



12 TRAITS OF A BIBLICAL CHURCH – Part 11

Biblical Leadership

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open with me to 1 Timothy 3. It's good to be together around the Word. I want to bring you greetings after a week with students at Beach Week. There were hundreds of them and by God's grace we saw many of them make spiritual decisions, including many who repented and became followers of Christ.

We have a video from the end of the week from Caleb, who is the senior high pastor here at Tysons, with students from all of our campuses in the background. Let me invite you to watch this with me.

Video

Caleb: What's up, McLean Bible Church? This is Caleb, and we are finishing off our last morning here at Beach Week 2018 down in Myrtle with our high school students. As you can hear, students behind me are singing and worshipping the Lord our God. Man, He has done so much this week in the hearts and lives of our students. There are so many students coming to know Him and trust in the gospel for the first time, students rededicating their lives to Him, students giving up burdens and hurts in their lives and making things right.

We thank you so much for your prayers. We thank you so much for giving to help students attend this. Be praying for our students as they come home, that this fire would not be just a camp moment, but that it would be a movement of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives and in our student ministries.

If you see a high school student in the lobby or in the service, come up, talk to them, encourage them, pray with them. We can't wait to see how God uses our camps this summer for His glory among the nations.

Platt:

I see that video and think about these high school students doing all kinds of things at the beach this summer. I got to see hundreds of our students worshipping God on that beach and responding to His Word. It was so good for me personally and pastorally to be with them in that setting—it was just pure

joy on a number of levels. I got to know some of your students in new ways. I'm so grateful for God's grace in them. For those of you who are students in one of these gatherings right now, I just want to encourage you that the same God Who was speaking to you this last week at camp is the same God Who is speaking in this gathering right now.

All of that leads into what we're diving into today as a church. We're in number 11 of "12 Traits of a Biblical Church" and this trait is Biblical Leadership. Now, I'm guessing most of you don't hear that topic and think, "This is going to be amazing." You might even think, "Ah, I've." . got all these things going on in my life—and we're going to talk about church leadership?" Some students may even be thinking, "What does this have to do with my life?" We just heard a testimony here at Tysons about God's grace in freeing a sister from alcoholism.

What I want to show you today is that church leadership has everything to do with all the things going on in your life. I want you to think about it with me. Some of us in this room have been deeply encouraged and changed by certain pastors or certain leaders in our spiritual journey. I would count myself in that group. Others of us have been deeply hurt by certain pastors or church leaders in our spiritual journey. I would also count myself in that group.

And some people who aren't even here aren't here because they've been pushed away from the church—or maybe even Christianity altogether—because of leaders they've seen or experienced in the church. It's no secret that scores of scandals and headlines about church leaders have done untold harm to the perception of Christ's church in our culture.

I would submit that looking at what God says about church leadership, particularly in our day, is extremely significant. I want to read you a quote from E.M. Bounds, whose books on prayer and spiritual devotion have had a huge influence in my life. At one point he said, "A church rarely revolts against or rises above the religion of its leaders." That basically means that a church will usually reflect its leaders. That's a really humbling quote for a pastor to read and for a church to consider.

So much of our church culture in America today is not healthy. That is a clear indicator that many church leaders in America are not healthy. It's not just around us—it's within us. Any unhealth in this church likely points to unhealth in leaders in this church, of which I am one. That means it's really important for us as a church to make sure we're led by healthy biblical leaders, because those leaders will affect every one of our lives as followers of Christ in this church.

Let's dive into 1 Timothy 3, where we see God define two primary groups of leaders in the church. Paul is writing this letter to Timothy, who was pastoring the church at Ephesus, and he says:

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.

⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

¹⁴ I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵ if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth. ¹⁶ Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

The church of the living God (verse 15) is led by two specific groups in the church that are outlined in verses 1-13. The first group is elders, who for the time being we'll call "servant leaders in the church." Then the second group is deacons, who for the time being we'll call "leading servants in the church." I'll explain why I use those descriptions as we go. So, elders are servant leaders and deacons are leading servants.

