

The TEST of Leadership (2019)

1 Timothy 3

So, in the coming months, we're going to choose a new Leadership Team. A team that will serve for three years, or until we're a full status church, whichever comes first. A team who will take us through a £2 million building project for the church community centre at Dores Road; a union with our brothers and sisters at Dores & Boleskine and all of the relationship building involved in that; and the task of bringing us to maturity as a church family in the way we reach out, look out for each other, give, love, serve and pray.

What kind of leaders do we need for this church at this time?

Whatever time or season a church is in, God's Word shows us that we're always looking for the same things consistently in our leaders - more than leadership experience, professional expertise, energy, social connections or anything else, comes the kind of disciple of Jesus our leaders are called to be.

What we read in 1 Timothy 3, and in some other passages in the New Testament that will help us today, is that those appointed to leadership must be people that pass the T-E-S-T. The four letters in that word help us to remember what God has revealed in the New Testament letters concerning those who would lead in His churches.

Firstly, *T is for Teacher*. Someone in church leadership, who oversees the life of the church, must be 'able to teach,' we read in 1 Timothy 3:2. The emphasis here is not on *knowing* God's truth in Scripture well - that was probably assumed. The emphasis is on being *able* to *teach* that truth to others.

It's not enough for our leaders to know the Bible well, although that is necessary. They also need to be people who can speak to us clearly and capably about that truth. Paul, writing with instructions to the younger disciple Titus about how a church in Crete should be led, says this in Titus 1:5-9:

'The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

‘Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless - not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.’

In this church, where misunderstandings of God’s Word and false teachings were spreading, Paul’s instruction was to appoint leaders who not only *knew* sound teaching, but who would *encourage others* in that truth, and who would be prepared to *refute* the errors that were leading people astray. People who handle God’s Word capably, and are focused on its truth being clear to others beyond themselves.

I’m not saying that every person in leadership needs to be able to stand up and preach sermons, or lead bible studies. But our church leaders must know God’s truth well *and* be able to explain it well to others. That can be in one to one conversations. It can be over a cup of coffee. It can be in the conversations we have in Life Groups, Huddles or Alpha courses. It can be answering a question in a chat after a church service.

There may be people who sense a call to leading in our church, and are thinking, ‘Yeah, but I don’t know my Bible well enough at all!’ Don’t write yourself off here. You don’t need to be a theology graduate for this. You don’t need to feel you have grasped every angle on every passage and issue in Scripture. Remember, when the twelve Apostles were first called, they didn’t know much about who Jesus really was.

But you do need to be someone who is *reading* your Bible. You’re in a day to day habit of reading God’s Word, listening to what God says there, and doing something in response to it. If you’re not doing both the things Jesus talks about in the parable of the wise and foolish builders in Matthew 7 - hearing His words, *and* putting them into practice - then you’re not going to be ‘able to teach,’ which you need to be if you’re going to be a leader.

So those you choose as leaders must be people whom you are confident about knowing and living out their Scripture, being able to explain it, and able to guard us from misunderstanding and error in our reading it and living it out.

Question - To whom would you go to ask a question about the Bible? Who has a way of explaining God’s Word clearly to you? Whose understanding of the Bible’s teaching would get you to think again about yours? Is it I, Lord?

Secondly, *E is for Example*. Most of what 1 Timothy 3 focuses on is not to do with how much a leader knows or what their abilities are - it's to do with their character and their way of life. We read that the overseer must be above reproach. There's a similar character list in Titus 1, where we're told, 'Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be *blameless...*' What does that mean? Does it mean finding people who don't do *anything* wrong?

We're all sinners; Christian leaders as much as any other Christian. We all need the grace of God at work in our lives, forgiving us and renewing us day by day. But church leaders are to live a life that can be held up in public view and be found by the church and the world alike to be sound and good. And that's because theirs are lives that must serve as examples of 'being like Jesus'. And leaders' lives, if they are to be any sort of example, will demonstrate plenty of repenting, saying sorry to God, and saying sorry to others.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul, as a Christian leader, says something quite bold in 3:17 - 'Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.' He says out loud, 'Be like me.'

