



The Overseer's Qualifications

DEL WELLS

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The Overseer's Qualifications

Introduction

The health, unity, and kingdom impact of any church are maximized when there are qualified spiritual leaders in place fulfilling their God-ordained mandate. When leadership is unqualified and incapable of modelling godliness and making disciples, the church will be directionless, disorganized, and dysfunctional.

It is true that the church is a body of believers of equal value in Christ. However, each member has different giftings and roles to play to promote unity of purpose and fruitful ministry. Everyone is called to serve according to God's enabling. For many, that means being faithful in works of service that enhance body life and influence the world with the gospel. For some, that means leading the body by example and equipping it to accomplish God's purposes for his church.

The focus of this article is on those who are tasked with giving overall spiritual direction to the church family. We examine the Biblical qualifications required to fulfill the leadership role listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 and refer to other Scriptures that also deal with spiritual oversight requisites.

Who Can Benefit from This Analysis?

Three groups of people can find this document useful. First, those who are already giving spiritual oversight can evaluate how they are measuring up to Biblical expectations. Second, those who are being considered for leadership can use it to better understand what is required and how ready they are for the task. And third, those responsible to choose leaders can use it as a resource for determining a candidate's suitability.

It is important to establish that those who are being considered for senior church leadership roles will already be faithful and obedient disciples of Christ and will have served or be qualified to serve as deacons. Refer to the LT article 'The Deacon's Qualifications' for examination of the necessary essentials for someone to be a deacon.

The Term 'Overseer'

Choosing the designation to use for those who give spiritual direction to the church family has been thoroughly considered. The term 'elders' is used extensively in the OT and NT to refer to Jewish religious leaders as a title of authority and respect. Beginning in Acts 11 and beyond, it is also used to refer to senior leaders in the church. Church elders are referred to as 'overseers' and 'bishops' in some instances which indicates that the terms are interchangeable. 'Bishop' can conjure up differing images and meanings in our culture today. It is rarely used in the Canadian Pentecostal / evangelical church context that probably constitutes most of the potential readers of this review. 'Overseer' is also not widely used and often refers to

denominational administrators when it is. However, it is the preferred translation in Titus 3:1 and Titus 1:7 in the NIV, the version used in LT resources unless noted otherwise when alternate renderings are considered.

The term 'overseer' was selected therefore, to be the primary designation used in this article because it conveys the concept of senior leadership easily. Terms like elder, bishop, superintendent, church official, and church leader that are found in other translations referring to the same or similar role will also sometimes be used.

Scriptural References for Overseer / Elder

A pastor of a local church family is definitely a spiritual leader, but not the only one. The NT mentions plurality of spiritual leadership throughout Acts and the Letters. Check out the following Scriptures referencing overseers' / elders' activity in the church:

Acts 20:28 – Ephesian overseers

Philippians 1:1 – Philippian overseers (along with deacons)

1 Timothy 3:1 – Overseer qualifications

Titus 1:7 – Overseer qualifications

Acts 11:30 – Elders in Jerusalem church

Acts 14:23 – Elders to be appointed in every church

Acts 15:2,4,6,22,23: 16:4 – Elders council in Jerusalem church

Acts 20:17 – Ephesian elders (same people as overseers noted above 20:28)

Acts 21:18 – Elders in Jerusalem

1 Timothy 4:14 – Elders laying on hands ordaining Timothy

1 Timothy 5:17 – Elders to be respected and paid well

1 Timothy 5:19,20 – Rules for dealing with accusations against elders

Titus 1:5 – Elders to be appointed in every town in Crete

Titus 1:6- Elders qualifications

James 5:14 – Elders pray for and anoint sick people

Local Church Leadership

It is not within the scope of this article to consider and evaluate the different denominational and religious organizational structures and leadership roles in place today. These exist because there is an obvious need for oversight of collective groups and ministries regarding shared mission, beliefs, accountability, and evaluation. How that is undertaken and what the Biblical support is for it would be a worthwhile investigation for another review. However, the focus of this study is primarily the workings of the local church and its leaders.

It is beneficial to understand the role and responsibilities of church overseers and compare that to any local church's leadership model. In our culture today, most overseers are not financially compensated but personally support their ministry role by other means. Generally, but not always, the lead pastor is paid to be able to give concentrated time and effort to the managing of church life. Other paid staff are added as finances are available to expand the scope of

church ministries. It should be noted that all qualified overseers, whether compensated by the church or not, are full partners of the leadership team and fall under the purview of this article's findings.