Let's think about each of these groups, starting with elders. The word "elder," which is translated "overseer" in verses one and two, is a pretty common term in the Bible. In the Old Testament it's used to describe the leaders who assisted Moses. In the New Testament it's sometimes used to refer to people who are more mature in age, while other times it's used to refer to spiritual leaders in Israel in the past. About 20 times this word refers to a unique group of leaders in the church. Nearly every church we know of in the New Testament is specifically said to have had elders or pastors or overseers.

Now, those three terms are interchangeable in the New Testament. We know they're interchangeable, because in the parallel passage in Titus 1, as well as 1 Peter 5—and another passage I want you to turn with me to, Acts 20—we see these three terms used interchangeably. So hold your place. We're actually going to go back and forth a couple times between 1 Timothy and the book of Acts. If we go first to Acts 20, I want to show you a picture of elder/overseer/pastor there. It's the same biblical term. Whenever you see any one of these terms, basically they refer to the same group of people.

As a side note, I want to mention that every time the word elder is used in the Bible to refer to leaders in the church, it's almost always mentioned in the plural. At various points in Scriptures we obviously see certain individual leaders highlighted among God's people, but most every time we see this

term, we see more than one elder/pastor/overseer in a church. We'll see that in Acts 20. And then based on this passage in 1 Timothy 3, I want to show you four responsibilities of elders or pastors in the church.

Some people think that pastors preach on Sundays, but what else in the world do they do? That's a valid question that I think deserves an answer. We're going to think about what elders and pastors do. It's not just me—it's all kinds of folks across the church. What do they do? In Acts 20, Paul is speaking to the elders or pastors of the church in Ephesus—so that has a direct tie to what we're reading in 1 Timothy—and he gives them these instructions. Let's pick this up in verse 28, where Paul says to these pastors:

²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Based on this passage, I see four responsibilities of elders or pastors or overseers in the church.

1. Elders lead the church under the authority of Christ.

First, elders . lead. When you see this term “overseer,” think of a leader. But we have to be careful, because we often think when someone is overseeing something, that refers to the ultimate leader of something. But that is not the case with elders or pastors. That's why I am calling elders and pastors here “servant leaders of the church.” Elders and pastors are definitely leaders, but they're subservient leaders.

This is key. Elders belong to the church. We've already seen in this whole series—in Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5, 2 Corinthians 2 and Galatians 1—that Jesus holds the whole church accountable for making sure the gospel is being preached and making sure unrepentant sin is addressed in the church. In 1 Timothy 3, we read that the church appoints elders. The church looks for particular qualities in a man, then affirms him as an elder or a pastor. This is why we have in place processes as a church to make sure that the church is accountable for any leader who is put into a position like that.

I am a teaching-pastor here at McLean Bible Church because of a process the church walked through last September to affirm me in this role. And if you hadn't affirmed me, I would not be in this role. So, thank you!

Similarly, this Wednesday night in our congregational meeting, members of this church will have the opportunity to affirm a couple of elders whose terms are up for renewal. There are also processes we

have in place as a church to examine a leader before we call him a pastor among us. Elders ultimately belong to the church and the church ultimately belongs to Christ. Did you hear it in Acts 20:28? Overseers “*care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*”

It’s not possible to approach church leadership lightly when you realize the gravity of Acts 20:28. Church leadership is so different from so much of worldly leadership. Church leadership must never be characterized as a power struggle marked by politics and power plays. The reason is because Jesus Christ has absolute power in the church and every leader in the church is a servant of the church and is ultimately accountable to the One Who paid His life for the church. That brings a sober humility and even fear to church leadership. There is no place for pride in church leadership. Elders lead under the authority of Christ.

2. Elders care for the body of Christ.

Elders are the picture of a shepherd in Acts 20:28. First Peter 5:2 says the same thing to elders: “*Shepherd the flock of God that is among you.*” So what does “shepherding the flock” look like? To summarize the role of a shepherd, this means that elders protect the flock like a shepherd protects sheep from wolves. Listen to Paul here in Acts 20: “Be on your guard. Watch out for false teachers. Watch out for false doctrine. Savage wolves will come among you.” There is an adversary who is always trying to spiritually attack the church and members of the church—from both the outside and the inside. Elders and pastors have a God-given responsibility to guard, not only their lives, but the spiritual lives of the church members.

I think about one particular trip I was on in the mountains of east Asia with two of my brothers. We were going in to villages where the gospel had never gone. It was illegal to share the gospel, so we were trying to stay under the radar by going from village to village with literature in their native language.

