



1 Timothy 3:1-7, Part 2

Kent Hughes was the pastor of College Church in Wheaton, IL for twenty seven years. He is the author of 28 books and has 21 grandchildren. He spent a total of 41 years in pastoral ministry. He was saved at the age of twelve and less than a year later, felt a distinct call to become a pastor. Obviously, that calling was confirmed in a powerful manner. But can a twelve year old be called to full-time ministry? How does a twelve year old discern this calling let alone confirm it in any tangible way? I first felt my call to ministry at age 19 and I will tell you that story a little bit later.

This morning we are delving into 1 Timothy 3 to see how local church elders are qualified and equipped to serve. This is relevant for everyone in the church because if the church does not have good leaders, it will have a detrimental impact on the entire church. As I have often said, as go the leaders, so goes the church and as we will see in a minute, it all begins with a person's calling.

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. 2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall

into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

In part one of this message last week, we answered the first three of five questions.

1. Why is the position of elder so important?
2. What is an elder?
3. What does an elder do?

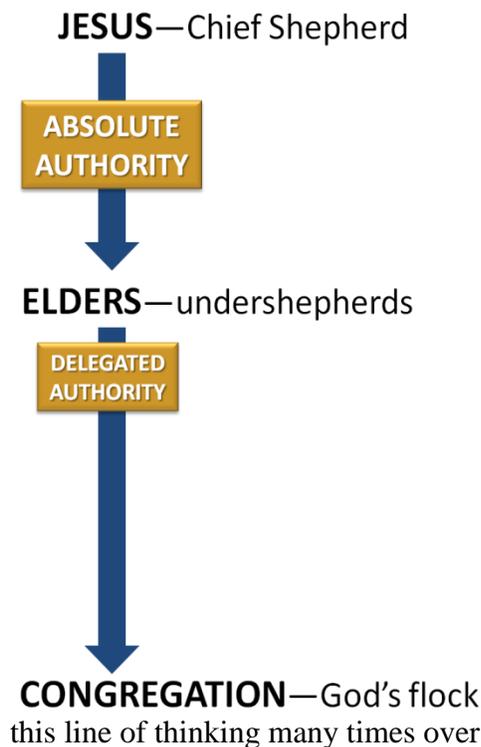
This morning we will answer the last two questions.

4. Why is the desire to be an elder a good thing?

This questions will describe the nature of a **CALLING** to ministry.

5. How are elders chosen?

This question will describe the **CHARACTER** and **COMPETENCE** required for elders.



4. Why is it good to desire this position?

Verse one reads, *The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.*

This is an important question because it is often misunderstood. Do you recall the primary role of an elder from last Sunday? Not only is the word elder synonymous with the word shepherd, but that also describes the elder’s primary role. But shepherding involves a certain level of authority. As this diagram shows, Jesus is the Chief Shepherd and rules over us with absolute authority but as his undershepherds, local church elders have been given a delegated authority in order to care for God’s flock, the congregation. And since there is authority involved in the role, many men believe that it would be wrong to desire this power. After all, being an elder requires a lot of humility, right, so how can one simultaneously seek to become more humble while also desiring to have power to rule over others? I have heard this question or at least

CALLING

When I was nineteen years old, I first felt a calling to pursue full time vocational ministry. By the way, I always make sure to use the term *vocational* ministry and not just *full-time* ministry. All Christians are supposed to be engaged in “full-time” ministry but some of them also happen to do it as their vocation. If you are a carpenter, you are to use carpentry as the vehicle for your full-time ministry. There are a myriad of ways you can do that, starting with practicing business principles with the highest ethical standards, treating customers and hardware store employees with respect, praying about opportunities to engage in spiritual conversations throughout the day. Whatever your vocation ,you are to be engaged in full-time ministry.

So when I first had these inclinations regarding ministry, I did not know what to do with them so I went to talk to my pastor. That's not such a bad idea, is it—go talk to your pastor? ☺ My pastor took me straight to 1 Timothy 3:1 in the KJV. *If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.* Then he explained to me that the desire the Lord had given me was a good thing. I was trying to figure out what my next steps should be and he essentially told me not to worry about it and the calling would be confirmed over time if it was the Lord's will. This was a brief but life changing conversation for me. I found this man on facebook last week just to let him know the impact he had upon me. It was like a seed that God planted in my heart. I was pretty sure it was there and I was certainly planning on watering it, but I did not have to concern myself about when it would come to full bloom.

If a man wants to be an elder so that he can impress his friends and family and obtain power, then, that will probably become evident real soon. 1 Peter prohibits such an attitude: *not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.* (1 Peter 5:2-3) However, if the office of an overseer is all about shepherding the flock, caring for the souls of people and fulfilling the Great Commission, then not only is it acceptable to desire this position, it is necessary that it be desired. If you don't "want" to do it, then you will burn out. If you do not have a heart for shepherding souls, then please do not seek after this office. You have to desire to serve in this manner and your desire to serve is your calling to serve.

