

Elders and Deacons

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[0:00] 1 Timothy 3 and the first 13 verses. Here is a trustworthy saying.

! If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.! Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.

[1:28] They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested, and then, if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers, but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

You all know that we have elders and deacons here at Grace Fellowship Church. Have you ever wondered why?

Many things we seem to take for granted. Things have always been this way, and so they always will be this way. That's just how it is.

[2:36] Kids assume that there will always be food on the table and clothes in their closet because it's always been that way. And they may begin to take for granted the hard work that dad and mom do to put that food on the table and the clothes in the closet.

Another way of taking things for granted is to not think about why they are that way. You know that if you turn on the faucet in your kitchen that water is going to come out.

And you probably never even think about it. You just do it because it's always been that way. You don't think about what it takes to get the water there, a water treatment plant, the pipes that deliver that water, the physics that keep the water in the faucet until you turn it on so that the water comes out until you have a leaky faucet.

Then you think about it. But we take those sort of things for granted. And I think oftentimes we take the church for granted in that way. It's always been this way. We have elders. We have deacons.

And that's how it is. And we don't, maybe, as often as we should, think about why. I don't think many people here are guilty of taking their pastors and deacons for granted in the sense that they don't appreciate the work that they do and the effort that they expend.

[3:54] Your expressions of love and prayer tell me otherwise. But I wonder if sometimes we don't just assume there have always been elders and deacons and not think about why that is the case.

And so tonight we want to take a few moments to consider those two offices in the church. Pastors, or as they're called here in 1 Timothy 3, overseers and deacons.

We're not going to dig into all these requirements here tonight. We're just going to consider the two offices from the Scriptures, from some of the verses here and from elsewhere in the New Testament. Next time we're going to be getting into the requirements of those offices.

And I want to set these truths before us so that we might know how the church runs, so that we might pray better for our elders and deacons, to encourage some others here, perhaps, to think about whether or not God might be calling them to serve the church in this way.

And just to clarify, by focusing on elders and deacons tonight, I don't mean to disparage the work that everyone else in the church does. Much service is done by people in the church who are not elders and deacons, but the text tonight brings us to elders and deacons.

[5:06] And so we're going to focus on them tonight as we consider some of these truths. You'll remember that Paul was talking about sins to avoid and roles to fulfill.

We saw that last week in chapter 2. And one of the roles for men to fulfill in the church is teaching. Teaching the others in the church. And just so everybody understands, Paul says, not everyone is cut out to be a teacher.

And that's why he launches into this discussion in chapter 3. Here are some of the qualifications of an overseer in the church. And that's what brings us to this point tonight. And so we're going to focus especially on verses 1 and 13 tonight.

It's the beginning and the end of this section. And verse 1 is about elders or overseers. And verse 13 about deacons. And we'll see two simple things tonight.

We need overseers or pastors or shepherds or elders. I'm going to use those terms interchangeably tonight. And we'll see why tonight.

[6:09] Because the Bible uses them interchangeably. So we need pastors. And secondly, we need deacons. And that's how God has ordained it to be in the church. God has ordained two office bearers in the church.

Elder and deacon. And those two and no others in the church to lead the church. Some would argue that there should be no formal leadership in the church.

There shouldn't be any. It's just the people. And we don't need officers in the church. Well, passages like this very clearly tell us otherwise. In fact, the word in verse 1 is the office of overseer. Here is a trustworthy saying. If anyone sets his heart on the office of overseer. It's a different word than the word in verse 2 for overseer. It indicates the office. And there you go.

There's to be that office in the church. And it's a good thing to desire it, Paul says. It's a noble task. A good work. And deacons as well are to be an office in the church.

[7:12] And so those who say there should be no offices in the church, no formal leadership, are mistaken. They don't look at all the biblical references that we're going to see tonight. Then there are others who say there should be more than two offices in the church.