Our goal was to walk through a village and leave literature there that talked about the gospel in places where they might find it a couple weeks after we left. We couldn’t just pass it out directly, so we would find a wood pile and just slip some literature inside there. Then in a few days and a couple fires later in that home, they would pick it up and ask, “Ah, what’s this?” That was our plan, so we were just going from village to village. Then we would camp out in the mountains in between villages each night.

But we found out that each of these villages had some dogs as security measures for the homes. I’m not a big fan of scraggly-looking dogs in the middle of mountains in east Asia who come running up and barking. Now, if you love dogs, stay with me here. We were told that if we needed to, always carry some rocks. When any dogs started coming our way, we would throw rocks in front of them. Not at the

dogs. We didn't hit the dogs with the rocks. But we'd throw them in front of the dogs and the dogs were supposed to stop.

While we camped outside a particular village one night, we knew we had to go back past that village early in the morning to get to the next village, walking . from our campsite past the outskirts of that village early in the morning. It was still dark and we didn't want to wake up anybody. We also didn't want to wake up any dogs.

So my brothers and I decided we would walk as quietly as we could. We got in a line. I'm holding on to one brother's shirt in front of me, my other brother is holding on to my shirt from behind and we're inching along. Our goal for a couple hundred yards was just to inch by as quietly as we could. It worked...for about a hundred yards. I can't remember exactly what happened, b. . . One of us (not me!) made some kind of noise and we heard a dog bark. We froze, hoping nothing would happen. But when we started moving again, another dog started barking. . It was dark, except for the light of the moon. We turned around and all of a sudden we saw these green eyes headed toward us. We had our pockets full of rocks, s. o we started running and throwing at the ground behind us for the next hundred yards to get out of there.

That's the picture I have in my mind when I think of elders. This is what elders do. There are always random and dangerous attacks coming at people in the church, so elders have rocks in their pockets to ward off those attacks. . Elders protect the church. If you look at Acts 20:32, Paul commits these elders or pastors to the Word. The responsibility as a shepherd is not just to pet the sheep, but to feed and nourish them. This leads to the next responsibility of the elder or pastor, something this leader must be able to do.

3. Elders teach the Word of Christ.

This is the primary way elders or pastors lead and care for the church: by teaching the Word of Christ. It's interesting when we look at the qualifications for an elder, almost all of them are character qualifications that are expected of all Christians. But there is one competency qualification that's listed in 1 Timothy 3, a competency that an elder must have. First Timothy 3:2 says an elder must be "able to teach." An elder must have the spiritual gift of teaching, because an elder's or pastor's leadership is totally tied to teaching God's Word.

Think about it. Who is the ultimate Leader of the church? Jesus. But we don't see Jesus physically in front of us. So how does Jesus lead His church? Through His Word that we do have physically in front of us. Which means that elders must know God's Word extensively, must study this Word, memorize this Word, meditate on this Word, because elders and pastors can't lead the church without this Word.

Elders do not lead the church according to their own thoughts, their own opinions, their own ideas. People can do that with some other company organizations in the world, but elders cannot do that with the church. Paul says in Acts 20 that he led the church in Ephesus for three years with God's Word, teaching them the whole counsel of God. So elders must know God's Word extensively and be able to communicate God's Word effectively.

. If an elder or pastor is not teaching God's Word, then he's not fit to lead God's church. We do not follow elders or pastors just because they have a position. We only follow elders or pastors if they know the Word, are following the Word and are teaching others to follow it. The minute I am not teaching this Word accurately and faithfully, that is the minute I lose the right to lead in this church. That goes for any elder or pastor.

I remember the first week I became a pastor when. I was 26. I went into the office on Monday morning, sat down at the desk and thought, "Huh. What do I do?" Then it hit me. I didn't have a clue what to do. I started thinking, "Well, I know I need to preach on Sunday." So I opened up the Bible. Just start there. And in the days and months and years to come, by teaching and leading according to the Word, I saw this Word do the work.

Now, fast forward almost 14 years. I'm down with our students at the beach this week and a guy recognizes me at the hotel where we were staying. He said, "Are you David Platt?" I said, "Well, yeah." He was telling me that he just started pastoring a church for the first time less than a year ago. He asked, "What counsel would you give me?" I looked back at him and said, "Bro, I still really don't know what I'm doing, but please. keep that a secret from the church I'm pastoring!" Well, that's kind of out of the bag now.