A Noble Task

"Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task."

1 Timothy 3:1

In this section of the apostle Paul's letter to Timothy, the lead pastor of the church in Ephesus, he outlines qualifications necessary for anyone to be appointed as a church overseer. This verse begins the passage with a couple of helpful insights about the overseer's role.

First, it is okay to aspire to be a spiritual leader for the right reasons. The church needs to be led by members who are open to taking on the responsibility. Being considered for a leadership role should not come as a surprise to anyone paying attention but should be a potential natural outcome for someone giving faithful kingdom service.

Second, the role of overseer is called 'a noble task', affirming it to be an honourable position, a good work that is worthwhile. Becoming an overseer is a process of years in the making. It is the result of long-term commitment to personal spiritual growth and maturity and clear evidence of kingdom fruitfulness. Those who lead well do excellent work.

Finding Quality Leaders

Before we list and analyze the Biblical qualifications for overseer, it should be noted that women are eligible to serve as leaders in the church if they meet the requisites.¹ The word 'whoever' in 1 Timothy 3:1 is a translation of 'tis' which is inclusive of both male and female genders. That means 'her' and 'she' could be used instead of 'his' and 'he'. Therefore, most often plural pronouns will be used throughout this essay to show this possibility for both singular and plural tenses.

As you examine these leadership qualifications, remember that no one is capable of being perfect in all of them. They are the Biblical standard to measure oneself by. It is helpful to have a high bar established as the ideal to grow towards. The apostle Paul never stopped his pursuit of becoming more like Jesus and neither should we. As a result of ongoing spiritual growth, there should be some evidence of these qualities in an overseer. All of them contribute to the spiritual life of the leader and serve as a practical model for others to observe and emulate.

¹ 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>

The qualities outlined here are more about what an overseer's character is than a job description of what they do in their role. The ministry responsibilities and functions of overseers are described throughout the NT, particularly in the Pastoral letters and Ephesians 4.

THE OVERSEER'S QUALIFICATIONS

1. Above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2 / Titus 1:6,7)

This term is close in meaning to 'blameless' used twice in Titus 1:6,7. It showcases the sterling character of someone with unmatched integrity in all matters. This person is irreproachable so that even if accused of impropriety for whatever reason, they are unimpeachable because wrongdoing can never be proved.

Think of Daniel in the OT who was falsely accused by jealous administrators. As hard as anyone tried, no one could find any legitimate fault in Daniel's conduct. He was thrown into a lion's den anyway, but God delivered and promoted him. Joseph is another example of someone being mistreated without cause. God delivered him more than once and gave him unprecedented favour and influence.

Those who lead the affairs of the church must be above reproach. They are often the public face of the church family and ultimately represent Jesus in all matters. Even Jesus was falsely accused of wrongdoing, but no evidence was ever given to prove it. He remains the perfect example of always doing what is right because it is his nature to do so. Spiritual overseers must practice integrity always to maintain a good reputation.

Q1. Why do you think this quality should head the list of overseer essentials?

2. Faithful in marriage (1 Tim. 3:2 / Titus 1:6)

This is one of the requirements for suitability to be a deacon (1 Timothy 3:12). That indicates the importance of faithfulness in marriage for leaders. Having a spouse to share life and ministry with is priceless. While the spouse is not involved with most of the business of supervising the spiritual affairs of the church, they do contribute much to the overseer being prepared and productive for service when the marriage is healthy.

The phrase "faithful to his wife" is taken by some to mean that an overseer must be male and married, not single or widowed. As pointed out above, the gender terms used in this section are generally neutral and can refer to male or female. We use the word spouse to allow both options. The focus of this qualification is that an overseer can only be married to one person and must be faithful to them alone. Spiritual leaders influence others positively by the health of their marriage relationship. To the necessity of being married, the case can be made for single people being eligible to be spiritual leaders from other NT teaching and is worth investigating.

The church and society need excellent role models to learn from and emulate. The overseer demonstrates godly living in every facet of life including their relationships. The Bible is clear about what a marriage is and what it represents. One man married to one woman exclusively is how God defines the marriage union. Anything outside of that intimate bond is sin and will not be blessed by God. Faithfulness to one's spouse is a foundational piece to building trust and intimacy and brings a sense of security to the home life. Wholesome marriage is also a picture of the relationship between Christ, the groom, and the church, his bride. Overseers must exhibit a healthy marital union.

