



# The Deacon's Qualifications

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## Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Deacons are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Deacons are servers .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Deacons have good reputations .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. Deacons have godly spouses .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>5. Deacons receive benefits .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>12</b>

# The Deacon's Qualifications

## INTRODUCTION

Deacons fulfill an important role in the life of a church family. How they are placed in position is decided by the membership. Each local assembly has a method of selecting people to serve as deacons written in its constitution and by-laws. The nominating process, the length of each service appointment, the number of consecutive terms permitted, the minimum age allowed, and determining if their membership is in good standing are some of the variables decided by each church for deacon selection. Designing a system that produces the best candidates must be a priority for every church. However, that is not the focus of this article.

The primary goal for this document is to identify and exam the Biblical qualifications for someone to be eligible for deacon appointment and provide the findings as a resource tool for three main groups. First, those already serving as deacons can use this to assess how they are measuring up in their role. Second, those considering becoming a deacon have a realistic view of what is required to see how prepared they are. And third, those tasked with finding and vetting candidates for the board can use this as a grid to evaluate candidates presented for consideration.

Choosing qualified deacons is serious business because the health, unity, and vitality of the church family are affected both positively and negatively by the decisions and example of this group of leaders. With prayer, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and teaching of the Word, the right people can be set place at the ideal time. Those chosen to be deacons are given increased opportunities for spiritual growth and maturity along with special favour and blessing of God. Those involved in the selection process gain increased awareness of God's interest and involvement in his church family through confirming signs and expanded kingdom impact.

The New Testament contains hundreds of teachings about producing full-time disciples of Christ that makes disciples. Each church family member is expected to make every effort to be transformed daily to be more like Jesus in the way they think and act. Anyone serving in ministry, including leadership positions, should be giving ample evidence of spiritual growth and fruitfulness.

In this article, we look closely at two Scripture passages that focus on the preparations for and qualifications of those chosen to serve as deacons. Acts 6:1-7 presents the qualities and purpose of the forerunners of deacons. 1 Timothy 3:8-13 lists the spiritual and practical essentials to be considered for the deacon role. Combining these Scriptures gives a helpful outline of identifiers to use for evaluation of candidates and those already serving as deacons.

## 1. Deacons are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom

Acts 6:1-7 records the choosing of seven members of the church family to share the ministry load with the apostles. The number of disciples of Christ had been steadily increasing in the Jerusalem church from the day of Pentecost on. The church elders at the time were the twelve apostles and they were finding it impossible to give spiritual leadership and direction while also trying to ensure everyone's practical needs were being met. The solution for the dilemma was to establish a group of mature believers to take on the responsibilities of caring for the practical needs of the members giving the spiritual overseers adequate time for prayer preparation and teaching of the Word.

The church was tasked with identifying seven of their members that exhibited the necessary attributes to manage their responsibilities well. It is noteworthy that two distinctly spiritual qualities were listed as priorities above everything else: *"Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom."* Acts 6:3a.

- 1) "...choose from among you"  
Candidates had to already be part of the church family as active participants in church life and ministry.
- 2) "...known to be"  
Those being considered needed to have a proven track record over time, being someone that had shown themselves faithful in whatever they said and did.
- 3) "...full of the Spirit"  
They must show evidence of being immersed in the Holy Spirit, surrendered his control, empowered as a faithful witness for Christ, and led by the Spirit doing God's will.
- 4) "...full...of wisdom"  
They should know and do the right thing consistently, be considered 'wise beyond their years, and be known for asking God for perfect wisdom in every situation (James 1:5-8).

## 2. Deacons are servers

The forerunners of deacons in Acts 6 laid the groundwork for every believer needing the proper attitude about ministry tasks. Serving others, not being served, is what it takes to do kingdom work well. This quality emulates the example of the greatest servant leader ever, Jesus Christ. He humbled himself completely, laid aside every divine advantage he had, and sacrificed his own self-interests for the sake of others (see Philippians 2:1-11).

A ministry team's efforts are maximized when everyone does their part unselfishly and willingly. In the Jerusalem church, unified effort enabled the poor widows to have their needs

met, the servers to experience joy by giving themselves sacrificially, and the apostles to be prepared for effective ministry of the Word to benefit all members.

*“So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.’”*  
Acts 6:2-4

‘...to wait on tables’ is translated from the Greek word family also rendered ‘deacon’ at times. In this case it refers to assisting others to see their needs met in a feeding program for the needy widows. Generally, this term can describe any act of serving that facilitates the mission of Christ on his behalf.