Seriously, I said, "Just let the Word do the work. Know the Word. Teach the Word. Live and lead and do everything you do according to the Word, then Jesus will lead His church."

4. Elders model the character of Christ.

Elders and pastors lead under the authority of Christ. They care for the body of Christ. They teach the Word of Christ, and fourth, they model the character of Christ. Look now at the list of qualifications in 1 Timothy 3. Just so you know, there are similar lists in Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-3. When you put all these passages together, you see an entire list of character qualifications for elders or pastors. Now, before we think about what's on this list, I want you to notice what is not on these lists.

First, age is not on these lists. So just because a man is older does not mean he should be an elder in the church. And just because a man is younger does not mean he should not be an elder in the church. Timothy, who Paul is actually writing this letter to, was considered very young, as it mentions in the next chapter.

Second, success in business is not on this list. Just because someone is successful in the world does not make him able to lead the church with the Word. Many times we think, “Oh, yeah, that person is successful, so they would make a good elder.” We’ve got to make sure we’re not looking at the world’s definition of success for leadership in the church. This is also not just a list of good ‘ol boys. The qualifications don’t include men in the church that everybody just loves to like.

And speaking of men, this passage and others like it are why, according to the Bible, we only have male elders and pastors at McLean Bible Church. I fully realize that goes totally against the grain of our culture, much like the Bible’s teaching on marriage. Just as God in His Word has called husbands to be the leaders in their families as a picture of Christ’s love for the church—which is another sermon for another day—in the same way, God has called men to be elders, pastors, overseers in the church. First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 both clearly state that God has designated men to be pastors and elders in the church, so to do otherwise is to go against God’s Word.

I want to be crystal clear that this does not in any form or fashion mean that the Bible views—or that we should ever view—men as superior in any way to women. That is absolutely not God’s design for the husband in the home and it’s absolutely not God’s design for the pastor in the church. As we’ll see in a minute, God has called women to all sorts of significant leadership roles in the church, so it is sinful and to our shame if we as a church ever fail to help women flourish across the church in all kinds of capacities—including leadership roles. There is no such thing as a biblical church in which the men flourish and the women do not. This is why the character qualifications of elders and pastors here are so critical.

As I mentioned earlier, there is really nothing on this list that God doesn’t desire for every one of us as Christians—which is kind of the point. God intends for elders or pastors to be models of the character of Christ for the members of the church. Later on in Hebrews 13:7, it says to watch your leaders and their way of life, imitating their faith. That’s so humbling. I was just thinking about that in a fresh way this week. My life, my faith, is intended to be imitated by you. So I asked myself the question: what would happen if people in the church imitated my way of life and my faith?

That’s the question we need to ask of any potential elder or pastor. The primary question we ask is what will happen if the church imitates this leader? When you think about all the biblical characteristics of an elder or pastor, that’s the overriding question. When you look at this passage in 1 Timothy and then the parallel passages in Titus and 1 Peter, you see different categories of a man’s character. . We as the church need to think about it. We need to ask, “What will happen if the church imitates this leader in his personal life?”

The Bible beckons us to ask questions like, “Is he self-controlled? Is he not addicted to anything—alcohol, pornography, food, anything? Is he wise? Is he peaceable? Is he gentle?” These are

the words the Bible uses. “Is he a sacrificial giver?” He must not be a lover of money. He must not be greedy. “Is he humble?” This is a picture of a shepherd; . this is not a glamorous job. “Is he patient? Is he honest? Is he disciplined?” So we look for these characteristics in an elder’s or a pastor’s personal life.

Then in his family life, we ask the question, “Is he a servant leader in his home?” An elder or pastor can’t lead the church under the authority of Christ if he doesn’t lead his home under the authority of Christ. We need to look at a man’s leadership in his family and ask, “Is he leading them under Christ? Is he caring for them? Is he teaching them the Word?” If he’s single, “Is he self-controlled in a way that reflects 1 Corinthians 7?” If he’s married, “Is he completely committed to his wife, as is evident in how he serves and sacrifices for her? Is this a husband we want people to imitate?” If he has children, “Do they honor him?”