He says it just after saying this a few verses earlier - 'Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.' Paul says, 'There is much I needed to repent of. I know I'm not perfect yet. But look at my life, and follow my example, as I keep changing and becoming more like Jesus.'

1 Timothy 3 mentions some specific character criteria. Those faithful in their marriages. Temperate and self-controlled. Gentle and not quarrelsome. Not overindulging in alcohol, not chasing after money. Of good reputation and held in respect by family and by all those who care to look at their lives. Hospitable - outgoing towards people and pleased to give them time, help and friendship.

Guarding their mouths - not gossiping, but instead being trustworthy with people's lives and stories. If someone nominates you to the Leadership Team, before you say yes, you'll need to deal with anything hidden here that doesn't stack up with that, which God sees perfectly clearly.

None of these things are unique to Christian leaders - these are character traits for every disciple to grow in as we become more like Jesus in our walk

after Him. But those who lead must look like disciples whose lives, attitudes, conduct and relationships encourage all of us on in growing in the fullness of life in Christ. They've got to be people who don't just *happen* to be like this, but who are happy for people to imitate them and their example of a life in Christ.

The evidence of *growth* in character to become more like Jesus is what you're looking for here. When Jesus called the first Leadership Team of the world Church (the twelve apostles), they were rough-round-the-edges. There were a lot of hot-heads - Peter, who often acted first then thought later, James and John who were known as the 'sons of thunder' because of their temper. But the letters to Timothy and Titus say we're looking for 'temperate, self-controlled... not quick-tempered' people.

That is what Jesus' twelve Apostles became between putting faith in Jesus in the gospels and being handed the reins of leadership in Acts. The growth in their character was the evidence of their fittingness to lead. They could lead, because they were being changed by Jesus, and everyone could see it.

So whose character is growing visibly enough that we notice it, and we aspire to grow in Christlikeness as they are growing? We're looking for leaders about whom we can say, 'Being more like them would mean being more like Christ.' Both because of how they are growing, and what they have so far grown to be.

Question - Whom in this church has a character you'd aspire to imitate? Whose attitudes and conduct in relationships have an obvious Christ-likeness about them? Is it I, Lord?

Thirdly, *S is for Shepherd*. The first half of 1 Timothy 3 is addressing what an 'overseer' is - a leader who 'oversees' the people of the church. v.5 tells us that these overseers are to 'take care' of God's church. Our leaders are to be our shepherds; watching over us with loving attention, noticing when we're in trouble or wandering off, and there for us to turn to when we are in need.

In the last passage of John's gospel, Jesus asks Peter three times, 'Do you love me?' And each time Peter responds, Jesus calls Him to feed or to look after His sheep.

That image of a leader in the church being a shepherd obviously stuck with Peter, because he uses it in writing to fellow church leaders in 1 Peter 5:1-2. 'To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow-elder, a witness of Christ's

sufferings and one who will also share in the glory to be revealed: Be *shepherds* of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers...'

Paul used the same image in Acts 20:28, talking to the leaders in the same Ephesian church that Paul is writing about in 1 Timothy. 'Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be *shepherds* of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.'

We need leaders like that. Leaders who love you. People who get how precious *you* are to God, because Jesus the Good Shepherd even *died* for you. People who will put themselves out and put themselves in harm's way for you to nurture, defend and treasure your life and your faith in Jesus.

People whom you feel have *your* walk with Jesus in *their* heart. Enough that they will challenge you even when you don't want to be challenged. Enough that they will give up time, money and energy for the sake of your welfare and your growing in knowing and loving Jesus.

