

Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons

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A Brief Book Summary

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In *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons*, Anyabwile sets out to examine Paul's instructions to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3-4 (and other supporting passages) in order to teach pastors how to find and train faithful men for church leadership and model faithful ministry themselves. Anyabwile argues that this is important because churches must have good leaders in order to be healthy. He explains that this book is to be used prayerfully, practically, and pedagogically.

First, readers should be praying for the pastors and elders in their local church, for more men to be raised up to church leadership, that God would pour out his grace on them, that members would show love to their leaders, that all men would grow in the godly qualities discussed, and that men would have a godly desire to serve.

Second, readers can expect to apply what they learn—this book is not purely theoretical but is meant to be easy to use in actually identifying and training leaders in real life.

Finally, readers can use this book to teach others, such as when planning and studying before selecting a church's first elders or when participating in a pastoral search committee.

This book is not to be used for finding faults and rebelling against one's leaders; though God sets the bar high for leadership in the church, he "uses the poles of grace to support that bar" (p. 16). Readers must keep God's grace in mind in order to avoid being overly critical. Anyabwile divides his book into three parts: the first on finding deacons, the second on finding elders, and the third on pastors modeling faithful ministry.

Part 1

Finding Table Servants

Chapter 1

Choosing Your Waiter: An Introduction to Deacons

Finding deacons is like being able to choose a good waiter at a restaurant; like waiters, deacons must be able to serve the practical needs of the church in a way that does not inhibit but rather strengthens the ministry of the Word and prayer. The apostles created the office of deacon because, as recorded in Acts 6, the number of disciples increased, which increased disagreements and thus required the apostles to prioritize the ministry of the Word and prayer in their own work and appoint certain men to tend to the physical needs of the church. The office of deacon was created by the apostles for the specific purpose of facilitating the ministry of the Word and prayer, thus strengthening the whole church. Therefore, it is not a less respectful position.

Chapter 2

Full of the Spirit and Wisdom

According to Acts 6:3, deacons must be full of the Spirit and wisdom. This position is spiritual and thus spiritual qualities must be taken into account. Anyabwile lists five questions churches could ask to determine if a man should become a deacon.

- First, does he have a reputation of being filled with the Spirit? This means that he knows how to live by God's law and knows how to apply it to life.
- Second, does he put the ministry of the Word and prayer above practical needs? This is important because putting practical needs above spiritual ministry reflects an attitude of putting man above God.
- Third, is he a servant? Though our culture sees humility as a sign of weakness, the church sees humility as the right way to life by imitating Christ. Being a servant means being willing to do menial tasks without being acknowledged.
- Fourth, does he have the fruit of the Spirit? Deacons must have the fruit of the Spirit because they will encounter difficult situations wherein they need to show grace to others; they must be able to settle strife rather than be easily stirred to it themselves.
- Fifth, does he demonstrate a Spirit-inspired wisdom? He will have to not only resolve problems, but anticipate problems, consider solutions from others, and be able to help others understand the solution that is arrived at.

Chapter 3

Sincere

According to 1 Timothy 3:8, deacons must be sincere. Double-tongued people are not respected or trusted. Deacons have to be sincere (which means that they must say the same thing to different people and do the same thing they say) because they have to be trusted to enter into the intimate problems of people's lives. In demonstrating sincerity, deacons reflect Christ who does the same. When looking for potential deacons, churches should ask, does this person have a reputation for keeping his word, speaking consistently to different parties, and speaking the truth in love? One way to measure these is by seeing if he follows through on commitments, has a track record for completing tasks, fights against the fear of man, and speaks edifying words. Churches should look for men who are known to be fair brokers; i.e., they are already acting as peace-makers between parties and promoting justice. Anyabwile concludes that though sincerity does not always indicate truth, there cannot be truth without sincerity.

Chapter 4

Sober and Content

1 Timothy 3:8 also teaches that deacons are to be sober and content. These are important qualities because deacons have access into private situations, including those of the vulnerable. When considering a certain man, churches should ask questions about his drinking habits. For example, does he exhibit self-control or weakness when drinking alcohol, and would he be held out as an example of good behavior? He should be capable of turning down a drink in order to avoid causing weaker believers to stumble. Regarding contentedness, does he show, and encourage in others, generosity or greed? To evaluate this, one could pay attention to his attitude

towards church finances and investing in missions. One could also ask if he exhibits pastoral care and self-sacrifice when talking to others about finances by correcting them when needed, rather than shifting the blame. Finally, one could determine if he is honest in his personal finances by asking if he pays bills on time and is honest when reporting his taxes.