There should be teaching elders. And there should be ruling elders. And there should be deacons. And then over the churches, there should be bishops. And presbyters. And all of these other offices. A hierarchy over the church.

That doesn't find warrants in the New Testament either. There are just two offices. And we hope to see why that is tonight. So we'll start with the overseers. Who are they? And what do they do?

They have, we've indicated, several titles in the scriptures that are parallel. Each one has a different connotation and indicates a slightly different part of the pastor's work. But they all refer to the same office in the church.

And these overseers, these pastors, these elders, in the beginning and still today were representatives of the apostles' authority. You read through Acts and the letters in the New Testament.

[8:13] You find that wherever a church was established, the apostles appointed elders in the church. Or they encouraged the church to appoint elders. Or one of the representatives to appoint elders in the church.

And these elders held a role of teaching and leadership in the church. They weren't apostles. They were just the original apostles. They didn't appoint more apostles. Here's another apostle for this church.

But they simply couldn't be in every church, in every place, all the time. And so they appointed men to lead these churches in their absence. And so came the office of elder and overseer.

They oversaw the work in the church in the absence of those elders. It's overseers. That's the first word. And it's the word here in 1 Timothy 3. They watch over the church. They lead it.

They guide it. They seek to protect it. Overseers in Christ's church teach the pattern of sound doctrine that's recorded in the Scriptures. They guard that apostolic tradition that's been handed

down.

[9:13] They teach what the apostles taught. We don't need new apostles. We don't need new revelation. We've got the apostles in the Scriptures. We've got the elders' jobs to teach what they taught and to faithfully represent that teaching in the church.

Overseers are also Jesus' representatives in the church. 1 Peter 2.25 says, For you are like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

Jesus is the great overseer. And shepherds, elders in the church are his overseers. As Jesus watches over his church, big church, universal church, he's appointed overseers to watch over particular local congregations where he has placed them.

Another word. There's overseer. There's also shepherd. This is where we get our term for pastor. Pastoral care. Shepherding care.

In Acts 20. You don't have to turn there, but in Acts 20. Paul calls for the Ephesian elders. And we'll get to that word in a second. But he calls for them. And then he says to them in verse 28.

[10:21] 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.

And there in that passage, we get all three of them. Elders, overseers, and shepherds. All in one. Same office. Three different names for it. And as shepherds, what are they to do? Well, they're to do what Christ did as the chief shepherd, Peter calls him.

They lead. They feed the flock. They feed their people. They protect them from attacks. From outside. From false teachers. From those who would divide the church.

From within. They guide them. They bring back those who have strayed. They warn them. They pray for their sheep. They bring their sheep safely into the fold. That's what a shepherd does.

And so do pastors for their people. It takes place in the preaching of the Word. Right now, preaching is shepherding the flock. It takes place in conversations in the foyer.

[11:20] It takes place over meals. In one another's homes. It takes place in shepherding visits. When we come to your home and seek to learn more of what's going on in your life.

And encourage you. Learn about your struggles and your joy. So that we can better pray for you and minister to you. Shepherds. Shepherd. That's obvious. But they take care of their flock like a shepherd does for his sheep.

So they oversee. They shepherd. And third term that's used is elders. We've already noticed the passage in Acts. Where Paul calls them elders. He calls the elders and names them as overseers and shepherds.

When he writes to Titus. He uses those terms together. He tells Titus to appoint elders in every town. And then he gives the qualifications for overseers. In the church. They're in parallel.

Or 1 Peter 5. To the elders among you. I appeal as a fellow elder. A witness of Christ's sufferings. And one who will share in the glory to be revealed. Be shepherds of God's flock that are under your care.

[12:20] Serving as overseers. There's all three of them again together. To the elders. Be shepherds. Serving as overseers. The elders. Not of necessity.

Older than everyone in the congregation. That would be pretty difficult to do. But they occupy a position of authority and respect in the church. Due to their office. And their fitness for that office. The task of elders to preach. To teach. To pray for their people. When the early church needed additional help. With other matters in the church in Acts 6.