‘...this responsibility’ indicates that this and other acts of serving are important undertakings that require adequate attention.

### 3. Deacons have good reputations

1 Timothy 3:8-13 expands on the groundwork for deacons established in Acts 6:1-7. The importance of being well known by the church family before being chosen for the role of deacon is obvious in the apostle Paul’s directives to Timothy. Where Luke uses the term ‘known to be’ in Acts 6:3, Paul uses terms like ‘are to be’ (v8), ‘must be’ (v9), ‘must be first’ (v10), ‘must be’ (v12) and ‘wives are to be’ (v11). It cannot be overstressed that the Bible does not say ‘will be’ or ‘could be’ or ‘should be’. That would imply that for some, ministry roles can be opportunities for people to grow up and prove themselves capable after their appointment. Unfortunately, that has been the approach too often with negative outcomes the result.

It is important to mention that women can be eligible to serve as deacons if they are qualified. In Paul’s list of proven traits necessary for both elders and deacons, he appears to use the masculine pronoun 10 times according to our English rendering. However, when Paul taught about spiritual overseers elsewhere, he usually used the generic words ‘anyone’ or ‘whoever’. In this passage, there is no generic third-person singular pronoun in the English language, so some translators determined it to be male. The original Greek terminology is inclusive of both genders and would be better translated as plural so that the gender-neutral pronoun of the third person ‘they’ would be used.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more insights into women in ministry:

- PAOC Statement of Affirmations Regarding the Equality of Women and Men in Leadership <https://www.paoc.org/docs/default-source/church-toolbox/position-papers/statements/paoc-statement-of-affirmation-regarding-the-equality-of-women-and-men-in-leadership.pdf?>

- AOG The Role of Women in Ministry <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/The-Role-of-Women-in-Ministry>

Reading through and considering the evidence of these qualities in your life and others can be an eye opener. Hopefully this exercise affirms many things about you that are in good shape while it also identifies others that need attention. Remember that the reputations of those being considered to serve as deacons are extremely important to review for the sake of the whole church family. Give thorough examination of each quality listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 as requisite for deacon qualification and think through why it matters.

1) Respected – “worthy of respect”

Respect is something earned over time, after weeks, months and years of transformed living. Listen to what someone says, how they say it, what they do and how they do it. Their actions speak as loud as their words confirming their integrity and fidelity.

Others admire the quality of their lives and hold them in esteem, not simply because of the position they hold, but for the dignity they bring into everything they are involved with. They show respect to others regardless of status or social standing. They do not demand special treatment but do enjoy favourable regard because of their good character.

2) Trustworthy – “sincere”

Would you trust the person being evaluated with the keys to your house or car? Can you trust them with keeping information shared confidential when necessary? Do they say the same thing to one person as they do to another?

You can have confidence in the veracity of what a sincere person says. They feel responsible to be always honest and find it difficult to manipulate the truth. People tend to rely on the sincere because they are dependable with anything they are tasked to do. They go about their business without constant supervision because they are trustworthy whether being watched or not.

3) Sober – “not indulging in much wine” (lit. ‘lingering over wine’)

Mature Christ-followers train themselves to not give into temptations that can be self-destructive. This Scripture specifically warns against the excessive desire for and consumption of fermented wine which can result in impairment of judgment, addiction, and wasting time. This speaks to the larger principle of not allowing oneself to gratify their feelings that can lead to unhealthy dependence on things that God does not approve of. Often, self-denial is required to pursue what is best and most beneficial for all.

Self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit produced in you by God’s grace that enables you to say ‘no’ to ungodliness and ‘yes’ to God’s will (see Titus 2:11-14). Rather than creating a list of risky things you should not do which could include drinking wine, it is best to live a Spirit-filled life, controlled, led, and enabled by God’s power to make good choices at all times.

Another Scripture gives clear instruction regarding the choice between Spirit-fullness and wine intoxication: *“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit...” Ephesians 5:18.* Debauchery is excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures

of any type. The self-denying of alcohol is a fail-safe way to not drift into unhealthy dependence on it. You will enjoy the benefits of finding the balance for living by being supernaturally self-controlled, always choosing what is beneficial. Deacons must be examples of living in freedom from slavery to anything addictive and destructive.