Chapter 5

Keeps Hold of the Faith

According to 1 Timothy 3:9, deacons must hold to the faith, which includes giving assent to Christ's teachings, personally trusting Christ for salvation, and living a life worthy of the calling to follow him.

First, the church must ask if he gives a credible profession of saving faith. This does not imply that his testimony of conversion must be doubted, but that the church must do their due diligence in inquiring into the evidence of his testimony; this is often done in an interview during a church membership process.

Second, the church could ask, does he understand the gospel? This should be easy to evaluate because one's testimony should include a statement of the gospel. Third, has he had seasons of falling away from the faith or is he stable? Third, does he live as someone whose life flows out of a focus on the cross? His manner should be informed by Scripture, and he should be known to open the Bible with others and live his faith outside of the church.

Fourth, does he hold to the faith without reservation? This includes being able to sign the statement of faith with a good conscience and without having major disagreements with the church leaders.

Finally, does he persevere in the faith? Since fruit from ministry does not come immediately or visibly, deacons must be able to labour patiently.

Chapter 6

Tried and True

1 Timothy 3:10 teaches that deacons must be tested and proven to be reliable. This is important because church ministry can be difficult. Though this passage does not say exactly how one must be tested, it probably has something to do with the spiritual qualifications already discussed, and it implies that a church has taken the time to evaluate an individual before making a decision. To do this, churches should ask if the candidate is a growing and mature Christian, if he shows serving skills, if there is anything that might disqualify him from this office, and if the congregation supports him entering this office. Though there is no exact number of years someone must be a Christian, he should show Christlikeness in his life, already be serving in the church, and have the skills needed for the office.

Part 2

Finding Reliable Elders

Chapter 7

Sheep and Shepherds: An Introduction to Elders

The Bible compares Christians to sheep who need a shepherd, namely, Jesus; he appoints under-shepherds (called pastors, elders, overseers, or bishops in the New Testament) to tend to the spiritual needs of the flock. These shepherds also exercise loving authority over the sheep. The New Testament instructs churches to appoint multiple elders. The benefits of this is that the elders can share the load of shepherding, teach in many areas, hold one another accountable, and encourage one another. Elders may be paid or unpaid.

Chapter 8

Desires a Noble Task

1 Timothy 3:1 says teaches that it is good to desire the noble office of overseer. This implies that when looking for men who could be elders, a church should look for those who aspire to it. However, this is trickier than it sounds because some could have sinful desires for power and some could be qualified but have no desire because of a sinful avoidance of leadership. To stir aspiration, pastors must teach about what godly ambition is and teach about the goodness of leadership. Being an elder is a noble task because it reflects the beauty and privilege of imitating Christ, and provides for the need of a shepherd for the sheep. Traits to look for in a man fit to be an elder are that he:

1. Regularly attends services and business meetings (because it is harder to add this discipline after receiving an office)
2. Is already shepherding in practice without the title (by caring for, watching out for, and giving council to others)
3. Shows respect to those in leadership (by working to understand the direction of the church, asking good questions, and not creating confusion in meetings)
4. Shows a desire for the office over time (a church can identify this by being patient with him, encouraging him, and observing him go through different seasons in life).

When considering someone for the office of elder it is helpful to ask him questions, like if he has thought of being an elder. If he hasn't but is qualified, that question may help him process his own thoughts. If he says yes and that he aspires to be an elder, the church can ask why and if he is aware of whether his motives are pure or not. Though no one's motives are perfect at all times, rooting bad motives out is imperative. If he says no to the first question, the church can ask if he has considered if his lack of desire may be a sign of complacency or misdirection, if he understands the importance of the church having elders, and if his heart says the same thing as Jesus' when he saw sheep without a shepherd. He may be in need of correction for shrinking from leadership, and should be asked if he has considered what avoiding leadership says to the congregation that is already relating to him as a spiritual leader.