You have to be called to shepherding because it can be such a source of discouragement at times. Kent Hughes, the same man who was called to the pastorate at age twelve and entered the ministry in his early twenties, after more than a decade of shepherding people and churches, fell into the greatest discouragement of his life. He had planted a church in southern California and despite having a church growth expert declare that his church was destined and primed to grow like a weed, it didn't grow. In fact, in the first six months it was shrinking in size. He was ready to throw in the towel and to start doing something else—anything else—other than pastoring.

One night he poured out his heart to his wife and said, "But where is God in all of this? I came to the ominous conclusion that had been brewing in my heart. God has called me to do something that he hasn't given me the gifts to do. Therefore, God is not good." He was not only discouraged but in his own words, his discouragement had brought him to anger and blasphemy.

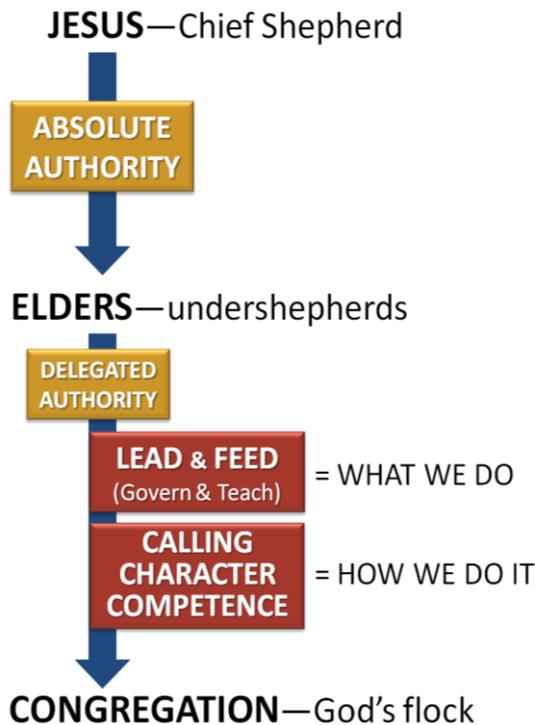
He credits his wife for his decision to remain serving as a shepherd. After he was done ranting and raving, his wife offered him the following balm for his soul. "Kent, I don't know what you're going to do. But for right now, for tonight, hang onto my faith, because I believe. I believe that God is good. I believe that he loves us and is going to work through this experience. So hang onto my faith. I have enough for the both of us."¹ Wouldn't you like to have a friend like this? If we could only all BE friends like this.

The idea of a calling into ministry has tended to be overly mysterious. Some pastors and leaders have made it so by telling young men that you must be called into ministry but they leave you with the idea that you are supposed to have some sort of mountaintop experience like Moses did or have someone seek you out and anoint you with oil like David did or have the Lord call your

name three times in the middle of the night like Samuel did. You do need to be called but we need to lay aside this mysterious veil of a calling. This is why the pastor’s advice was so important and timely for me. When I told him that I think God wanted me to be a pastor, he did not probe me as to whether some miraculous event occurred at the time of my calling. He didn’t put me to the test or dip down into my psyche to discern whether or not this was a genuine calling. He took me straight to Scripture and showed me that my desire was a good thing.

Amazingly, I had a conversation with someone from another church just this past week about this. He told me how much he enjoys studying the Bible and leading others in home Bible studies. He has an increasing passion to do more and more ministry and the advice I gave to him was nearly identical to what was given to me thirty years ago.

We are in the process of slowly training and equipping men who have this seed of a desire. My vision is to have twenty men who could serve as elders even if they never do serve in this capacity. In several years when it comes time to select elders, I want the selection committee to be overwhelmed the sheer number of qualified candidates. Can you imagine the powerful impact this could have upon the entire church body if we had twenty trained shepherds, able and willing to shepherd souls? This would eventually spill over to other men, women and teens who would in turn aspire to follow the Good Shepherd in such a way as the overflow of their hearts would be to shepherd the souls of those around them.



5. How are elders chosen?

Our fifth and final question—how are elders chosen—is divided into two parts. Assuming they are first called to the task, elders are chosen according to Character and Competence.

This is how it looks on the diagram. Elders serve as shepherds and a shepherd leads and feeds the flock. Leading and feeding represent the roles of governing and teaching. This represents “what” an elder does and “how” they serve in their role is by calling, character and competence of the person. These are the things which must be evaluated. We have already talked about calling so let’s see what our passage says about character and competence.

This passage has a long list of character qualities and if you look at the chart below you will see that the list is almost identical to the one in Titus chapter one.