And we'll look at this later. They appointed deacons. So that the apostles then could continue. In the prayer and the ministry of the word. That's what elders are to give themselves to.

But notice what Paul says here in verse 1. Here's a trustworthy saying. If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer. He desires a noble task. Or a good work.

[13:20] We have elders in the church. Or overseers. Or shepherds. And what they do, Paul says, is a good work. It's a noble task. First of all, notice that it's work.

It's not a job for someone that's going to be lazy. It requires effort. Listen to what John Calvin says. It's no light matter to be a representative of the Son of God.

And discharging an office of such magnitude. The object of which is to erect and extend the kingdom of God. To procure the salvation of souls. Which the Lord Himself hath purchased with His own blood.

And to govern the church, which is God's inheritance. It's work to do those things. And it is a good work. A noble task. To do all the things that we've talked about. That fall to elders and overseers and shepherds.

It's hard. Sobering labor. Not always easy to keep up. And this is, relatively speaking, a small congregation. Compare it to some.

[14 : 19] Compare it to others. It's large. With a hundred plus members. To keep up with them and their families. Knowing what is going on in their lives. Praying for them. Seeking to minister to them. It's not always easy to prepare fresh.

And applicable. And faithful. And enjoyable sermons each week. Sermons that are easy to listen to. That are easy to stay awake during.

And hard to fall asleep during. It's not always easy work for a pastor to do. It's not easy knowing the sins and struggles of your sheep. As you help them through those struggles. There's work to be done in praying. And administering.

And teaching. And organizing Sunday school. And funerals that are unexpected. And weddings that you have a little bit more time to plan for. And counseling. And shepherding business. And all these things that a pastor does. There's work to be done.

It is hard work. It requires effort. It's work, he says. Paul puts it this way when he writes to the church at Corinth. 2 Corinthians 11. Besides everything else. I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

[15 : 20] Who is weak? And I do not feel weak. Who is led into sin? And I do not inwardly burn. Now pastors today just have one church to look after. A whole bunch of them. To consider.

But just one can provide great pressure. It requires work. I'm not telling you this so you feel bad for us. Oh poor elders. But here's what he's saying. It's work. And it's a good work that is to be done. Fulfilling the office of overseer is a noble task. Good work. Some might have a negative view of the ministry. You think ministers are lazy. They work one day a week. They don't really do anything. Maybe you've had that view before. Paul says no, it's work. Or maybe some don't have that sort of negative view. You don't think ministers are lazy. But there's no way that you would ever want that sort of responsibility.

That pressure. That work. Too demanding. Too stressful. Though there are high standards for entering the ministry in its difficult work. It is a good work.

[16 : 22] And God calls men to that work. And he puts a desire in men's hearts for that work. And he holds it forth for our consideration as something that is good and noble and worthy of our aspiration.

If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a good work. It's worthy of wanting. Why is it a good work?

It's something that almost in some ways can't be described. To be an instrument in the hands of God.

And that's really all we are. It's a jar of clay. An earthen vessel. A pot. A vessel through which God works. No minister is fit to do this work in and of himself.

His sufficiency can only come from Christ. And what a privilege it is to be used of God to provide for the needs of his people. Oh, it's good to see that. What a privilege to see one of your sheep.

[17 : 20] One of the flock who struggled with sin. And to be able to come alongside them and be used of God to bring them back. What a blessed thing to see sinners convicted. And then converted.

Under your ministry. And then you know that it's a good work. How blessed to see God's power displayed in weakness. What a blessing to see a congregation that doesn't just come on Sundays and listen.

But they take what they hear on Sundays. And they go and they live it out. In their lives throughout the week. And then you see that it's a good work. A rewarding work.

Wonderful thing to see saints loving one another. And ministering to one another. Having been so equipped by the ministry and the church. It's a good work. And it fills ministers with joy.

