

Discussion Questions

School of the Shepherds 103

Lesson 1: Introduction

1. Read carefully [1 Timothy 3:1](#). Break up the verse into its grammatical components (e.g. “This is a true saying”). Then explain the meaning of each component (phrases, clauses, sentences). Finally, write out an expanded, creative paraphrase of the whole verse in your own words, demonstrating that you grasp its meaning. Example: “There is a special principle circulating among the first Christians, and I agree that it is a true, irrefutable thing: ‘If any man within the local church truly desires from the heart the functioning of an overseer, that is, an elder, he desires a praiseworthy, excellent, noble work.’”
2. [Titus 1:5](#) is a very important verse for our study of biblical eldership. As in the above exercise, read it carefully, break it into its grammatical components, explain the meaning of each component, and write out an expanded, creative paraphrase. Example: “Titus, there is a specific reason I left you behind on the Island of Crete. It is this: set in order for each of the churches the organizational things that I was not able to complete when there, things that are still lacking in the churches at this time. Specifically do this: appoint qualified elders in the churches that are in each city. Be careful to do this in the way I direct you to act.”
3. Read [Titus 1:5](#) and [1:10-12](#). In between these two passages, Paul lists the qualifications for elders. These two passages supply reasons that qualified elders are so important. Identify those reasons.
4. Why is it helpful that we understand the historical background of each of our three key passages ([1 Tim. 3](#); [Titus 1](#); [1 Peter 5](#)) on the qualifications?
5. Before you begin the detailed study of the qualifications, read thoroughly the four passages that directly deal with the qualifications for local church shepherd ([1 Tim. 3:1-7](#); [Titus 1:5-10](#); [1 Peter 5:1-4](#); and [Acts 20:28](#)). Now read this important observation from the text for this topic: “A *too-stringent* compliance requirement may *disqualify* every potential shepherd. On the other hand, taking these qualifications *too loosely* can *hinder the work of the Spirit* greatly.” Given that probably every authentically qualified elder will fall short at some time in his life in at least one of these areas of qualification, why is it crucial that we still take these qualifications seriously?
6. Since none of us is perfect, and we all have our blind spots, character flaws, and eccentricities, how do we explain that a person *can* still qualify for pastoral eldership?

Lesson 2: Desire

1. Demonstrate that Spirit-driven desire (voluntary, eager) is an indispensable quality in pastoral oversight with concrete examples from your current ministry service. Describe specific opportunities you could not have carried out without Spirit-given desire and willingness.

2. All church leaders naturally become tired and need a break at times. Is there a difference between becoming periodically tired (even discouraged) in your service for the Lord, and losing that essential eagerness to serve? Explain the differences and the practical ways that help you maintain a spirit of eagerness throughout your service as an elder.
3. Not all hesitations to enter into church oversight are unhealthy. Some caution is wise. List some of the natural, even healthy, hesitations, uncertainties, or doubts that potential elders in your church may face. How would you counsel potential elders dealing with such uncertainties?
4. This lesson briefly addressed the potential conflict between financial support for serving the Lord ([1 Tim. 5:17-18](#)), and the need to serve him freely, eagerly, and voluntarily ([1 Peter 5:2-3](#)). What are the visible signs that one has lost the desire and eagerness to serve as an elder but is still doing the work primarily for the sake of the perks and status?
5. What are some tangible signs that the Holy Spirit is working in your heart and mind to confirm that you should serve as a pastoral elder in your congregation?

Lesson 3: Integrity

1. Read [1 Timothy 3:7](#) (“He must have a good reputation with those outside the church”), with [Matthew 5:16](#) (“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works”), and [Matthew 6:1](#) (“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them”). Many of the elder qualifications are displayed outwardly and can be evaluated by outsiders. But does it really matter how the world evaluates us? If so, why? How can we balance our concerns about others’ opinions with a genuine desire to maintain respectability before others inside and outside the church?
2. [1 Thessalonians 2:1-12](#) is a concrete example of how Paul lived out his teaching about being above reproach and living as an example. Locate within the passage each of the six aspects of integrity in this lesson.
3. In [Acts 20:18-19](#), Paul told the Ephesian elders, “You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials.” The blessing on Paul’s ministry was related to his public example. Describe a time in your life when an exemplary reputation helped you, protected you, blessed your ministry.
4. “An overseer must be above reproach” ([1 Timothy 3:2](#)). Discuss what “above reproach” means regarding an elder’s past sins, such as immorality committed before becoming a Christian or since becoming a Christian, or a one-time “event” versus a “chronic” situation that is now past. This question always comes up when discussing the qualifications, and so it is healthy to engage the matter as soon as you consider eldership or as you mentor potential elders.