Q2. What are some practical ways an overseer can maintain a healthy marriage?

3. Temperate (1 Tim. 3:2)

This is one of the requirements for the spouse of a deacon (1 Timothy 3:11). It is an incredible asset for any person to deal with people and situations proficiently and is especially beneficial for an overseer.

Being temperate is to be balanced in all things, not going to extremes or over-reacting. Opinions and statements are offered with self-restraint so that damage is not done unnecessarily. Spiritual leaders will often be tempted to hastily set the record straight or tell someone off for their poor judgment or bad behaviour which can potentially make matters worse. Temperance is recognizing the need for a measured response that facilitates resolution and growth and minimizes negative outcomes.

An overseer must be level-headed in everything they do including managing the spiritual affairs of the church family. Being even tempered in a hostile or volatile situation has far greater influence and positive effect than losing your cool or demanding changes. A temperate person is recognized by their balanced lifestyle overall. They practice self-control in their responses to impulses and temptations with the enabling of the Holy Spirit. They are the ones that people look to in times of crisis to lead the way with a steady hand. Spiritual overseers are at their best when they stay balanced during challenging times.

Q3. Give an example of a temperate leader bringing calm to a tense situation.

4. Self-controlled (1 Tim. 3:2 / Titus 1:8)

This quality is linked to the previous one. It focuses on the fruit of the Spirit that God produces in you to be temperate in all things. Practicing balance in every situation requires more than human self-will because of your limitations. As you surrender to the Holy Spirit and allow him to fill your life with his presence, he gives you supernatural strength know how to do what is best in every circumstance.

Self-control is managing your impulses and desires appropriately and not giving into attitudes and actions that are not beneficial. It is a gift of God's grace to you that has the potential to train you to say 'no' to ungodliness and worldly passions and 'yes' to what God wants (see Titus 2:11-13).

A wild stallion that has been tamed and put under the supervision of someone holding the reins is a picture of Biblical self-control. Your raw and powerful passions and desires are placed under the control of the Holy Spirit who works through you to produce the best results supernaturally. There are many personal benefits of producing and practicing self-control. They include enabling you to maintain your spiritual disciplines for maturing and keeping you from engaging in destructive and addictive patterns to which you are susceptible. The group you serve as a leader also benefits by you being a consistent model of balance for them to follow. You show by example that every person has the same potential you do by staying Spirit-filled.

Q4. Why is Spirit produced self-control a must have for any Christ follower, let alone a leader?

5. Respectable (1 Tim. 3:2)

Being worthy of respect is an essential quality for deacons and their spouses as well as overseers (1 Timothy 3:8,11). It cannot be overemphasized how important it is for a spiritual leader and partner to have excellent reputations that gain the attention and admiration of others. When others hear your name mentioned, what images are conjured up in their minds? Do they think of someone deserving their respect? When you live a well-ordered life and are known for your good behaviour and values, people are more likely to give attention to your words and be influenced to live like you do.

It says a lot about a group when their leaders are not only well respected in their church but also in their community and beyond. It indicates that a high value is placed on integrity and doing what is right and good. A track record of consistency and dependability is essential for building a reputation that others respect and want to emulate.

You notice that people worthy of respect generally show respect to others regardless of their position or station in life. When you converse with a respectable person, they make you feel honoured, treating you with dignity and grace. Respecting others is a good way to gain respect from others. Spiritual leaders must remember they are representatives of Jesus and his church wherever they are and always live accordingly.

Q5. Why is being respectable important in a society that shows disrespect to authority figures?

6. Hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2 / Titus 1:8)

This term literally means 'loving strangers'. It was customary in NT times for people to have those they did not know well stay with them when they were visiting the area. Hotels and inns

were not commonplace or affordable for most, so people would often make room in their homes to accommodate guests. In our day, people usually do not have to stay in a stranger's home because affordable rental accommodations are plenty and travel stopovers are not as necessary with modern transportation modes. So, what does it mean for someone to be hospitable in our context?