Chapter 9

Above Reproach

1 Timothy 3 continues on to say that elders are above reproach—this noble office can only be filled by a person of noble character. This characteristic is an umbrella term for other characteristics included in this passage that will be discussed. Being above reproach means that no one would suspect one of immorality and one has earned the respect of others over time. It is

important for elders to be above reproach because they serve as examples in every area of life to the other sheep and must be esteemed by others for their character (rather than their wealth or popularity). Traits to watch for in order to determine if a man is above reproach are faithful dealings in the church (i.e., he gives regularly) and outside the church (i.e., he shows up to work on time, is known for a good work ethic, and manages finances well), and commands respect from others (in the sense that he inspires others to good behavior). It is helpful to ask the man if he knows of anything in his life that might disqualify him, if family and coworkers would be surprised if they knew he was a church leader, or if they would oppose this decision.

Chapter 10

A One-Woman Man

An elder is a one-woman man. This term has been interpreted in various ways (i.e., narrowly as prohibiting polygamy, and broadly as teaching moral and sexual purity), but all agree that it relates to sexual purity. There are different questions for single men regarding this trait than there are for married men. Regarding a single man, the church should ask how they would characterize his dating habits and friendships with women (i.e., if he treats women with purity or is a serial dater playing with hearts), what his entertainment choices are (i.e., if he struggles with porn, which would prevent him from becoming an elder right away), and how he battles lust (i.e., if he is serious about cutting out temptation). Regarding a married man, the church should ask if he evidences emotional and physical fidelity (by explicitly asking him if he has committed adultery and asking his wife for input), if he builds accountability into his life (i.e., by avoiding tempting situations), if he makes his marriage the top priority in the home (even above other relationships in the home), and if he embraces biblical gender roles.

Chapter 11

Sober-Minded, Self-Controlled, Respectable

Elders are to be sober-minded, self-controlled, and respectable. Another word for these concepts is temperate, meaning not influenced too strongly by lusts, emotions, and passions. Ways to tell if a man is temperate is asking if he teaches other men to live like him (by encouraging sober-mindedness), if he is trendy (not necessarily outwardly but inwardly—i.e., following theological trends that are unwise—though outward trendiness could indicate inward trendiness and instability), if his appetites are balanced (i.e., not addicted to anything or prone to excess in eating, drinking, or anger), what his action and reactions are like when things in his life are good and when they are not, and if others respect how he lives.

Chapter 12

Hospitable

Elders are hospitable. Hospitality is important because it tangibly expresses love and care for strangers, and enables evangelism, discipleship, and fellowship. When looking for a man who has this qualification, a church should ask if he treats greeting at church as a ministry (i.e., by coming early to say hello to everyone and leaving after saying goodbye to everyone), helps those in need (i.e., by giving rides or helping seniors), opens his home to others or spends time with them elsewhere, and accept invitations to others' homes.

Chapter 13

Able to Teach

Elders are able to teach. The New Testament portrays teaching as a very important part of the church that affects everything it does; therefore, it should not be surprising that this is a qualification for an elder. Being able to teach means that one has the “ability to communicate and apply the truth of Scripture with clarity, coherence, and fruitfulness” (p. 78). This can be done in various settings, such as publicly in the pulpit or privately in a smaller group. In order to determine if a man is able to teach, he must have had opportunities to teach at church, thus pastors should provide these opportunities. Once he has taught, churches should assess whether he is capable (keeping in mind that this could develop over time), sensitive to pastoral issues in the church (i.e., speaking to people’s hurts and joys), committed to exposition (or the church’s philosophy of teaching), edifies others in his teaching, and disciples others. Furthermore, the church should ask if he is theologically mature enough to teach the right content, able to defend the faith by correcting error, and open to learning from others.

Chapter 14

Sober, Gentle, Peacemaking

In 1 Timothy 3:2, Paul set forth positive qualities of elders; in verse three, he identifies qualities that elders must not have—elders must not be violent and quarrelsome drunks, but sober and gentle peacemakers. Given to drunkenness means having a tendency to drink in excess, quarrelsome means being argumentative and divisive, and peacemaking means not creating controversies. Questions to ask a potential elder are:

1. Is he given to drunkenness?
2. Is he able to distinguish between primary matters of the faith and foolish controversies?
3. Is he patient and gentle in conflict (i.e., avoids disputes and retaliation)?
4. Is he a peacemaker (i.e., does things to maintain unity)?
5. Is he a physical abuser in the home?