Lesson 4: Word-Oriented

1. Scripture requires that an elder or potential elder hold “fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching” ([Titus 1:9, NASB](#)). Briefly explain each phrase of this sentence. Use your own Bible translation, a commentary, or pages 235–237 of *Biblical Eldership* if you desire.

2. What are some of the specific characteristics of a man who is “able to teach,” a man who is a Holy Spirit-gifted teacher of Scripture ([Eph. 4:11](#); [1 Cor. 12:28](#))?
3. An exceptionally important passage of Scripture that every Christian teacher needs to know well and practice consistently is found in [2 Timothy 2:15](#): “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handing the word of truth” (NASB). To show that you understand the significance of this text, explain each phrase of this passage. Use your own Bible translation and even a Bible commentary for help in understanding the text better. Why are the concepts in this passage so crucial for all teachers of the Word?
4. It is vital to the local church that its elders be Word-filled, Word-controlled leaders. It is also vital to the local church that elders be able to open their Bibles and encourage, comfort, counsel, and edify fellow believers. If you cannot do this, you are not prepared to be a pastoral elder. But don’t give up! The church of Jesus Christ desperately needs more men who can exhort and comfort others in sound doctrine. Based on all we have already learned from our study, what do you now need to do to prepare yourself to become this kind of servant, who can exhort and comfort God’s people in sound doctrine? What will happen to our Bible-believing churches if we do not have Christian men who know the Bible and are exhorting and comforting others with the doctrines of Scripture?
5. Why does the Scripture require every single elder to be “able” to “refute those who contradict” sound teaching? List several reasons. Consider [Acts 20:28–31](#). What can you do to prepare yourself to protect the sheep from wolves? How can you train yourself so that you are able to spot false teaching and successfully refute it? The church of Jesus Christ desperately needs more men who can refute false teachers and keep the church sound in doctrine. Will you be one of those men? Pray about this urgent matter.
6. Read and meditate on [Luke 10:38–42](#). List as many lessons from this passage as you can for your own personal life. This is a very important passage of Scripture. What does “only one thing is necessary” mean? How would you apply it to yourself?

Lesson 5: Family

Unlike any other time in human history, modern Western society is confused about marriage and gender. So it is essential that Bible-believing Christians know God’s design for marriage. From the beginning, the Creator intended marriage to be:

- A “one flesh” relationship between one man and one woman; a monogamous, heterosexual union ([Gen. 2:18–25](#); [Matt. 19:4–6](#)).
- A sacred, covenant relationship witnessed by God himself ([Mal. 2:13–16](#); [Matt. 19:6](#)).
- A permanent union ([Matt. 19:6](#); [Rom. 7:2](#)).
- A sexual union for the procreation of the human race and intimate pleasure of the man and the woman in a loving, marital relationship ([1 Cor. 7:2–5](#)).
- An exclusive relationship; “no other human relationship must interfere” ([1 Thess. 4:2–8](#); [Heb. 13:4](#)).
- A relationship symbolic of the relationship between Christ and his church ([Eph. 5:25–32](#)).

In his book *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, Andreas J. Köstenberger defines biblical marriage: “The biblical concept of marriage is best described as a covenant, *a sacred bond between a man and a woman, instituted by and publicly entered into before God (whether or not this is acknowledged by the married couple), normally consummated by sexual intercourse*” ([Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010], 78). This book clarifies marital and family issues from a biblical perspective. It assists in answering many common marital and family questions.

1. Using the above material, what aspect of God’s choice and beautiful design for marriage has new significance for you?
2. Most of today’s biblical scholars agree that the rare, unusual phrase “the husband of one wife” is a Pauline idiom emphasizing the positive virtue of fidelity in marriage, marital faithfulness. What do you think it is so critically important about this characteristic that it heads the two lists of requirements for biblical elders, immediately after the general, overarching qualification “above reproach”? (See [1 Tim. 3:2](#) and [Titus 1:6](#).)
3. Why do you think it is absolutely essential to the inner spiritual life and the external witness of the church that a pastoral elder’s marital and sexual life be “above reproach”? Specifically, what happens to the church that does not enforce the biblical requirement that an elder be “the husband of one wife,” that is, he exhibits marital faithfulness?
4. Some think the nature of how a man manages his own household and children is a private matter, not one for public examination and discussion ([1 Tim. 3:4–5](#)). How would you counter this?
5. In the two lists of qualifications for a pastoral elder, managing one’s children is stressed as a condition for office ([1 Tim. 3:4–5](#); [Titus 1:6](#)). What does the behavior of his children living at home tell you about a man’s leadership and future eldership?
6. Christian fathers are instructed to not provoke their children to anger ([Eph. 6:4](#); [Col. 3:21](#)). In what specific ways can a father unnecessarily “provoke” his children to anger? Why does it matter if a father acts unreasonably toward his children?

