine to the watching world around us. Do you get the analogy that Paul's painting here? This is the wonderful news about true godliness. It comes not through a leadership book, doesn't come through a podcast, comes through the life and death of our servant king, Jesus Christ.

Right? And in verse 16, Paul practically sings the gospel to us. There's a bit of poetry here. He was revealed in the flesh to be justified in the spirit.

[31:45] He was first seen by angels, and now he's proclaimed to the nations. He was believed all over the world and carried up into glory. That's good news.

Do you believe this? Do you trust this Jesus? Have you ever given your life to him? Are you giving your life to him right this moment? Because this good news about our great God and savior, Jesus, shines far brighter than any man-made structure ever could.

And for those of us who are wary about or just weary of the work of leadership, have we forgotten the roof, the gospel that we're meant to display?

PCBC, if we are just a roof without pillars, right, nobody sees God's household. And so that's why we encourage you to join the church. Don't be a lone ranger.

But PCBC, if we're just a bunch of hard-working pillars and we're not holding up a roof, nobody enters God's household. All our beautiful work is for nothing.

[33:00] So we raise the roof. We make sure all our hard work is to proclaim the gospel, right? That's the real trophy we lift up when it comes to this team sport, isn't it?

It should be. The wonderful news that Jesus, he died and was risen for our sins, that's what we lift up for the whole world. That's what we help each other to lift up for the whole world.

It's held high, right, by teams of believers, not just here at PCBC, but around the world, including our team. Forget trophy-lifting moments that just come and go.

Jesus Christ is and should be the prize that we hold up forever. And so church, here is a beautiful picture that Paul gives us, right?

To lead and to serve, not just to keep the lights on here, not just to tick things over or just to be comfortable, but far more than that. To hold up the gospel to our dying world.

[34:02] And to hold up the gospel to our world, our families, so that every man and woman can submit to Jesus deeply, to lead and serve like him broadly, and to do so faithfully until the servant king comes for his own.

And so, with that, how about we pray and ask this Jesus to help us as we join in his beautiful work. Let's pray together.

Our gracious God, you are the only giver of all good and beautiful gifts. We thank you for the gifts of godly leaders, both now and over PCBC English's history.

We thank you for the gift of faithful leaders and also potential leaders in the future. Thank you for all these things. But Lord, we long for all our work not just to be busy work, but we long to lift high the name of Jesus Christ, who was justified for our sins by the Holy Spirit, who was vindicated as he died and rose for sinners, who has been proclaimed to the whole world, even in this distant corner of it.

We thank you. We thank you for this good news. Would you make us a church that is just all about raising up this roof for the world to see? Strengthen our pillars.

[35:37] Strengthen our community. Only you can do that by the power of your Holy Spirit. We thank you and we ask all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.