If you think the ministry is anything less than something joyful. Then forgive me for not portraying it as such. If you watch some ministers. You walk away. Only with an appreciation that the ministry is work.

[18:20] And hard work. And they're always stooped under the pressure of it. And it shows in their countenance. And that is true. But if that's all you ever see. From a minister.

Then something is missing. Because it's a good work. You should be able to tell from watching faithful ministers. That they love it. That it's a good noble task that they're doing. Somebody has told me more than once.

And I'm not going to tell you who it is. That I don't smile enough when I preach. That I need to smile more. And okay. There. There's one. There's one. They're not.

Well I shouldn't say that. Anyway. But you should be able to tell. That a minister loves what he does. That it's a good work.

That it brings him great joy. And I can say. That ministering here. Is a joy. It's a joy to minister where sheep make the job joyful.

[19:21] Where people come hungry. And ready to hear God's word. It's easy to preach to people like that. It's a joy to do so. To see them taking those things. As we've said.

And putting them to practice in your life. It is truly a good work. And you should be able to see that in the minister. I grew up in the house of a pastor. And I had an opportunity to see the good and the bad.

And the ugly sides of ministry. Because my dad was a pastor. And I saw all of that. And it was obvious to me that the ministry was work. But it was also obvious to me.

That it was a good work. I'm very thankful that I had a good example in my father. Obviously. Obvious from watching him. That it was a joy.

I didn't grow up disillusioned with the prospect of ministry. Because of what I had seen in my home. I was rather drawn to it by what I saw. I knew that it was a good work.

[20:16] And I hope you see it like I saw it in my house. It's something that's good. Something that is worth aspiring after. A good work. It's not to say that every child that grows up in a minister's home.

That doesn't become a pastor. Doesn't think the work is a good work. Or that was negatively portrayed in that pastor's home. Not everyone is called to the ministry. What a blessed thing. To be able to grow up and to see it. To know that it's a joy. To know that it's a good work. You all should know that it's a good work. To be a minister of the gospel.

Matthew Henry says it this way. It is a good work. A work of the greatest importance. And designed for the greatest good. The ministry is about no lower concerns than the life and happiness of immortal souls.

It is a good work because it's designed to illustrate the divine perfections. And bringing many sons to glory. The ministry is appointed to open men's eyes. And to turn them from darkness to light.

[21:17] And from the power of Satan unto God. Oh, that's a good work, isn't it? To see men saved. And then to see them walking on their way to glory. Does anyone here aspire to that work?

Does anyone here desire that work? It's a faithful saying. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer. He desires a good work. Will you men take that faithful saying to heart?

And at least consider whether or not God has put that desire in your heart. To do the work of the ministry. It's worth aspiring after.

There are some things, Scripture tells us, that are worth longing for. That are worth, literally, the Word is reaching. Stretching out for. So that you might lay hold of it. Right here, it's translated, setting your heart on it.

But in Hebrews, those who were of faith before us, set their heart on it. They reached out for it. They stretched out for a better, a heavenly country. That's something worth striving for.

[22:20] Worth aspiring to. There are things, the Scripture tells us, that are not worth striving after. In 1 Timothy 6, we're going to see that money is not worth striving after. Reaching for. Grasping for.

Being eager for. That's not worth it. But one of the things that Scripture tells us is worth striving after. That it is a worthy goal. Is the work of the ministry. And so I wonder if some of you men, and some of you young men, and older men, have considered that.

Now, only God can call men to that work. But has He put even an inkling of that desire in your heart?

Maybe you've suppressed it. Thinking it's too hard of a job. There's not enough money in it. Or whatever. But let me tell you that you will be a miserable person. If you ignore a call from God to the ministry.

It is not a desire to be shunned and put away. It is welcome. It is a good work. You should desire it. If God has put that desire there. Now, the desire alone is not enough.