Lesson 6: Personal – 1

1. Several elder qualifications concern his temperament. A man’s temperament is critical in his leadership in the church, and in his dealings with people and problems. What qualifications express an elder’s temperament (disposition, personality, character, frame of mind)? What kind of temperament does God expect and forbid in those who shepherd his people?
2. The elder qualifications strongly emphasize an elder or elder candidate being self-controlled. Name some positive reasons why God requires this quality in a leader of his church. What problems will arise if a church leader has little personal self-control or self-discipline?
3. William Hendriksen explains being a “lover of good” ([Titus 1:8](#)) as being “ready to do what is beneficial to others” (*Pastoral Epistles*, p. 348). The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* states: “According to the interpretation of the early Church, it relates to [the] unwearyingly activity of love” (vol. 1, p. 18). (For more information, see *Biblical Eldership*, pp. 233–34.) Specifically, what would a church leader actually do for others that would demonstrate that he is a lover of good?

Lesson 7: Personal – 2

1. The elder must not be a new convert ([1 Tim. 3:6](#)). Toward the end of his ministry, after he had seen many people appointed to the Lord's work, Paul warned, "Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others" ([1 Tim. 5:22, NASB](#)). Reflecting on your own church ministry, identify specific scenarios in which it would have been unwise for a new believer to have had a decisive role. If responsible to cope with, even lead in, such situations, how could a new believer actually cause himself harm, or cause disgrace to fall on the church?
2. An elder *cannot* have a drinking problem ([1 Tim. 3:3](#)). In most cases, the eldership will most likely deal with what is called a "closet alcoholic" or a "high-functioning alcoholic" (see "Six Signs That You Are a High Functioning Alcoholic," <https://www.ashwoodrecovery.com/blog/six-signs-high-functioning-alcoholic/>). How would you identify an elder or elder candidate who is a "closet alcoholic," or a "high-functioning alcoholic," a man thus not qualified to be a shepherd elder? How would you "care front" such a person?
3. A church official can steal money outright from the congregation's offerings, particularly if they are in cash. But in most cases of misappropriation, church funds are cleverly, and even legally, used by a church official for his own profit and selfish desires. By what subtle means can a church leader accomplish this? What simple principles and procedures can guide us in protecting our local churches from misappropriation of church monies?

Lesson 8: Relational – 1

1. In [3 John 9-10](#), the apostle John wrote about the church leader, Diotrephes, whose style of leadership had quite a few unscriptural aspects. Describe these, and the lessons the elder needs to draw from his example, in order to avoid similar attitudes and behaviors.
2. It is very easy for a church leader to hide sinful argumentativeness, harshness, anger, arrogance, and abuse of authority behind the mask of his supposed zeal for God's truth and his God-given authority as an elder. How does the important instruction in [2 Timothy 2:23-26](#) correct such misuse of authority and misguided obstinacy?

Lesson 9: Relational – 2

1. What are some of the characteristics of the "self-willed," or "arrogant," church leader?
2. What are some of the characteristics of the "quarrelsome" church leader?
3. What are some of the characteristics of the "quick-tempered," angry church leader? What consequences are evident in the church that has an elder who is a "quick-tempered" leader?

Lesson 10: Free from Pornography – 1

1. How can you as a church leader make it easier for the people to approach you with their struggle with pornography?
2. What plans must church leaders teach "the whole counsel of God," which includes teaching on protecting against pornography?

Lesson 11: Free from Pornography – 2

1. Explain the phrase, “Put on your oxygen mask before assisting others.” What does it mean to you as a church leader? And what does it entail?
2. Explain the phrase, “Repent and good intent is not enough; one must prevent.” How does it apply in the fight against pornography?
3. Explain Warren Wiersbe’s phrase that victory over sin is “through incarnation, not imitation.” How can you encourage someone with the truth of this statement?
4. When is the time, or what are the circumstances, of greatest temptation in this area for you?

Lesson 12: Free from Pornography – 3

1. Explain why the gentleness of the shepherd is important to a broken and contrite sheep.
2. Explain Alvin Cooper’s three-step process in a way that is relevant to you and to the members of your local church.
3. Discuss how movies or videos can desensitize Christians to pornography. State your position on being selective when consuming digital media.
4. Select one of the following resources, peruse the site, and then report back to your mentor or mentor group what you discovered: A) Covenant Eyes is a comprehensive ministry that provides a wealth of resources and help in dealing with internet pornography—it is more than just a filter. B) Pure Life Ministries has been a pioneer in dealing with sexual addiction and its consequences for 30 years now. During that span of time thousands of people have found freedom through our counseling programs and teaching materials.