1 Timothy 3:1-7	Titus 1:6-9
Above reproach	Above reproach
Husband of one wife	husband of one wife
Sober minded	disciplined
Self-controlled	Self-controlled

Respectable	Upright, holy, lover of good
Hospitable	Hospitable
Able to teach	Give instruction in sound doctrine
Not a drunkard	Not a drunkard
Not violent, but gentle	Not violent
Not quarrelsome	not quick-tempered
Not a lover of money	Not greedy for gain
Manage his household well	Children are believers
Not a recent convert	
Well thought of by outsiders	
	Not arrogant

We could take a long time discussing each of these character qualities but I plan to choose a couple for emphasis.

Not greedy for money

I think we recognize that in our day, religion is big business and evangelical Christianity is among the biggest of them all. As a general rule, the “safe” preachers are on the radio and the more questionable ones are on TV. That’s not a hard and fast rule but if you’ve watched an TV evangelists, I think you know what I mean. But recently I learned about a well-known radio preacher and senior pastor of a megachurch who would certainly fail to meet this qualification of not being greedy for money. If I said his name, most of you would immediately recognize it. In 2009 he was being paid about \$400,000 per year for role as senior pastor and for his radio ministry. This did not include any book royalties or outside speaking and consultation fees. Despite this very generous compensation, and despite the fact that hi church was 65 million dollars in debt, he asked for and received a \$100,000 raise. This may have not been hard to do seeing that he holds 50% of the power on the elder board, he only needs one other elder to vote with him and the motion is passed.

Notice that this is a popular, middle of the road evangelical pastor. He is not known as a prosperity preacher. He does not have a lavish TV ministry with a wife who has big poofy hair and smeared mascara from her incessant crying. Pastors with as much responsibility as this man has should receive a higher compensation. Pastors with churches similar to this man’s earn, on average, \$170,000 per year. Now \$170,000 seems like a lot of money. I happen to think that of you are responsible for running a church of 5-10 thousand people, earning over \$100,000 is not a problem at all but if you are already making more than \$400,000 and you demand a \$100,000 raise, now we have a problem. But also don’t forget that you can be poor and still be greedy and a lover of money.

Husband of one wife

This character quality is often debated and just as often misunderstood. A quick look at the various translations sheds light on the diversity of opinion.

ESV/NASB/KJV—the husband of one wife

NIV (2011)—faithful to his wife

NRSV—married only once

NLV—He must be faithful to his wife.

The literal meaning of the Greek phrase is “husband one wife” which is why most English translations have it as “the husband of one wife” but the main question is does this have any bearing on divorce of the proposed elder. The NRSV takes a position by translating the phrase as “married only once.” If a man is divorced, does that immediately disqualify from ever being an elder? Here are the four possible meanings of this phrase.

- (1) “Must be married,”
- (2) “Not polygamous,”
- (3) “Faithful to his wife,”
- (4) “Not remarried/divorced”

Option #1 cannot be true or else Paul and Timothy could not have been elders because they were not married. I don’t think anyone doubts that options #2 and #3 must be part of the meaning of this phrase. Just to be clear—if a man is married to more than one woman at a time, he will never be allowed to be an elder at Grace Church. ☺ Polygamy is certain a disqualification. Marital faithfulness is also an obvious necessity for an elder. Now I have seen elders fall into adultery and eventually be restored years later. I believe it is possible to restore a fallen elder but it is something that must take time and great care.

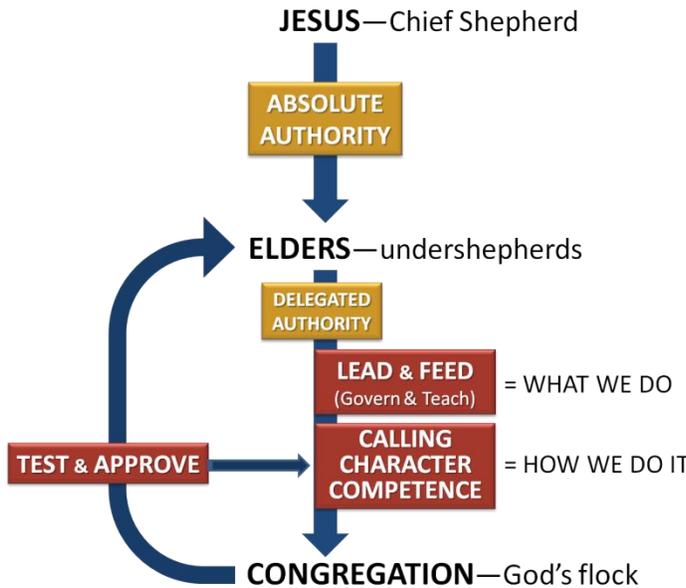
So the question remains—is option #4 relevant to an elders’ qualification? Personally, I don’t think that a past divorce immediately disqualifies a man and here is why I believe this.