4) Honest – “not pursuing dishonest gain”

Earning a living is a noble thing. It requires doing an honest day’s work week in and week out most of your life. You will sometimes be tempted to get ahead by taking shortcuts from the daily grind by committing illegal or immoral acts for financial gain like stealing or lying. Giving in to them is never a good idea. There will always be victims negatively impacted by dishonesty including the well-being of the deceiver: *“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” 1 Timothy 6:10.* Being ethical is always the best approach.

You can tell a lot about a person by how they conduct themselves in any situation. Are they honest in their dealings regardless of what it might cost them? Are they hard-working and diligent, known as dependable and trustworthy or do they come across as a bit shady or dishonest if it is to their advantage? When choosing deacons to manage the administrative affairs of a church family, you only want those you can say with certainty are honest about everything including handling money.

5) Spiritually deep – “must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience”

Two things stand out in this Scripture: having knowledge of and practicing sound doctrine with a clear conscience. Spiritual depth involves much more than these qualities of course, but they are essential for acquiring and maintaining it. Rookies in the faith should never be put in positions of influence before they are ready. This has happened too many times with disastrous results for themselves and those they serve. Being seasoned in knowing and obeying Christ’s commands and NT teachings takes time to do but should be non-negotiable for people in ministry positions.

Having a clear conscience is the result of maintaining a mind being renewed by the Holy Spirit and the sanctifying power of the Word. It is knowing you have done what is right and true out of love for God which protects your heart from attacks of false guilt and condemnation. Staying faithful to the deep truths of the faith reinforces your sense of being right before God which becomes apparent in the way you go about life and ministry. Deacons must be clear examples of the spiritual lifestyle.

6) Tested and proven – “must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.”

How you handle tests of your faith reveals your suitability for spiritual leadership. Deacons are not to be novices in life and ministry but experienced enough to show that they have what it takes to lead. Gifts and talents are reasonable considerations for what candidates can bring to ministry but should not be the primary issue. Choosing people because of their

charisma, personality, or popularity is never a good idea. It is always better to select those who have unimpeachable character above all else.

Proving oneself to be godly and mature while facing life and ministry challenges must be a requirement for confirming leadership potential. Staying the course and being a credible example of how to serve God faithfully are valuable assets for anyone tasked with influencing others for Christ. The church family benefits by having deacons who are not easily shaken when facing difficult decisions because they are prepared for them through personal experience. The caution to not being hasty in appointing spiritual leaders is reinforced in this requirement for a reasonable time of testing to be sure of suitability.

7) Faithful in marriage – “must be faithful to his wife”

This phrase has been taken by some to mean that a deacon must be married, not single or widowed. Whether or not that is implied, the focus here is that a deacon can only be married to one spouse and must be faithful to them alone. and usage. This highlights the influence potential spiritual leaders have on others by being faithful in their marriage. To the earlier point, Biblical support for a single person being eligible to be a deacon can be drawn from other passages that speak to that issue.

In our society, marriage has been redefined by some and marginalized by others. The Biblical teaching of marriage as the exclusive relationship between one man and one woman has been widely disregarded as God’s standard resulting in the moral breakdown of families and society at large. On the other hand, those who do honour marriage by practicing fidelity with God’s love, experience blessings of secure and honorable relationships and family stability. A deacon who remains faithful to their spouse serves as a godly example for others to follow and provides moral fibre to society whether it appreciates it or not.

8) Competent family manager – “must manage his children and his household well”

This qualification is sometimes overlooked when considering suitable candidates to serve as deacons. Managing the affairs of the church family is a big part of what deacons do. How do you know if someone is capable of attending to the administrative details that are part of church life? One way is to look at how they are doing managing their own home. Is there a semblance of order and structure or is it chaotic and unpredictable? How do the children behave? Are they respectful of their parents and do they contribute to the smooth running of the family or are they out of control?

You should realize that the expectations for an overseer regarding home life are even greater than mentioned here for a deacon (vs.4,5). Every Christian family is to be one where children honour and obey their parents and parents effectively train their children in God’s ways (Ephesians 6:1-4). The Scriptures do not say the children must be perfect, but they must not be out of control. The point is made that if someone cannot manage their own family well, how can they take care of God’s church? There must be clear evidence of a healthy household of every spiritual leader.



All these 8 characteristics are essential for every disciple of Christ to build a good reputation. These qualities need to be established and already seen in anyone considered for ministry leadership, including being a deacon.

The next section focuses on key qualities for the spouses of deacons or female deacons as will be explained. Remember that those who are single having never married, are divorced, or are widowed are not the subject of this discussion.