[23 : 22] You must be qualified for the work. And so, you have the desire. And then, God gives you that. It's the inward call. And then the church confirms it. And that's one of the reasons we have 1 Timothy 3.

Here's how we know who's qualified for the work of the ministry. But it starts with that inward desire. It starts with what God puts in your heart. And then the church can validate that claim.

And say, no, it doesn't look as though you're cut out for the work of the ministry. And so, as we look at these characteristics. Feel some of that desire in your heart. Start looking and seeing. Is that me? Not in a proud sort of way. Yep. Okay. No problem. Buff approach. Got that. Temperate. Good. Self-controlled. Mostly. Not in a proud sort of way. It's like a checklist where you just go through. But humbly. Look at that list. Pray over it. Think, has God put these things in my heart? Has He made me a person like that? And see if the church is able to confirm it.

[24 : 22] That's a good work to desire and set your heart on. Don't write it off out of hand. Don't say, you know what? I'm never going to consider the ministry. See if God would put that desire in your heart.

May God raise up from our midst those who would be willing to humbly consider whether or not God might call them to this noble task. It's good work. We need pastors.

We need men in the ministry. Jesus tells us to pray for laborers in the harvest. And Paul tells us, God tells us through the Apostle Paul that if you aspire to this work, it is a good work to which you aspire.

It's a good thing to desire. Strong desire is the word that's used there. He desires. He longs for a noble task. May God do His good work then in our hearts through His word, raising up people even from this congregation that would serve Him.

It's a good work. Knowing that, having considered just a little bit about who pastors are, what they do, that is a good work.

[25 : 30] I just want to ask you one question, and that is, do you pray for your pastors? For the ones that you currently have? I know that you do. You tell us that you do.

But having seen it, we must be encouraged to pray all the more for them. It is a good work, but it is a difficult work. It is a weighty work. For the pastors that you have now, Pastor John, Pastor Bob, myself, do you pray that God would help us every day to live up to these qualifications in 1 Timothy 3?

Do you pray that He would make us faithful ministers of His word? Do you pray that He would make us faithful shepherds of the flock? Do you pray that He would make us holy men whose lives match what we preach?

We need those prayers. We're unable to do this apart from the strength, the power of God. Our sufficiency comes only from Christ, and so do you pray, asking that we would be given help in large measure?

Do you pray that God would be preparing future pastors and overseers for this church? Do you know that we won't live forever?

[26 : 40] We won't. Bob Heaney and John Heaney and Aaron Hoke will not always be the pastors of Grace Fellowship Church. We sometimes don't like to think about those things, but that's the fact.

That's the reality of the matter. Five and a half years ago, Aaron Hoke wasn't one of the pastors of Grace Fellowship Church. Now you have another. Do you pray for future elders in this church? That God would raise them up from our own midst? That He would bring us the right men? We're not going to live forever. Maybe the Lord will send us to the mission field.

Do you pray that God would provide elders for the church? Because it's a good thing for church to have elders. You know, there are churches that don't have any pastors. And there are some churches that only have one pastor. And the biblical norm is a plurality of elders.

We don't have time to dig into that tonight. What a blessing that we have that here. We've got more than one. Do you pray that God would keep it that way? That He would sustain us? That He would always provide for us in this way?

[27 : 43] It is a noble task and worthy of our prayers. So we need pastors. And secondly tonight, and more briefly, we need deacons.

This is the second God-ordained office that God has given to His church. Well, who are deacons and what do they do? The word, very simply, is the word for servant.

They are those who serve. Here in verse 8, they are named deacons, likewise to be men worthy of respect, and so on, given qualifications of their own, similar to the elders that precede them in the passage.

And they are servants. They are office bearers in the church. And it is another formal office that God has given His church. You see it here.

Here there's elders, qualifications for them, and there's deacons and qualifications given for them. When Paul writes to the Philippian church, he writes, Paul and Timothy, the servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons.

