



# Community Group Discussion Guide

February 25, 2024

## 1 Timothy 3 | Ecclesiology

### MOTIVATE

Starter Question:

- ⇒ *What qualifications did you need for a current or past job? Why were these necessary qualifications?*

### DISCUSS

Ecclesiology is the study of the church. The word "church" comes from the Greek word "ekklesia" which means "assembly." Wayne Grudem, author of *Bible Doctrine*, defines the church as the "community of true believers for all time." The church is "invisible yet visible" and is "local and universal." When we think about the study of the church, we must consider both the church as God's chosen people from all times and places, and also the local gathering of believers.

While our passage today focuses primarily on Timothy's instructions to local churches, it's important that we also view this in light of the universal Church. The universal Church is comprised of all those who have trusted in Christ for all of human history. It is the body of Christ, of which He is the head or leader (Ephesians 1:22-23). His Church is to be an example and, while imperfect, a manifestation of God's glory on earth (Ephesians 3:10). The Church is to submit to Christ (Ephesians 5:23-24) and be a light for God's glory and Christ's good news in the midst of a sinful and broken world (Matthew 5:14-16).

- ⇒ *Why is it important to have an understanding of the universal Church?*  
 ⇒ *How might this lead us to approach the local church with humility and love?*

*Leader's Note: 1 Timothy 3:14-16 provides the basis and reasoning for what Timothy gives as instructions to the church in the preceding verses (1-13). As such, it may be helpful to begin your discussion by starting in verses 14-16 to frame the importance of the church and why Timothy writes what he does. This discussion guide has been arranged to follow this suggested order.*

**1 Timothy 3:14-16** *I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, **15** if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. **16** Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.*

Paul wrapped up his discussion on the instructions to the church by giving us his reasons for writing these instructions. He tells us that he "[wrote] these things to you so that...you may know how one

ought to behave in the household of God." Paul's instructions were written so that the church may know how to be rightly organized and function as God intended. Paul helps us to understand the role of the church and what our role is in the church.

Verse 15 is one of the key New Testament descriptions of the church's identity and mission. Paul described the "household of God" as "the church of the living God." As discussed previously, church comes from the Greek word "ekklesia," meaning assembly. Just as the universal Church is a gathering of all true believers for all time, the local church is a gathering of true believers in a certain place and time.

We must ask ourselves the questions, "What is a true church?" And secondly, "What are the primary purposes of a true church?" In his article *What is a Church*, Chris Hutchinson answers these two questions in this way, "The church is a group of Christians who meet together regularly and who have some measure of commitment to each other to be the body of Christ together, which includes biblical leadership and biblical teaching and preaching and a proper celebration of the Lord's Supper and a right application of Christian discipline." ([www.9marks.org/article/what-is-a-church](http://www.9marks.org/article/what-is-a-church))

Consider first, "a group of Christians who meet together regularly." Hebrews 10:24-25 reminds us to "consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together..." Implied in these instructions by the author of Hebrews is that Christians should be gathering together regularly.

- ⇒ ***What is the importance of the church gathering together regularly?***
- ⇒ ***If we only defined the church as a group of Christians who gathered together regularly, what other gatherings may be considered a church?***

A church must also "have some measure of commitment to each other to be the body of Christ together." A church must know who is and is not a part of the gathering. In Acts 5:12-13, we see that a group of believers "were all together in Solomon's Portico [and] none of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem." This group of believers knew who each other were, and others knew who they were.

- ⇒ ***Why is it so important that a local church knows who is and is not a committed member of the church?***
- ⇒ ***In what ways are you committed to the body of Christ at Henderson Hills? In what ways could you deepen your commitment to the body?***

Consider the second question, "What are the primary purposes of a true church?" A true church "includes biblical leadership and biblical teaching and preaching and a proper celebration of the Lord's Supper and a right application of Christian discipline." 1 Timothy 3:1-13 lays out a biblical plan for church leadership, with elders leading the church and deacons coming alongside the elders to assist and serve the church. The church also includes the preaching and teaching of Scripture, which we

see the early church devoting themselves to in Acts 2:42. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12, also gave the unique commandment to the church to observe the Lord's Supper together. Church discipline is one other element of a church and is intertwined with what was previously discussed regarding knowing who is and is not part of a church.