These are all questions we ask when we consider elders and pastors in the church. We look in their home, then beyond their home. The church is intended to look at their business and social life, asking, “Is he kind? Is he hospitable? Is he a friend of strangers? Does he show favoritism? Does he have a blameless reputation among outsiders?” Obviously that doesn’t mean that he’s perfect, but is he above reproach in the community? If somebody doesn’t have a reputation for integrity and kindness in social and business settings, then that person should not be a pastor or elder in the church.

Finally, we think, “What will happen if the church imitates this leader in his spiritual life?” We need to ask, “Is he making disciples of all nations?” An elder or pastor can’t lead the church on mission if he’s not living that out in his own life. Any elder or pastor should be able, by God’s grace, to point to others who are following Christ and making disciples as a result of his life. Is he a disciple maker? “Does he love the Word? Is he a man of prayer? Is he holy?”

Do you realize how hard it is to preach this sermon? As I was preparing this week, I was praying, “God, make me more and more this kind of leader for this church.” I prayed that, knowing there was no way I could be this kind of leader on my own. No other pastor or elder in this church can be this kind of leader, apart from the grace of Christ. Needless to say, Jesus sets a high bar for pastors and elders in the church, giving them serious responsibility to lead under His authority, to care for His body that He bought with His own blood, to teach His Word faithfully and to model His character.

So the way this plays out currently at McLean Bible Church is we have eight elders, including myself, who compose the legal board of governance in the church. We’re surrounded by a variety of pastors on our staff at different campuses. And we’re in the process of raising up more pastors across our campuses—not only those who are on staff, but others who work other jobs. Because the reality is with over 10,000 people coming to McLean Bible Church every week, we need far more than eight elders and however many pastors on staff in order to care well for every member of this church.

We talked about this in biblical membership. To be a member of a church means to be cared for by leaders in that church. We want 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 type men doing this kind of work all across this church. We want to continually improve how we do this as a church. Different elders and pastors have different responsibilities. The board of elders carries out some responsibilities. Campus and staff pastors carry out other responsibilities. Other pastors who aren't on paid staff carry out other responsibilities. This is the picture we see in Scripture—a plurality of elders and pastors working together to lead, care, teach and model Christ in the church.

Let's be clear. The pastor is not somebody who puts on a show every week. Elders and pastors are leaders who are responsible to make sure that every member of the church is well cared for in Christ. Our goal before God is to make sure that every single member of this church is shepherded well. It is so important for us as a church to know and work toward and pray for this.

Alongside them is the second groups of leaders in the church—the deacons—who are mentioned in the last part of 1 Timothy 3. The challenging thing about deacons is that while we see these qualifications for deacons here, we don't really see a clear picture in the Bible of what deacons do—at least not as clear as we see about what elders or pastors do. In fact, outside of this passage, we rarely see deacons mentioned specifically as leaders in the church. But we do see a powerful picture in the very word “deacon.”

So go now to Acts 6 to see a picture that illustrates this word. It's a great word. In the original language of the New Testament, the word is *diakonos*, or *diakonia*, or *diakoneo*. Those are the different forms we see. It's used at least 100 times in the New Testament, almost always referring to some form of serving or ministering. Acts 6 uses this word to describe people who are leading out in serving in the church. It's why I use the term, “leading servants.” Look at Acts 6:1-7 with me:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists [Greeks] arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. ² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ⁵ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷ And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Now see at the end of verse two where it says “serving tables”—that word for “serving” is the word from which we get “deacon.” The picture we have in Acts 6 is basically two groups of leaders in

the church. On the one hand, you have a group of leaders—here, the apostles—who were primarily responsible for prayer and the ministry of the Word. As we’ve already seen, that’s primarily what elders and pastors do. Then you have another group that arises here to lead out in a specific area of service, which is how we biblically understand deacons. So the question “What do deacons do?” leads to three primary responsibilities of deacons.

1. Deacons meet needs according to the Word.

According to God’s Word, the deacons meet needs. That’s the primary meaning of the word *diakonos*—it’s spiritual service aimed at meeting a specific ministry need. The needs here in Acts 6 arise from specific circumstances in the early church in Jerusalem. The church was growing. They were sharing resources with each other. They needed somebody to help lead in the distribution of food. There was a specific need that necessitated these leaders.