[28:49] The two offices that are to be held in the church. It becomes clear to us when we look at Acts 6, and we'll look there in a moment, that this was an office that was appointed in the church by God.

Now the word for deacon, for servants, used more often in the generic sense of just servant, but sometimes it does have this more technical sense of deacon, an office in the church.

They are servants, and they serve the church. And keep your finger in 1 Timothy 3 and turn over with me for just a moment to Acts 6, that we might get an idea of who the deacons are and what their role is in the church.

Acts 6. This is where we see this office being instituted in the New Testament. Notice the first six verses with me.

In those days, when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

[29:55] So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, it would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word in order to wait on tables. And that word wait there is our word serve. To deacon.

To serve tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them.

And we'll give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word. You see the division of labor. We want some men that will be able to take over this distribution of the food so that we can give ourselves to prayer and ministry of the Word.

A division of roles in the church between deacons or elders and now this new office of deacon.

Verse 5, This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.

Also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid their hands on them.

[30:54] That's an ordination that we see there. Set apart for a particular office in the church. And you can turn back over to 1 Timothy chapter 2. But there in Acts 6, there was a need in the church.

We read this morning from Acts 4, the end of Acts chapter 4, how from time to time people would sell things and give their money to the church so that no one was in need.

And they would distribute those funds accordingly. Here or there where we were in Acts 6, it got to the point where that was occupying too much of the apostles' time and attention. So they said, we need someone that will be able to take in these funds and distribute them accordingly to serve, to wait on tables.

There was the distribution of food to these widows who were in need. And so by the time the church is established at Philippi, it's clear that it's in office to the elders and deacons at Philippi.

And by the time the church in Ephesus is established, and Timothy is there, and Paul's writing to him, he talks about the qualifications for the office of elder and then for the office of deacon as well, an established office in the church.

[32:03] And so that's who deacons are, it's where they came from, why the office was established. And so what do they do? Well, in many ways, they do what Christ came to do.

What did Christ come to do? To serve. He came to minister, to preach the word, to proclaim the truth, something that pastors do.

He also came to serve. Pastors are to be servants as well. Don't misunderstand. But deacons do what Christ came to do. Not only was he the great overseer and separate, he was a servant.

Think of Jesus washing his disciples' feet, showing compassion and mercy to those he came into contact with. The deacons are, in many ways, the arm of the church to show mercy to those who are in need, to minister compassion to those who are in need.

Their role will involve various things. It involves the finances. The men in Acts 6 were responsible for the distribution of food. From what came in, they were to distribute it.

[33:09] And so deacons today are given the task of handling the money that comes into the church and distributing it accordingly. For mundane things like the electric bill, so that we have lights tonight, and for matters of compassion and mercy to those who are in need, within our own church and in the community as well.

Our deacons are in charge of caring for the building. That's part of our assets, part of what God has given to us. And so they make sure that it's maintained, so it can be a place of worship and fellowship and service and ministry to all who enter our doors.

The ministry of mercy. The deacons in Acts 6 were taking care of these widows who were in need. And our deacons keep their finger on the pulse of the congregation, seeking to know who is in need, meeting those needs, fielding requests from our community as well for those who may be suffering and in need.

There are things that these men do, many things that go unnoticed. And if they stop doing them, all of a sudden they would be noticed. Our deacons serve.

In the weeks to come, we'll consider the qualifications for holding that office in the church. But here, just so you understand how it works at Grace Fellowship Church, our deacons divide up these things into three areas of service.

[34:30] The finances, the building, and the mercy ministry. And you all know who our deacons are? I hope you do. I think you do. There's four of them. Scott Ladig and Stan Heaney handle the mercy ministry aspect as well as many other things.

And Tim Barr oversees the building and grounds, and Chuck Cloco is our treasurer who handles the finances, pays the bills with accountability to the other deacons as well so that all is above reproach.

