

YOU: Connect. Grow. Serve. Go!
Winter 2018-19 Leader Commentary



Unit 2: What Matters Most
Session 2: Character Counts (see pp. 128-131)

The Question: What's the big deal about character?

The Point: I must develop character so God can use me.

Background Passage: 1 Timothy 3:1-16

Focal Passage: 1 Timothy 3:1-3,7-11,14-15

This commentary is designed to help you think about the question, "What's the big deal about character?" and drive home this one truth: I must develop character so God can use me.

Focus These Points

Character Counts for Leading
(1 Tim. 3:1-3, 7)

Paul understood that the church could not operate without both leaders and laity who took character seriously. Therefore, he took a large portion of his letter to Timothy to instruct his younger disciple in the importance of developing godly leaders within the church who had high character. If the leaders did not have character, it would adversely affect those who were not in leadership, and all Christians were called to be people of character.

Paul's second trustworthy saying, "If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble work," reflected the need for good, strong character in church leaders. The high level of morality to be demonstrated by the overseer sets an example for the members of the church. Followers seldom rise above their leaders. Church leaders model character before the members. If overseers set the bar high by living Christlike lives, other believers in the church are more likely to also strive for that standard.

Paul listed fifteen characteristics that should mark the life of a person who aspired to serve as a leader and commended the people who desired such a work. He described it as "a noble work," and he looked for the overseer to be "above reproach" or blameless. Certainly, Paul did not mean the overseer had to be perfect. As people mature in the Christian life, however, they naturally pattern their lives after the life of Jesus. Thus, the pastor should live in such a way that no one can attack his character. A person living above reproach exhibits the qualities described in 1 Timothy 3:2-7.

Included in the fifteen characteristics was the "husband of one wife." Differing interpretations of this qualification have been offered. Here are four possibilities: (1) An overseer should be one who maintains a faithful monogamous marriage relationship. (2) An overseer should have one wife to the exclusion of many. (3) An overseer should be married rather than single. (4) No

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divorced or remarried person should serve as an overseer. Regardless of which interpretation is chosen, the trait of marital faithfulness appears at the top of Paul's list of desired traits of an overseer.

Other characteristics included: "self-controlled" (translates the word for *sober*, not under the influence of alcohol), "sensible" (indicates a similar concept), "respectable" (indicates a person whose behavior is appropriate at all times), "hospitable," and "good reputation among outsiders."

The truth of verse 7 is clear today—leaders must have, and maintain, a good reputation outside the church. Paul's challenge to Timothy, and believers aspiring to leadership, is to aspire to be more in life.

Character Counts for Serving (1 Tim. 3:8-11)

In verse 8, Paul turned his focus to the servants of the church, the deacons. The Greek term translated *deacon* is *diakonos* and means "messenger, minister, or servant." While the character trait qualities that Paul mentions in verses 8-10 mirror those listed for the role of the pastor or bishop, they are intended to be distinct references for a different role of service. The role of deacons in the New Testament church centered around table service, specifically that of distributing the elements for the Lord's Supper. In addition, the deacons served in much of the ongoing functions of the church.

Verses 8-10 identify that deacons must be worthy of respect, not "hypocritical" but rather controlling their speech, guarding themselves from the harmful effects of intoxication, not greedy for money, have a "clear conscience," and be "tested." These are the types of people a church would want to have in service. In verse 11, Paul also gave some character traits for the wives of those who served. They, too, were to live upright lives worthy of respect. One commentary writer states that "Paul was always concerned that followers of Christ, particularly those associated with church leadership, demonstrate a life in which the Spirit was working."

Character Counts for All (1 Tim. 3:14-15)

That Paul wrote "these things" emphasizes the importance of these words about character and leadership. The obvious intent was that the letter be read to the church at Ephesus as instruction to the whole congregation. Paul hoped to visit the Ephesian church soon to confront the false teachers who caused confusion in the church. He preferred a face-to-face meeting with them, but if that couldn't happen, at least his opinion on the matter would be before the church in the form of this letter.

Paul acknowledged that he might be delayed in visiting the church. He wrote to help the believers know how people who are part of the church ought to act. He described the church as "God's household." Christians are part of the family of God regardless of gender, age, and race. Paul's description of the church as a household of faith implies it was intended to be a place that exemplifies somewhere that all people feel acceptance and love.

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The church is further described as “the church of the living God.” The living God manifests Himself in the lives of those who make up His church. God lives in church members through the indwelling Holy Spirit. The church should be a place of warmth and refuge—the type of environment a family provides. We are to be a family of faith. The church also is called “the pillar and foundation of the truth.” The church protects the truth of the gospel by making it the mission and purpose of the church. Our character—the way we live, act, talk, and interact with others—all matter when it comes to representing our Lord and Savior to a lost and dying world. This is a foundational aspect in God using us both within the church and within the community.

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