If divorce happened before a man’s conversion, I believe that this does not disqualify him. Otherwise, you are setting divorce as a greater sin than any other sin. What if a man embezzled \$50,000 from his company twenty years ago but he was fully repentant and obviously free from the love of money? Such a man would not be disqualified any more than if had been a crackhead or gang banger. Think about in terms of a personal testimony. Think about all of the amazing testimonies on the radio program Unshackled. We love to hear about how the Lord miraculously delivered people from gangs and drugs and promiscuity. These make for powerful testimonies of God’s amazing grace and many such people go on to become pastors and missionaries. No one has ever said, “I’m sorry, but since you snorted cocaine when you were nineteen, you can’t be an elder at our church. So then why would we say that divorce was any worse than these other sins?”

Divorces that occur after a person’s conversion are more difficult to deal with. It may be that the husband was mostly “innocent,” in the divorce, but even that is not always a simple thing to determine, is it? Here is how I come down on the subject. If a divorce was Biblically permissible—meaning that either adultery abandonment were the chief cause of the divorce—then the Bible states that remarriage is allowed. If the Bible allows for remarriage, then I don’t see why the divorce would, by itself, disqualify a man from becoming an elder.

When you look at the list of character qualities, as detailed as this list is, it strikes me that many things seems to be left off. If an elder’s primary role is that of a shepherd, why isn’t love on this list? What about joy and peace and the other fruits of the spirit? There is one fruit of the spirit listed here—gentleness—but where are the other eight?

I think there are two reasons for this. First, this list of qualifications assumes that the elder candidate already possesses these qualities in increasing measure, otherwise, the person would probably not be considered at all. Second, most of these character qualities have to do with external characteristics while fruits of the spirit are more inward in nature. Take joy for example. Joy is something that is usually self-evident. You can generally tell when a person is filled with joy and you can tell when it is absent from their life, but how do you quantify such a thing when it comes to selecting elders? How do you decide if an elder has enough love or a sufficient amount of peace in order to qualify as an elder? These are more inward character qualities but the list in this chapter is more objective in nature and therefore more easily discernible.

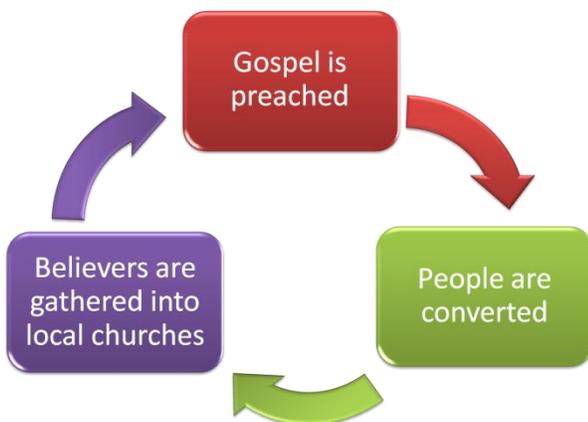


Remember that it is the job of the congregation to test and approve the elders. The role of the congregation is to examine the life of the elder candidate to see if they meet the criteria to be an elder. In terms of making decisions, the testing and approving of elders is the most important decision that a congregation can make.

But if the bar is set so high, how can anyone meet these qualifications? Character always trumps giftedness and it is all important in this arena, but we should therefore never get the idea that elders are some kind of spiritual superheroes. We are fallible and sinful just like everyone else. Furthermore, the evaluation of character is NOT about your past sins and failures, assuming there was true repentance, but what you are doing in the present. No one is looking for perfection but rather for Biblical faithfulness.

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The Great Commission Process



Please understand that the selection of elders is not the end goal. The end goal is the Great Commission but the Great Commission is dependent upon the selection of godly leaders. You could actually overlay the elder chart over top of this one to the left. God's leaders drive good shepherding which drives the Great Commission forward.

Let me leave you with a verse and a few applications.

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them, "The harvest is

plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest (Luke 10:1-2).

If workers for the harvest was needed in Jesus; day, how much more are they needed in our day. Based upon Kate's testimony of God's calling her to Slovakia, would you please pray for Kate? Please pray for Chloe as she is planning to be in Thailand this summer for seven weeks. Pray for other young people in our church who may feel called to go to other places and other ministries. Please pray for our current shepherds, that we would continue to grow as shepherds. Finally, please pray for our vision of at least twenty future shepherds who could lead and feed hundreds of other people.

Rich Maurer
February 24, 2013

¹ Kent Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome—26 Years Later*, Desiring God Pastor's Conference, February 4, 2013.