And you should know that there's a great blessing for deacons. And that's why we want to look at verse 13 tonight. Lest you think this is merely a lowly office of grunt work, with little appreciation. Look at how Paul wraps up this section. He begins with an incentive of sorts in verse 1, for the office of elders. It's a good task. It's worthy to be desired. And then he finishes it with some incentive for the office of deacon, and the blessing that comes with it.

Verse 13, those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. For those who serve well, they acquire for themselves a good standing and great confidence and faith in Christ Jesus.

[35:44] That's a beautiful reward. These men have attained a good standing in the eyes of God. These men who are so, I believe, underappreciated in the work that they do, because it's a work of service, and they have servants' hearts, and they wouldn't want me even to say some of the things that are being said tonight.

But you should know how much work they do. And it goes unappreciated, but not in the eyes of God. They attain an excellent standing in God's eyes.

They also have the blessing of great confidence or assurance and faith in Christ. It's not that being a deacon is an automatic ticket to glory, but rather that in order to be a deacon, you must have the heart of a servant, which is evidence of the grace of God in their lives and their faith in Christ.

You can't be a deacon without that heart of a servant, and you can't have that without faith in Christ. And so they attain a great standing and assure confidence. 1 John 2 tells us, And now, dear children, continue in Him so that when He appears, we may be confident, assured, and unashamed before Him it is coming.

The work of deacons shows that they are continuing in Him and therefore may have great confidence and faith in Christ. It's evidence of what is at work in their hearts, and so their reward is great, deservedly so.

[37:10] They have a great reward in the eyes of God. And so thank you, deacons, for your faithful labors.

It does not go entirely unappreciated. And dear people, I wish you could know how much more effective the ministry of your elders is because we have deacons to do all sorts of things, freeze our

hands to pray and to go about the ministry of the Word.

I wish you could know how effective their ministry is in the church. I started to make a list of things that our deacons do, and I don't even know if I should read it or not because I've left hundreds of things off, I think.

But you know that if we didn't have deacons, we wouldn't have that ministry of compassion in the church. We wouldn't always know who was in need, and they wouldn't receive the help they need, and the calls that come into the church for help would go unanswered.

I wouldn't have health insurance if we didn't have deacons. That's okay. You can live with or without that, but that's one of the things that they do that wouldn't get done. We wouldn't have a pictorial directory coming if we didn't have deacons and deacons' wives and others who enter into these labors.

[38:32] And something I meant to say is that a lot of what deacons do, some of what they do is delegate. They make sure that these things get done. They might pass these duties off to other folks. So if I name something that you do and you're not a deacon, don't be slighted by that.

Remember, focusing on elders and deacons tonight, but do you know that these chairs wouldn't be set up in nice straight rows if we didn't have deacons? Did you know that snow doesn't remove itself from sidewalks and parking lots?

If we didn't have deacons to delegate those things, it wouldn't get done. We have heat and electricity. One, the bills are paid, and that wouldn't happen without the deacons, and it wouldn't come on at the right time without the deacons.

You come here in the middle of the week and the building is cold, and you come here on Sunday and it's warm and it's ready to be used because we have deacons. There would be no fellowship lunch without our deacons.

There would be no repairs made to the building that you don't even know about because you never saw it was broken unless you were the one that reported it to the deacon in the first place. There wouldn't be toilets plunged without deacons in this place.

[39:35] There wouldn't be... The lawn would be overrun without deacons here. There would be no money going to our missionaries. There would be no one to count the offering and to distribute it accordingly.

There would be no money going to contractors. We wouldn't have this building if it weren't for our deacons. We wouldn't get a paycheck if it wasn't for our deacons. We wouldn't have bank accounts maintained if it wasn't for our deacons.

We could go on and on and on about the things the deacons do in the church that we don't ever even notice, but I hope you take time to think about what they do and to thank God for it.

Have you ever thought about serving in this way yourself? Some of you men. You'd also do well to aspire to the work of the deaconate, the office of deacon. Don't dismiss out of hand the possibility of serving this way.