Hospitality essentially means inviting people into your home for fellowship, creating an opportunity to get to know one another in a deeper way. The church family is made up of many households and each one is to be a place of welcoming others to connect with. That is a clear directive for every believer do with joy, not just out of duty (1 Peter 4:9). There will also be times you invite people from outside your social circle to visit in your home which is a neighbourly thing to do. There are few things more welcoming and endearing than opening your home to those you are influencing towards Jesus.

A spiritual overseer is to be known for their hospitality. They invite others to share in their home life warmly and generously. Newcomers find these leaders to be a friendly face that shows interest in them and wants to get to know them. Obviously one person cannot have everyone else in their home all the time but when every member of the church family practices hospitality, no one is left out and everyone feels included.

Q6. Give an example of how you practice hospitality.

7. Able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2)

Teaching others is an essential part of being a disciple of Jesus. Integral to the Great Commission is this command of Christ: "Therefore go and make disciples...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Matthew 28:19,20. Knowing and living out all Jesus' teachings and instructing others to do likewise is a daily, life-long endeavour that both facilitates your spiritual growth and helps expand God's kingdom.

Those being considered for spiritual oversight are to be obeying this command of Christ already. They need to be able to teach, which means being skillful in training others to learn, absorb, adopt, and live out God's instructions for life. That includes knowing and sharing the gospel, the elementary teachings of Christ, the commands and teachings of Christ, and the Bible as God's revelation to us. If that seems like a big commitment to make, you are correct – it is. However, it is totally worth your effort. There are countless benefits to being Jesus' disciple, but they are only appropriated through knowing and doing what God commands.

A spiritual overseer must have the ability to instruct others in the faith. They must be deep in their knowledge of God and his Word and give evidence of daily devotion to applying God's truths to daily living. The local church family is in good hands when its spiritual leaders are capable practitioners and communicators of the word of God.

Q7. Most believers are not gifted teachers. How can they learn to teach others effectively?

8. Sober – “Not given to drunkenness” (1 Tim. 3:3 / Titus 1:7)

This prohibition is still a big deal today. Society presents a mixed message about alcohol consumption when it bemoans the negative consequences of intoxication while at the same time promotes its necessity for having a good time. The reality is that alcohol is never necessary and is often not beneficial. The Bible acknowledges that drinking wine is permissible but not required. This guideline falls under the general principle of 1 Corinthians 10:23,24 that teaches it is not just about what you can or cannot do but what is best for you and everyone else.

Being sober is always a good idea for any person. Intoxication causes loss of inhibitions and control as physical and mental faculties are diminished and impaired. Poor decisions often result when your mind is clouded and confused. Lack of discipline can induce regrettable actions and words that can damage relationships and reputations. A follower of Christ should always strive to be clear minded and self-controlled to be able to live the life God has ordained. That means being very choosy about what you subject your body, mind, and spirit to, only doing what is good for you and others.

A spiritual overseer must not be addicted to anything that impairs their ability to be godly and influence others to stay free from destructive vices and patterns. The desire to consume alcohol must be managed with rigor to prevent becoming captivated by it. That is why abstinence from drinking alcohol is often presented as the best course of action to be sure to never get addicted. Spiritual leaders must live by the life principle that while not everything will damage you a lot of things are not advantageous for you either.

Q8. Why is abstaining from alcohol beneficial for a spiritual leader?

9. Not violent (1 Tim. 3:3 / Titus 1:7)

The term ‘violent’ means being inclined to anger or being quick-tempered (Titus 1:7). It is the person who does not need much to fume and fuss about and become agitated and hostile in short order. The expression that they have a short fuse fits well. They are a powder keg ready to explode causing damage to themselves and others around them. Observe their relationships and you will find others walking on eggshells around them, trying to not set them off with something said or done.

It should be obvious that a spiritual overseer cannot be someone who has a combative nature and likes to push their weight around to intimidate others. It is counter-productive for building church unity and love to have leadership that is unapproachable and mean. As good examples, the leadership team should itself be harmonious and respectful, without in-fighting and brawling. This leadership essential will be discussed further in #11 below – ‘not quarrelsome’.

If someone is being considered for spiritual overseer role and has a reputation of being hot-headed and having a quick temper, they do not qualify on this point. They would be a disruptive force on the leadership team and to the health and unity of the church family. Both Jesus and James teach about the necessity of controlling your anger and not letting it injure you or others (Matthew 5:21,22 / James 1:19,20). Overseers must be known for being non-violent which is discussed in the next qualification #10 - 'gentle'.