#### 4. Deacons have godly spouses if married

*“In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.” 1 Timothy 3:11*

It should be noted that the Greek word for ‘wives’ in this verse could also be translated as ‘deacon’s wives’ or ‘women who are deacons’. Therefore, in examining this section, we use plural pronouns and ‘spouse’ for this term so that either position can be taken. The point of this exercise is to identify Biblical standards established for those related to the deacon role.

The Scripture starts with “in the same way’ which stresses the importance of these attributes being taken just as seriously as the others in the passage. As you follow through the instructions for leadership in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 you notice the pattern that elders (overseers) set the pace, deacons do likewise (v8) as do the women involved (v11).

For deacons who are married, partnership in life and ministry is indispensable. Each spouse will have different roles and responsibilities, but both need to support one another for effective kingdom service. While a deacon, whether male or female, is tasked with administrating the operational affairs of the church, their spouse must be an asset by living a godly life with impeccable character and conduct.

##### 1) Respected – “worthy of respect”

Gaining the respect of others takes a lifetime of living well. Having a spouse that is admired by others for the way they have proven themselves to be a model of doing things right is a huge benefit. Every follower of Christ is responsible to learn the commands of God and obey them. A spouse who takes that seriously and gives evidence of personal holiness and Biblical morality is an asset to the marriage partnership.

It is prudent to check out the reputation of the potential deacon’s spouse to determine if they are someone others esteem for their good values and behaviour. They should be known for enhancing the quality of their home life and other relationships in the church and community. If they have a questionable reputation in any of these areas, they will negatively affect their spouse’s ability to serve well as a deacon.

2) Judicious – “not malicious talkers”

How someone talks reveals a lot about what’s going on in their heart. Jesus and James teach considerably about the power of the tongue and how to keep it under control. Words spoken can be uplifting or destructive in their effect on the hearers as well as on the speaker. People need to learn how to talk properly in all situations because once words are spoken, they cannot be taken back. It is far better to be circumspect and only say what you are okay with being repeated.

Watch and listen closely to the spouse of a deacon candidate. Are they a gossip who talks about others in a slanderous way? Are they malicious in the information they share, bringing others into suspicion? Are they a busy body who sticks their nose into situations that are not their concern? If any of these actions are obvious, they are not qualified to be a deacon’s spouse. If, on the other hand, you note they are sensible with their words, bring constructive dynamics to the conversation, and come across as wise and tasteful in what they say, then they are a benefit to any partnership.

3) Balanced – “temperate...in everything”

People in positions of influence are being watched and emulated constantly. The spouse of a deacon, while not holding an official position, does give an example for others to follow whether they realize it or not. It does matter how they deal with all circumstances, not only for themselves and their close relationships, but for anyone in their orbit of daily life. Being temperate means to be balanced in all matters, not going to extremes, or giving in to unhealthy desires but practicing self-restraint and keeping a clear mind to choose the best option from the rest.

Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit that grows in the maturing disciple through cooperating with the internal work of the Holy Spirit. This is supernatural ability to exercise sober judgment when considering all matters and calmly proceeding with confidence in the Holy Spirit’s leading. You will notice that temperate people are not carried away with making statements and giving opinions that are excessive and inflammatory. A balanced spouse is a great asset to a deacon by creating an air of stability and soundness. Be sure to evaluate the way the potential deacon’s spouse deals with all aspects of their lives to be convinced they are temperate.

4) Dependable – “trustworthy in everything”

Making sure that a deacon can be trusted with the responsibilities of their role is wise. So is confirming that their spouse is someone you can depend on no matter what. They are in a partnership in life and ministry, and one deeply affects the other. It is no small thing to be recognized as someone who is trustworthy in everything. Trust is a foundational piece of every relationship. The more you can trust the other person, the stronger the bond becomes between you.

As you consider the suitability of the deacon's spouse, evaluate whether they keep their word and follow through on their promises. Is this someone that others consider to be responsible for their actions and words? Is their family an example of consistency and dependability in their dealings with themselves and others? Are you confident that you can trust them with information that is sensitive in nature? Are they honest with their dealings? Would they make a credible witness if called upon? Most of all, are they faithful in their obedience to Christ's commands giving evidence of mature discipleship?