- ⇒ ***How did Paul describe the church in verses 1 Timothy 3:14-16? What does each word convey about the church?***
- ⇒ ***How have you been encouraged through the purposes of the local church?***

Paul then described the church as "a pillar and buttress of truth." One of the church's primary tasks is to promote and protect the gospel. This idea leads back to the instructions Paul gave in the preceding verses. Elders and deacons were instituted to ensure that the church remained "a pillar and buttress of truth." In 1 Timothy 3, Paul gave instructions for establishing biblical leadership within the church.

**1 Timothy 3:1-7** *The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. 2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

One aspect of a true church is that it has a biblical leadership structure. The first office within the church, laid out in Scripture, is the office of elder. The terms "elder," "overseer," and "pastor" (or "shepherd") are used interchangeably throughout the New Testament to refer to the same biblical office. In Acts 14:23, part of Paul's church planting included appointing elders in every church. He gave two important truths regarding elders. The first is that elders are a leadership role for the church that is ordained by God, and the second is that there were multiple, or a plurality, of elders in each church.

- ⇒ ***What is the importance of a church having a biblical leadership structure?***
- ⇒ ***Why is it important that the church is led by a plurality of elders?***

There are two passages of Scripture in which Paul writes with instructions as to the qualifications for elders: 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The qualifications in the two passages are very similar, but this session's focus is on the qualifications laid out in 1 Timothy 3.

Paul opened his instruction by referring to elders as "overseers" and that desiring this role is "a noble task." The idea of being an overseer implies that of protecting and watching over the congregation. It's commonly said that the primary purposes of elders are to lead, feed (teach), care for, and protect the local church.

- ⇒ ***How do the overseers, or elders, in our church function as shepherds? In other words, how do the elders in our church lead, feed, care for, and protect the church?***
- ⇒ ***Why is being an overseer a noble task?***

Paul then listed out the qualifications necessary for elders. The list Paul gave focuses primarily on character qualities and conduct, and less on specific duties required of elders. An overseer must be “above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.” Almost all of these qualifications listed out are qualities that are required of all believers, with the exception of being able to teach. Being able to teach is a unique qualification required of elders.

Paul then moved into a longer discussion on the importance of the elder “managing his own household well.” While this does not mean that the elder’s family should be perfect, it does stress the importance that the home is a training and proving ground for Christian character, and prepares Christians for ministry outside of the home. In light of the picture of the church as the “household of God,” this is an important aspect of an elder’s qualification.

- ⇒ ***How have you seen the family be a training and proving ground for Christian ministry?***

Paul closed out the list by mentioning that an elder should “not be a recent convert” and should “be well thought of by outsiders.” With the qualifications listed above, it takes time to demonstrate that these character qualities are lived out consistently. Also, the elder, as a leader of the church, should not be a hindrance to the reputation and advancement of the gospel going forth through the ministry of the local church. It is important that elders maintain a good reputation.

- ⇒ ***Take a look at the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Note which are character qualities and which are abilities, and the importance of each.***

**1 Timothy 3:8-13** *Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. 11 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. 13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*

The second and only other office laid out in Scripture for the local church is for deacons. The word deacon comes from the Greek word “diakonos” which means “servant.” It is helpful to think of deacons as those who serve the church and assist the overseers in carrying out their ministry. Matt Smethurst, in his book, *Deacons*, comments that, “Deaconing is not training wheels for eldering. It is a different office with different aims requiring, in many cases, different gifts.”

We see deacons first established in Acts 6 in the middle of a conflict rising up in the early church. The church was growing, which meant that the needs of the church's members were growing. The disciples were no longer able to adequately care for both the physical and spiritual needs of the church.

