

EXCELLENCE IN MINISTRY

Starting Strong—Doing What’s Right in the Work of Ministry

Checklist for Choosing Church Leaders

1 Timothy 3:1–7



LET’S BEGIN HERE

God doesn’t always spell out things in stark, “thou shalt” terms. He did in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17; Deuteronomy 5:6–21), but most of God’s Word is filled with stories, prophecies, proverbs, psalms, and biographies. When we get to the epistle of 1 Timothy, however, we discover virtually a whole chapter devoted to a black-and-white list requiring little interpretation but a lot of application. In 1 Timothy 3:1–7, Paul put his finger on the essential qualities God looks for in overseers—qualities as applicable for church leaders in the twenty-first century as they were in the first century. We’ll look at the first two verses in this message and the last five in the next message.



LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. Erroneous Methods of Selecting Church Leaders

Organizations tend to take on the personality of the person at the top. Leadership is expressed through individual action, and action is rooted in values, and values color and control what is championed in the organization. This is why the selection of church leaders, especially those for the highest office of overseer, is so important. Unfortunately, some churches fail to turn to Scripture to find out what God requires of His leaders. Instead, these churches rely on four erroneous methods—four “Ps”— to select leaders.

- First, *popularity* motivates congregations to select and retain leaders.
- Second, *posterity* compels congregations to stick to those who are tried-and-true.
- Third, *politics* persuades congregations to elect leaders who are well connected.
- Fourth, *prosperity* sells congregations a bill of goods.



Quotable

*A church lives
because its people
are spiritually
alive. A church dies
because its people
are spiritually dead.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. Checklist for Selecting Church Leaders (1 Timothy 3:1–2)

Churches that select leaders based on the four “Ps” mentioned above have not read and obeyed the Word of God. In 1 Timothy 3:1–7, the Lord created His own rules for church leaders. And all leaders in high office who wish to serve God’s people must follow these rules.



GETTING TO THE ROOT

The Noble Task of Overseeing God’s Church

The Greek word translated “overseer” is *episkopos*. In reference to church leaders, it occurs five times in the New Testament (Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1, 2; Titus 1:7). According to one scholar, “the word came originally from secular life, referring to the foreman of a construction gang, or the supervisor of building construction.”¹

The word *overseer* is often interchanged with *elder* (*presbyteroi*), especially when both words appear in the same letter (1 Timothy 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5). Nevertheless, each word carries its own nuance. The term *elder* portrays leaders from the perspective of *position*—older men in the church, who have the wisdom and experience to lead the church. The term *overseer* portrays leaders from the perspective of *function*—men who were to superintend, exercise authority over, or care for the spiritual life of the church.

The position of overseer required one to teach and preach (1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17), to direct the affairs of the church (3:5; 5:17), and to shepherd (or “pastor”) the flock of God (Acts 20:28). And any man who desires such a position is worthy of praise (1 Timothy 3:1).

Above Reproach

The Husband of One Wife

Temperate

Prudent



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Respectable

Hospitable

Able to Teach



LET’S LIVE IT

Whether or not churches admit it, when it comes to selecting overseers, many place more weight on the four “Ps” than they do on the seven spiritual qualities found in 1 Timothy 3:1–2. Those churches shouldn’t be surprised when their spiritual vitality drains away. Nor should they be shocked when their congregations fall into bitterness, finger pointing, and political intrigue. Leadership is the lifeblood of a church, and a leader’s character is the heartbeat of a church. Therefore, follow these suggestions when selecting leaders.

Be careful.

Be realistic.

Be aware.

How does your church select leaders?

ENDNOTE

1. Kenneth S. Wuest, “The Pastoral Epistles in the Greek New Testament,” in *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 52.



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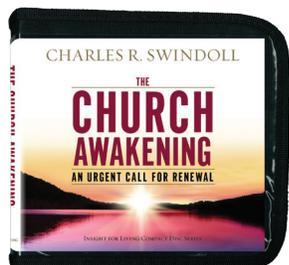
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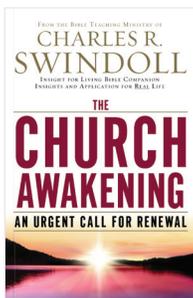
1 Timothy 3:1–7



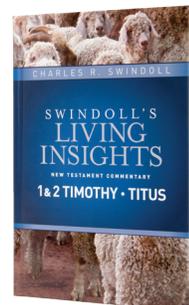
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