That’s part of the reason I think we don’t see clear deacon responsibilities spelled out in the New Testament, because the needs in the church necessitate different types of leaders at different times in the church. That was the need at this point. There would be another need at another point and another need at another point, just like there are various needs we face as a church in how to best care for each other. Deacons meet needs that arise from specific circumstances.

Think about how God in His Word necessitated that the church look after widows. So in order to carry out God’s commands, God’s heart, these deacons were assuming accountability for carrying out those commands from God. We’ll come back in a minute to how this applies today, but let’s keep going.

2. Deacons support the ministry of the Word.

Not only are deacons meeting a need here in Acts 6, but because these widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food, the apostles were being taken away from their overall leadership responsibilities. As a result of that, the mission of the church was starting to suffer. So here we see the balance God intends for the church. He wants the church to be fully devoted to His Word and fully devoted to meeting needs in the church and in the world. So it needs leaders who are devoted to both.

This is a critical role that deacons play in the church. Deacons serve elders so the elders can lead. These deacons here—Stephen and others—freed the apostles to devote themselves to prayer and the Word, which was huge. This is not a second power bloc in the church. This is not a body of leaders competing with the elders to provide overall leadership in the church. It’s not a second house in the legislature. Deacons here in Acts 6 are helping to make sure that elders and pastors are leading with the

Word as God has designed. And in the process, deacons are leading others so the elders can serve. Notice that only seven leading servants are selected here. That's certainly not a large enough group to handle the entire problem for a church that contained thousands of people at that time. So these deacons were organizing others to make sure the work was done.

Again, everybody in the church is intended to serve. These people were helping lead all the other servant leaders.

3. Deacons unify the body around the Word.

Deacons meet needs according to the Word, they support the ministry of the Word and finally, deacons unify the body around the Word. If you think about what's happening here in Acts 6, the unity of the church was at stake. This physical neglect was causing spiritual disunity. Christians were beginning to complain against each other. There was tension. The deacons were appointed to squelch this rising disunity in the church.

How did they do that? This is where we square this picture in Acts 6 with what we already read in 1 Timothy 3. Deacons demonstrate a Christ-like character with a mission mindset. . The church in Acts 6 was growing at breath-taking speeds. The church needed leaders who said, "Hey, we have a mission to accomplish. We need to unite together around that mission." Deacons are not small-minded men, engrossed in turf warfares, caring about their area or their rights in the church, advocating for their cause, lobbying for their corner in the church.

Deacons see the overall mission of the church and work to help the church stay focused on that mission, realizing their ministry is part of that mission. We exist as a church to glorify God by making disciples and multiplying churches among all nations, beginning right here in D.C. Deacons exist to make sure that mission stays front and center—and they do this with Christ-like character.

So one last time, let's go back to 1 Timothy 3. Again, much like elders and pastors, deacons are intended to model the character of Christ. They are to be honorable, genuine, self-controlled, sacrificial givers and devoted to God's Word. Although a deacon doesn't have to have the gift of teaching that an elder or pastor must have, the deacon must be faithful, blameless—personally and in their family—much like an elder or pastor.

What's interesting in 1 Timothy 3:11 is that you see mention of their wives as well. But then you probably see a note in your Bible that says, "This could be translated 'Women likewise...'" Which has led some to debate about whether or not this is a reference to women deacons—or deaconesses, as some call them. In that debate, the question of whether deacons can be men and women, there are basically two schools of thought. Some say yes; others say no. That pretty much sums up the debate. Glad I was able to help you with that.

Here's the deal. I know Bible believing scholars and pastors whom I respect greatly and they fall on both sides of this discussion. But here's why I and other pastors and elders here at McLean—far before I got here, like all the way back to the founding of this church—believe this refers to women serving as deacons, calling them deaconesses. It's not because of certain pressure from the culture one way or the other. The culture does not drive church and must never drive the church. The wisdom of God in His Word drives the church.

When you look at the original language here, the pronoun “their” is actually not there, which is why some translators think it's implied and others don't. . It's also odd that 1 Timothy 3 would mention deacons' wives but not elders' wives. The transition that starts verse 11 with that word “likewise” in the original language of the New Testament is the same transition that was used back in verse eight, when Paul began talking about a different group of people there.