The disciples recognized that "It [would] not be right [to] give up preaching the word of God to serve tables." As such, the disciples identified seven men to come alongside the disciples to ensure that the disciples could continue in their ministry of preaching and that the unity of the church could remain intact. While Scripture does not lay out specific responsibilities for deacons, the primary purpose for them is to assist the elders so that they can effectively lead, feed, care for, and protect the church.

⇒ ***What are some ways that you have seen deacons assist the elders in their ministry?***

Paul opened up this list of qualifications in verse 8 with the term "likewise," which suggests a link between the list of qualifications for elders and the list of qualifications for deacons in this section. There are many similarities between the two lists, and like the list of elder qualifications, this list focuses primarily on character qualities rather than specific duties. The one primary difference between the two lists is that there is no requirement for deacons to be able to teach.

In this list, Paul laid out three qualifications related to self-control. Deacons must "not be double tongued," "not addicted to much wine," and "not greedy for dishonest gain." He then moved to three positive attributes or qualifications of deacons.

Deacons must "hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience" (have a good understanding of the gospel), "be tested" and proven, and have a faithful family life. Again, similar to the qualifications listed for elders, most of these are character qualities required of all Christians. In his book *Deacons*, Matt Smethurst observes that "deacons must embody the kind of character expected of all Christians. But they should be exemplary in the ordinary."

⇒ ***Why are each of these attributes or qualities important for someone called to assist the elders by serving the practical needs of the church?***

In the midst of this list of qualifications, Paul shifts in verse 11 with the phrase "their wives." One question that comes up regularly when discussing the office of deacons is if women are permitted to serve in this role or not. This question arises from the fact that "wives" in verse 11 can either mean "women" or "wives." With this in mind, there are three possible interpretations.

The first interpretation is that Paul was referring here to the wives of deacons. The argument for this interpretation is that this phrase appears abruptly in the text, and it leads into the discussion of the deacon's family.

The second interpretation is that Paul was referring here to women serving as deacons. This interpretation is supported by the use of the term “likewise” and the use of this term in Scripture often introduces a new group. Additionally, the discussion of overseers lacked any reference to wives, so a mention here of “women” may support that idea that women are permitted to serve as deacons. Also in support of this argument is that Romans 16:1 refers to Phoebe as a “servant,” or “deacon.”

The final interpretation that could be made is that Paul was referring to women who assist the deacons and serve in the role of “deaconesses.” As is evident here, there are legitimate arguments to be made for each of these interpretations, so we should approach this matter with humility and charity, recognizing that faithful Christians can have legitimate differing views on this matter.

Paul closed out this section by calling out the reward that deacons will receive for serving well in this role. Paul stated that deacons will receive two gifts – respect and confidence in their faith.

⇒ ***What are the rewards for serving well as a deacon?***

## **TRANSFORM**

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**1. Make personal application:** God has ordained the church to be a light to a broken and sinful world. In His perfect plan for the church, God instituted the roles of elders and deacons in order for the church to function as He designed for it to. In these roles, He has laid out specific qualifications, many of which are applicable to all Christians.

⇒ ***Which of the character qualities listed in 1 Timothy 3 could you seek to improve upon in your life?***

⇒ ***What are some ways our Community Group can encourage our elders and deacons?***

**2. Pray:** Thank God for the way He has redeemed a people to Himself and built His church. Pray that Henderson Hills would seek to be a church that faithfully follows God’s plan for being a biblical church. Ask God to encourage our church’s elders and deacons as they seek to lead and serve our church.

## **STUDY**

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### **Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:**

- *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2329-2331.
- *Deacons*, by Matt Smethurst.
- *Bible Doctrine*, by Wayne Grudem, pages 363-395.
- *Paul’s Vision for the Deacons*, by Alexander Strauch.
- *1 Timothy and Titus*, by John Stott, pages 24-28
- *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, pages 51-65.
- *What is a Church?* By Chris Hutchison, [www.9marks.org/article/what-is-a-church](http://www.9marks.org/article/what-is-a-church)