## 5. Deacons receive special benefits

*"Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus." 1 Timothy 3:13*

There are countless blessings for anyone who lives as a faithful disciple of Christ that are not experienced by those who do not. Freedom, joy, peace, needs met, hope, assurance, and love are some of the benefits of being in Christ by faith. Someone who serves as a deacon will already be enjoying these dynamics simply by being a Christ follower. However, for those who take on leadership responsibilities, there is potential for increased blessings beyond these. Being accountable to stay qualified as a deacon provides ongoing motivation for continuous spiritual growth through daily disciplines in godliness training. That itself is a personal benefit.

The Scripture above gives two additional blessings available for deacon service: Favour with God and people and increased confidence in God. Of course, these are the potential for every follower of Christ that seeks God and his kingdom and righteousness and daily lives to please the Lord in all things. However, taking on the role of deacon puts you in a place of recognizing your need for God more and can motivate you to accelerate your spiritual growth to serve well.

### 1) The benefit of the favour of God and the church family

*"Those who have served well gain an excellent standing..."*

Section 3 above explored the importance of the deacon's reputation for qualifying to serve in the role. This Scripture addresses enhancing a deacon's reputation for doing a good job. Having 'an excellent standing' means to be highly regarded and respected by those you serve. It is being recognized for having the favour of God on you that overflows into your ministry onto others.

While a deacon role is usually an unpaid position, those who take it on should treat it as a valuable opportunity to excel as a Christ follower by growing more mature and serving with distinction. The goal is not to try to impress the church family so they applaud you for how amazing you are which would be self-serving. The aim is to be an outstanding example of serving unselfishly like Jesus causing others to speak highly of you and show you respect for the exceptional ministry you bring.

## 2) The benefit of increased confidence to trust God

*“Those who have served well gain...great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.”*

Serving as a deacon provides lots of opportunities to put your faith to the test, not only for yourself, but for others when they are tempted to doubt God to provide. The longer you exercise your faith in Christ for everything you face, the more assured you become that Jesus has you covered and is at work for your good and his glory.

One thing that should encourage you as a deacon is that you are surrounded by others just like you who are qualified and who also have to trust God to a greater degree. You speak encouragement to each other and pray together for whatever you need God to provide. Every time God comes through, your faith is further strengthened personally and as a ministry team. Like Jesus’ disciples that experienced great joy during their ministry assignments, you also will overflow with spiritual blessings as you represent Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit whenever and wherever you go.

## Summary

A deacon is a leader who influences others by their words and actions. They are more visible to others than most because of their public role. How they live is scrutinized and evaluated which is both an extra burden and a significant growth opportunity at the same time.

The qualifications examined in this document are the ideal. No one is capable of being perfect in any of them because we are all fallible humans. However, there should be clear evidence of these requisites to some degree in anyone who serves in this role. Continuous growth in these areas is highly recommended and doing so will benefit the church family’s health and kingdom effectiveness as well as blessing the deacons themselves.

If you are already serving as a deacon, use this document as an evaluation tool for your own spiritual progress. Celebrate how you have grown and address areas that need work on. If you are being considered for a deacon appointment, measure yourself against these qualities to help you determine your readiness to serve in this capacity. And, if you are part of a process of choosing deacons, whether as a nominations committee or a voting church member, this overview can assist you in your decision.

Remember to pray for and encourage the deacons of your church family. They give of their time, talent, and resources to fulfil an important role that affects the health and vitality of your church, your family, and your growth as a disciple of Christ.

Those who serve as deacons over time become candidates to minister as overseers through faithful service. Refer to ‘The Overseer’s Qualifications’ LT article that examines the criteria for someone assuming the role of a spiritual elder in the church family.

## Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe what a deacon is and does to an inquirer?
2. Why is it important to stress that a deacon must be a maturing disciple of Christ first?
3. Why is the emphasis in Acts 6:1-7 of proven Spirit fullness for serving significant?
4. How do deacons complement the ministry of the spiritual leadership?
5. Give your thoughts about any of the 8 characteristics of building a good reputation.
6. Why does it matter that the deacon's spouse possesses the 4 qualities listed?
7. What do you think about the extra benefits available for taking on the deacon's role?
8. Why is it wise for spiritual leaders to be qualified first to be deacons?

### **The Deacon's Qualifications**

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Del Wells is an ordained minister with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada having served the local church for 37 years as a pastor. His vision is to see people transformed daily by having their minds renewed with the word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Utilizing his teaching gift and drawing on his many experiences and spiritual insights, Del has written numerous courses, studies, and articles to help followers of Christ learn to live well, be godly and impact the world around them for Jesus.