Question - Whom would you go to in this church with concerns about life and faith? Whom would you be happy to be challenged or corrected by? Who has sacrificed things for the sake of nurturing your faith in Jesus? Is it I, Lord?

Fourthly, *T* is for *being motivated by the Task*. Our passage in 1 Timothy 3 began like this: 'If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble *task*.' Not, '...he desires a noble *status*.' Not, '...he desires a position of influence.' The person willing to be put forward for church leadership is someone who *desires* the *work* that it involves.

We're not looking for people who lead to satisfy themselves, look good, get respect or boost the CV. Nor are we looking for people who *don't mind* doing the work. We're looking for leaders who *love* the work itself - the work of leading, guiding, and shepherding.

1 Peter 5:2-3 expresses this more fully, addressing those who are already in positions of leadership in the church - 'Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers - *not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be*; not greedy for money, but *eager to serve*; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.'

When a person is motivated by a desire to have a respected status, or a position where they can influence decisions in the church to get things looking the way they want, they ought not to be in leadership. When a person appears greedy for playing with money, or power, or control over people, they ought not to be in leadership. Indeed, 1 Timothy 3:3 is clear that a leader must not be someone who loves money.

When a person is motivated by the work of sharing the truth about Jesus that they are passionate about making known and guarding from error; when they are motivated by living out a life that will glorify God and be a witness to those around them; when they are motivated by a love for their brothers and sisters in Christ coupled with an awareness that they have an ability to pastor them - well then, that person should be in church leadership.

Question - Whom in the church do you believe to be motivated for the work of leadership? Who cares little enough about status? Is it I, Lord?

Here's a good bottom line litmus test for our potential new leaders:
Is it true of these people that the biggest thing in their lives is following Jesus?

Jesus constantly challenged people to let nothing be more urgent or important to them than being His disciple. He said, 'Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these other things (the things most people spend most of their time on - food, money, possessions, security) will be added to you.'

We're looking for men and women who will look after Jesus' things and Jesus' people, and let Jesus take care of their things and their lives. And whenever it is true of *all* of our leaders that the biggest thing in their lives is following Jesus, then the unity that God has given to us as a church and that we prize so highly and look after so carefully will keep flourishing.

We must not pass over what Paul says in v.6 of our passage. A church leader, '...must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgement as the devil.' Strong words! Some of us here are pretty new to faith in Jesus - some are just working out the truth of it all and what it might mean for them; some have come to a clear faith in Jesus in recent months.

That's brilliant, and it makes me so glad to be part of this church! But those who are new in faith are not to be church leaders. The way Paul talks about it here; that's for *their own* sakes - that their own young faith might not be

ruined by conceit. We need to take that seriously, since the warning is that the end of such an unwise course is the same judgement as the devil!

This shouldn't be misunderstood. This verse is not saying that those who are young in *age* cannot be church leaders. I have known 19 year olds who have been Christians for a decade, and whose ability to teach; example in character; shepherding care and motivation to serve make them clearly ready to become church leaders. And I have known 60 year olds who have been Christians for only a year or so, who have wisely resisted the call to leadership because they are not yet ready in their young faith.

Let's close with some words from Hebrews 13, from vv.7 and 17. These verses sum up the role that our leaders have amongst us - teaching, providing an example, overseeing our walk with Jesus, and being motivated by the work that they do. But these words also address *all* of us in the church, instructing us in how we are to respond to the leaders we call to lead us...

'Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. *Consider* the outcome of their way of life and *imitate* their faith... *Obey* your leaders and *submit* to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. *Obey* them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.'

Whom amongst us would you be happy to remember... imitate... obey... and submit to? Whom amongst us is able to teach, live out an example of faith for life, shepherd us caringly, and be motivated only by all of that work for our sakes?

Pray about it. Think about it. Talk about it. But whatever else we do - for all our sakes - let's have *God* lead us in all this, as we follow His instructions for calling His leaders in His church.

Silent Reflection - Who passes the T-E-S-T?