Q9. Without giving names, describe the dynamics of being around an angry person.

10. Gentle (1 Tim. 3:3)

In many ways, gentleness is the opposite of being violent. It is required of all disciples of Jesus "to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone." Titus 3:2. Living like that is sometimes called meekness which, in our day, is considered weakness by many. Actually, it is a show of strength to be gracious and forbearing particularly when you are being mistreated or maligned and when you are in the middle of conflicts and contentions. That was Jesus' style for living in a hostile world and he invites you to learn from him how to be like that (Matthew 11:28-30).

A spiritual overseer must have a reputation for bringing calm to situations by knowing what to say at the appropriate time. "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Proverbs 15:1. Where a violent person throws gas on the fire, the gentle person puts it out with wise and considerate words.

As you consider someone to be a pastor or other ministry leader, ask those who know them how they treat people in different situations. Are they kind and genial or are they hot-headed and easily provoked? Are they magnanimous towards others who have insulted or hurt them or are they resentful and vindictive looking to get even? How do they share the gospel with unbelievers? Do they do it with gentleness and respect or with arrogance and judgmentalism (1 Peter 3:15)? A spiritual overseer must resemble Jesus in handling every situation with generosity and grace.

Q10. How is it possible to be gentle and truthful at the same time?

11. Not quarrelsome (1 Tim. 3:3)

This characteristic is very similar to #9 above – 'not violent'. It focuses on not having a disposition to quarrel with others all the time, whether in a rage or not. It is obviously difficult to bring and maintain harmony on any leadership team or group when there are those who are constantly being disagreeable. Just one contentious person can cause a lot of problems by their negativity which gives them a lot of power if they are allowed to get away with it.

A spiritual overseer must be one who refuses to stir up controversies and pick fights with anyone who has a differing viewpoint. Too much valuable time is spent on dealing with people who are not really interested in finding common ground and solutions. It is far better to have people in place that are working together, offering input, and building consensus for each decision. There is no room in any group for those who bring a fractious and contentious spirit with them.

When considering people to serve as spiritual overseers, it is prudent to investigate their leadership style and interaction with others in various settings. Do they carry an air of cooperation and collaboration in their approach or are they bent towards being adversarial and nit-picky? Are they looking for things to agree on with the other team members or are they quality control types who look for any perceived flaw to focus on? In-fighting is a destructive force that will cripple a church's ability to do effective ministry and impede the building of unity that promotes the group's health and vitality. Look for those who build up others constructively and you have a candidate with potential.

Q11. Explain how you can be honest and truthful without being contentious and divisive?

12. Not a lover of money (1 Tim. 3:3)

Jesus taught clearly about the power of money to possess someone, that it can capture a person's attention and devotion away from God: "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." Matthew 6:24. Paul expands on the tragic consequences of making money an idol: "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. You do not have to be rich to love money, just simply mesmerized by it so that you constantly think about how to get more.

Being thankful for what God has provided you each day and learning to be content with it is a good way to affirm your trust in God and stay free from money addiction: "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" Hebrews 13:5. It is possible to seek a leadership position to make money through deception and manipulation. The NT letters give several examples of that type of misbehaviour and warn of the damage that can be done to everyone involved if allowed to continue.

A spiritual overseer must be known for their absolute devotion to God, not material things. The NT teaches it is appropriate for a pastor to be compensated fairly by the church as they are able to. Many spiritual overseers will support their ministry to varying degrees through other vocations. Regardless of receiving remuneration or not, the desire for money must never dominate a leader's thinking. Doing so opens you up to temptations to make money your

treasure instead of Christ. Money is a fact of life that is required to buy necessities, so learn to handle it cautiously, always keeping God in first place.

Q12. How does the way someone spends their money reveal their devotion to God?

13. Manages their own family well (1 Tim. 3:4)

This is also a qualification for a deacon (1 Timothy 3:12). The phrase “must manage his own family well” conveys the concept of presiding over one’s family competently, doing everything possible to ensure each member lives life well. It pictures you giving guidance to your household with the awareness of the responsibility to do it right. The home must be a safe sanctuary for every family and the leader is tasked with making sure it is.