Chapter 15

Not a Lover of Money

1 Timothy 3:3 also prohibits men who are lovers of money from being elders. To determine if a man is a lover of money, churches can ask if he gives generously and sacrificially or hoards, if he invests in earthly things or heavenly things, if he measures success by wealth, if he makes life decisions based on monetary gain, if he is concerned about the church accumulating wealth or having good real estate (rather than spending appropriately on ministry), or if he cares more about money than people.

Chapter 16

Leader at Home

1 Timothy 3:4-5 states that elders must manage their homes well. The church is a family and so how a man manages his own family says something about how he would shepherd the church. If he does not manage his household well, he may be too authoritarian, aloof, or permissive. Questions to ask when evaluating a married man in this area are:

1. Is he attentive to his home?
2. What does his wife say?
3. Does he care for his children?
4. Do they submit to him or rebel against him?
5. Do they think he is qualified?

If single or married without children, one should ask why he does not have children and if he volunteers with kids.

Chapter 17

Mature and Humble

1 Timothy 3:6 says that elders cannot be new believers because they may become puffed up with pride and fall into the condemnation of the devil (which could mean receiving the same judgement as the devil or being accused by the devil). Though they are zealous, they have not yet been trained enough to exhibit wisdom. Questions to ask of a potential elder are:

1. When was he converted?
2. If for some time, how spiritually mature is he?
3. To what extent does he struggle with pride and is he prideful regarding his own spiritual strength?
4. Is he sensitive to criticism or will he listen to disagreements?

Finally, a church can ask him directly if he is able to submit to someone with a different opinion and if he thinks the other elders are qualified and thus worthy of submitting to.

Chapter 18

Respected by Outsiders

1 Timothy 3:7 says that elders should be respected by outsiders. The most common criticisms of Christians are that they are not involved enough in relief for the poor, are not open-minded, just want your money, and are obsolete, killjoys, self-righteous, and hypocritical. Some Christians are like this, and it does not help to deny that is true. This passage suggests that what unbelievers think about elders matters though they will still be reviled like Christ is. Questions to ask of the man being considered are:

1. Does he engage with the wider community (by building relationships with non-believers and getting involved in society)?
2. What do his neighbours and coworkers say about him, and is there evidence that this is true or false?

Part 3

What Good Pastors Do

Chapter 19

Elders Refute Error

The pastoral epistles clearly explain the work that pastors are to set themselves to. Titus 1:9 indicates one of these as refuting error. This is supremely important because the enemy is attempting to draw people away from the church and ideas have real life consequences. Positively, a good pastor knows who his people listen to (so he can warn them of false teachers and encourage them to learn from godly teachers), helps his people train their consciences by God's Word, and prays that God will sanctify him and his congregation in truth. Negatively, a good pastor does not avoid calling out false teaching in hopes of being polite and does not avoid attributing false teaching to the devil as the New Testament does.

Chapter 20

Elders Avoid Myths and Train for Godliness

1 Timothy 4:7 sets forth a stark contrast: pastors must avoid harmful myths used for deception and they must train for godliness. To avoid myths, pastors should dialogue with those who speak truth (i.e. in what they listen to and who they read) so that they are constantly feeding on truth, refuse to listen to lies (in the form of gossip, over-exaggerations, or anything of that sort), maintain confidentiality regarding church issues by knowing when to speak about what in various settings, and follow error to its root so as to renew his own mind. To train in godliness, pastors should pray for those in government, be pious and content, and expect persecution.

Chapter 21

Elders Hope in God

1 Timothy 4:10 characterizes pastors as those who set their hope on the living God. It is tempting for pastors to do ministry in their own strength by finding their hope in study and preparation, relationships, and eloquence, but these hopes fade. Lasting hope is only found in God. A good pastor avoids trusting in his own abilities, does not let his study blur his vision of the Savior or be motivated by a desire to impress others, reads the Bible in order to listen to God, and nurtures his fellowship with God. This leads to a sense of freedom because success rests on God, not the pastor.

Chapter 22

Elders Command

1 Timothy 4:11 says that pastors must command and teach. This means that the pastor must exercise authority over the church. However, it is not his own authority, but God's authority. Thus, the good pastor exercises his authority when he teaches the commands of Christ. Pastors are to teach on the most important doctrines on a regular basis. They should not be concerned about sounding repetitive because Christians need to be reminded about things they have already learned but have not put into practice well enough.