Great blessing comes with it. The church is constantly in need of servants. And just as with our elders, don't assume that these deacons we have will be around forever or that they will never need more than the four that we currently have.

[40:44] Could God be calling you to fulfill this office in His church? And as I ask you to pray for your elders, I'm going to ask you now to pray for your deacons.

And I know that many of you do. Continue on. Remember, Scott and Stan and Chuck and Tim pray for them. Their ministry of service to us is invaluable. Don't take it for granted, but pray for it.

And pray for them often. Pray that the Lord would sustain them in their work. You know, these men, that's not all they do. They have jobs that they do besides that. Every one of them, extremely busy. And on top of that, they do this work. In addition to their families that they care for, they are special targets of Satan's attacks because he does not want the work and ministry and service of the church to prosper.

If these men are the hands of the church, Satan would love to cut those hands off. Pray that God would sustain them, that he would keep them from growing weary and well-doing, that he would bless their labors for the good of his church, for the good of his kingdom.

[41:46] Pray that God would never leave his church without a sufficient number of deacons to accomplish the work that's necessary so that the work of the church might go on, so that the pastors might continue in prayer and the ministry of the Word, shepherding the flock.

Pray that God would supply deacons in the future for this church. And then help them. There are many areas, some of the things that I've talked about tonight, where you can help our deacons, where you can serve.

We have those ministry opportunity sheets that we've asked our members and new members that join the church to fill out and our regular attenders. Take a look at those again if you haven't in a long time.

We can make them available to you again to see the opportunities that are to assist our deacons in service in these areas. We need deacons. And so let us praise God tonight that he's made this provision for his church.

So I hope we don't take our elders and deacons for granted. This is how God ordained things to be and it's why we have them here. These two offices he's given to keep his church functioning and prospering until the end of the age.

[42:58] So may he make us more aware of his design for the church and more grateful that he's provided for the working out of that design right here in Bremen. We mentioned, we've said this, there are churches that have no elders or deacons or don't have a plurality of them.

And here we sit with a plurality of both. With the potential for more right here in our midst. We are truly blessed. Through God's ordained offices, we have a regular faithful ministry at Grace Fellowship Church.

And I hope and pray that we don't take it for granted. See what God has established and rejoice in it. Give Him thanks for it and pray that it would continue. And I think it should be a challenge to us as well.

God has so abundantly provided for us. Are we then excelling in ministry to our local congregation, to the community, and to the world? He's provided abundantly.

Are we making good use of what He's given us? I believe to a large measure we are. And yet there are areas where we can be improving and growing. And so may God make us bold and determined to press on in the ministry for His glory and for the good of His church.

[44:16] Lord, He'll have asked us to pray, haven't I? To pray for elders and deacons in the church. And we want to take our hymnals now and turn to Hymn 278 and conclude with a prayer.

An opportunity to pray corporately. It's more a prayer for the church. But you'll find as you sing through these verses that it's a prayer for things that elders and deacons do in the church.

And so let us stand together and sing Hymn 278 as we pray for God's blessing on us as a congregation. Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank You that You have so ordered the church as You have seen fit to ordain offices in the church of elder and deacon.

We thank You that You've given us men to fulfill these offices in this church. We pray that You would guard and keep each one. Keep them faithful to their task.

Keep them faithful in their ministry. Keep them faithful in their service. Do guard from the attacks of the evil one. We pray that You would make this a place where the ministry goes on unhindered, where it is a profitable ministry for the good of Your saints that gather here each Lord's Day, for the good of the lost that come into our midst, for the good of the community around us, for the good of the world.

[45:39] We pray that You would bless the ministry of the Word and service in this place through the elders and deacons that You have given to us. We thank You for providing for us abundantly and we pray that You would make us to serve faithfully.

Work these things in us. Help us to pray. Help us to not take these things for granted, but to express our gratitude to You for all that You have done for Your church.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.