. If we had time, we could go to Romans 16:1, where Phoebe is called a servant of the church. The word for servant that's used to describe her is *diakonos*. Many believe that points to a deaconal role that she played. Then you combine that with the fact that all over the Bible women had integral roles in leadership among God's people, both in Old Testament Israel and in the New Testament church. So as humbly as we can in submission to God's Word, would affirm women in all kinds of leadership capacities in the church, apart from pastor or elder.

Again, it's God's Word that drives us. One of the main things I hope is clear in this whole series and even today is that God defines and designs the church, then we live and operate according to what He defines and what He designs. Our goal is to align as much as possible with what He has said. So, our current elders and pastors are in the midst of diving into the question, “Okay then, who are the deacons across this church? Who are the men and women who are leading servants across this church? Who are the people in various positions of leadership who are already carrying out these responsibilities biblically and how can we best affirm and honor them, making sure they're meeting the biblical expectations we see here in a way that honors and glorifies God?”

We want to see Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13 type people all across McLean Bible Church. That's the whole point. So just imagine with me for a second a church filled with servant leaders—pastors and elders—who are humbly leading under Christ's authority, who are making sure that every single member of this church is cared for, who are teaching God's Word and showing what it looks like in their lives and families on mission in the world. Then imagine leading servants—deacons, both men and women—who are leading out in all kinds of ways across the church.

I think of all the student-ministry leaders I spent time with this past week, many who took a week of their vacation to spend time with a group of teenagers. Does that sound like an ideal vacation to

the world—or to be honest, to any of you? They did that because they wanted to shepherd these students' hearts in this pivotal time in their lives.

This does not happen just once a year. I think about men and women and students who are doing that every week here in Kids' Quest and student ministry and Access ministry and hospitality ministries in scores of ways all across this church. The bottom line is that church leaders exalt Christ as they display His love for the church. This is how Jesus loves and leads His church, through elders, pastors, deacons, deaconesses who serve the church with selfless care—just like Him.

In this way, church leaders are intended to help all of us love Jesus more. That's why church leadership is really important. In the process, church leaders equip and enable us to accomplish our purpose and mission in the world. This is a whole other sermon, but the whole point of church leadership according to Ephesians 4 is to equip the church for the work of ministry. Now, the last thing I want you to take away from the Word today is, "Okay, pastors and elders, deacons and deaconesses—they're the leaders of the church, and the rest of us don't really do much." That would miss the whole point.

We talk all the time about how every follower of Christ in this church is called and created to make disciples of Jesus. That means that according to God's Word, the church is comprised of elders and pastors, deacons and deaconesses, plus members who all together are giving our lives to make the love of Christ known in the world around us.

I want to go back to a verse we read a few minutes ago: Acts 6:7. Remember when we read that passage, the first six verses show these different groups of leaders working together in the church. Then do you remember what verse seven said? As a result of biblical leadership working across biblical membership in the church, the Bible says, *"And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."*

What a great verse! McLean Bible Church, don't we want it to be said that the Word of God continued to increase and the number of disciples of Jesus multiplied greatly in Washington, D.C.? This is what we want as a church. Don't miss the connection here. If we want that, it will only be so as we appoint, affirm, honor, pray for, look to and become more and more a church marked by biblical leaders in ways that are good for every one of our lives as followers of Christ. A church rarely revolts against or rises above the religion of its leaders. We want to do these things in a way that we pray will be a testimony to the world that is totally different from what the news headlines in our day so often read. We want to do these things for the glory of our King.

Will you pray with me?

God, we pray for this all across McLean Bible Church. We pray for leaders. I pray for this obviously in the role You've put me in, but not just for myself, for other leaders, elders, pastors, deacons,

deaconesses, people who are leading out in so many different ways around this church. God, help us to lead in a way that shows Your love for the church. We pray that You would raise up more and more and more Acts 6, Act 20, 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1 and 1 Peter 5 type men and women across the church.

We pray that You would guard and keep us from all of the adversary's attacks to pull down leaders and pull members away from You and the life we're intended to find in You. We pray, O God, may McLean Bible Church be marked by biblical leadership in every way, for Your glory and for our good. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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