Chapter 23

Elders Let No One Despise Their Youth

Some churches require candidates for the pastorate to be at least 40 years old (which would have disqualified Jesus and Timothy) or say that they would hire a young man if they could train him in their ways, but usually these people have never served as elders or pastors. Paul says to Timothy that his age is not a barrier to godliness or being a pastor. Thus, older pastors should not despise younger pastors but rather give them opportunities. On the other hand, younger pastors should also not despise older pastors but be teachable, humble, and patient, and not act defeated but command and teach.

Chapter 24

Elders Set an Example

Paul tells Timothy to set an example for believers in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. This works itself out in many ways depending on one's audience and context. It implies that the pastor is seen (i.e., he is around people, with people, and at events), though he must set boundaries in his life. In speech, pastors must listen well, speak truth, be direct and open, edify with their words, and show grace. In conduct, pastors must watch their whole lives because what they do makes an imprint on their congregation. Regarding love, pastors must give up their lives like Jesus gave up his. Regarding faith, pastors must not rely on themselves but on God. Regarding purity, pastors must not live a double life but rather live according to the message they preach.

Chapter 25

Elders Teach

Being a good pastor includes many things, but if you had to boil it down to one thing, it would be teaching. Good pastors devote themselves (i.e., prepare privately in advance) to the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, and teaching. Reading Scripture publicly is important because God's Word brings life. The Word must remain central to a church. Exhorting from God's Word aims to move people to feel and act based on the truth; the good pastor must apply God's Word to individuals. Finally, teaching is systematic instruction. The pastor can practice these by:

1. Guarding his study time
2. Reading the Bible and theology deeply
3. Reading various types of theologies (i.e., systematic, biblical, and historical)
4. Training his thinking by writing out a sermon manuscript
5. Getting people in his life to provide constructive criticism
6. Coordinating his teaching on various days and occasions so it complements one another (since not everything can be done on Sunday morning)
7. Sharing the teaching responsibilities with others.

Chapter 26

Elders Grow

1 Timothy 4:15 exhorts pastors to grow in the traits listed above. Good pastors will grow because ministry is labour, and labour requires aiming to improve. Pastors are to grow in the traits already discussed. This requires practice. Ways that pastors can practice these are by treating study time as the game (i.e., not an option), finding a good coach (to help evaluate and support), and cultivating humility (by watching and imitating other humble men). A pastor's growth benefits the congregation because if they see his growth that means they were aware of his flaws, if he is allowed to make progress then they were not pressuring him to be perfect (which leads to burnout), if he is encouraged to grow then it helps the congregation see warning signs in his life, and if they can see his growth then he is setting a good example.

Chapter 27

Elders Watch Their Life

1 Timothy 4:16 exhorts elders to watch their life and doctrine. There are many ways to watch one's life. First, a pastor should have an accountability partner who helps him actively examine his life. Second, a pastor should make sure he is properly involved in his family and not make an idol out of ministry. Third, a pastor should watch his thought life and fight against sinful attitudes by speaking truth to himself. Fourth, a pastor should protect himself, his family, and his church against sexual sin, or even the appearance of sexual sin. This means that he cannot be in any setting that could be interpreted wrongly or could tempt him, such as meeting alone with a woman. He should actively cultivate intimacy with his wife. Fifth, a pastor should ensure he makes time for rest and play because his body and spirit need it and it will strengthen his character. Sixth, a pastor should watch his strengths because those are often his weaknesses since they are overemphasized traits in his life.

Chapter 28

Elders Watch Their Doctrine

There are many ways to watch one's doctrine. A pastor should make the Bible central to his life. A pastor should always read good books to grow in soundness of doctrine but also read bad books once in a while if there is something that has aroused the interest of the congregation or could be a potential issue in the theological world. A pastor should read church history and historical theology because many errors made today have already been made in the past. A pastor should avoid fads because they often birth errors. To do this, the pastor could ask, how does this idea conflict with truths we know, how does it affect other doctrines, and how does it affect real life? A pastor should constantly learn from good teachers, commit to the church's statement of faith, and start to develop discernment for when error can creep in (such as when pragmatism becomes king).

Afterword

Anyabwile concludes that pastoral work should be a joy, not a burden, and he hopes this book has inspired joy. When a pastor is joyful, he is a gift to everyone in the church; in fact, everyone in the church should increase each other's joy.