Qualifications #14 and #15 are specific to the social and spiritual development of the leader’s children. In this essential, the whole household is in view. Ask good questions about a potential leader’s family life by those who know them well. How does everyone in the home get along with each other? How do they function outside the home as a reflection of their family? How do they handle their possessions and stay out of debt as good financial stewards? Are their dwelling and surroundings well maintained as a reflection of their gratitude for all that God has provided them?

The overseer’s marriage was discussed in qualification #2. It is worth repeating that a healthy marriage is good for not only the spouses but for everyone in the home. As with the other requirements, be sure to get a good perspective on the potential overseer’s family life. The point is well made in 1 Timothy 3:5 that the home is a training and proving ground for spiritual leadership: “(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?)”. Ignore this assessment tool in the evaluation process and you will regret it. Good stewardship of the home is a requirement for managing the affairs of the church effectively. The next two requisites deal with how an overseer candidate raises their children.

Q13. Give an example of how home management is practical training for spiritual leadership.

14. Their children obey them with proper respect (1 Tim. 3:4,5/Titus 1:6)

Titus 1:6 specifies that “An elder must be...a man whose children believe and not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.” Having children that follow Christ is examined in #15 below. This quality #14 deals with the second part of 1 Timothy 3:4b regarding the children’s behaviour. Are they obedient to their parents and do they show them proper respect?

Being a parent is a huge responsibility and great privilege at the same time. During the child’s formative years while they are living at home, a parent is tasked with training their child to mature over time and learn life skills that will stay with them forever. That requires daily mentoring by example through actions and words with the goal of producing well grounded

and sensible children that contribute to the world around them. While hard work and consistency are necessary to ensure success, this responsibility is also a blessing for a parent to be trusted by God to help shape the lives of others.

Take a good look at the children of a potential overseer before you make your decision. Keep in mind that no children or parents are perfect but there should be clear evidence of training and accountability in place. Do the children show respect for their parents and do what they are told without a fuss? Do they treat other adults with respect by speaking appropriately to them without giving off a dismissive attitude? Do the children appear to have potential to grow up to be model citizens who gain the respect of others? Hopefully, the answer is yes to these questions. If on the other hand the children are known for their wildness and disobedience, the parents must take responsibility for that and do what it takes to save their children from catastrophe. Until that happens, the candidate would not qualify as a spiritual overseer.

Q14. What does the child's behaviour reveal about a parent's discipling ability?

15. Their children are believers (Titus 1:6)

This qualification gives further requirements for an overseer with children: "An elder must be...a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient." Essentials #13 and #14 stress the importance of a spiritual leader being a competent manager of their family household and a disciplined trainer of their children to be obedient and respectful. This requisite goes a step further focusing on the spiritual condition of the children.

Every parent's primary responsibility is to raise their children to know, love, and serve God. This is a huge undertaking that requires in-home Christian education training that produces children that are disciples of Christ. No matter how effective a parent is at influencing others outside of the home, making sure that your children are deeply rooted in Christ always takes precedence over anything else. Children must develop their own reputations of being true believers that are not wild or disobedient in their conduct.

This qualification should never be minimized or overlooked when considering someone to be a candidate for spiritual overseer. A parent's children tell a lot about the candidate's ability to manage those under their care. A fair question to ask is why anyone would consider themselves qualified to oversee others and their families when they cannot manage their own children? Recall the point made in 1 Timothy 3:5: "(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church.)". This is common sense. It is not being judgmental towards someone, looking down on them if they have struggles with their children. This is about knowing who should be appointed as spiritual overseers as examples for others to follow and emulate. These Biblical qualifications are in place for good reason.

Q15. Why is it important that an overseer's children are Christ followers?

16. Not a recent convert (1 Tim. 3:6)

“He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.” The protection of the overseer candidate is the focus here while the potential damage to the ministry and reputation of the church can easily be predicted. It is a mistake to rush someone who is not qualified into a leadership position that needs to be filled instead of taking the time to develop them to be suitable for the role.

In requisites #24, #25 and #26 below, it is made clear that the overseer must be spiritually deep enough to have unshakable faith, be able to teach others sound doctrine, and be able to refute those who promote false teaching. We will take a closer look at those competencies that require a huge investment of time and effort to become capable in. So how long should someone be in training before even being considered for a spiritual overseer role? The answer is, long enough for them to be qualified.

Being given spiritual authority prematurely can tempt one to think they are something they are not and become prideful of self and contemptuous towards God. That is what happened to Satan before he was thrown out of God’s presence and sentenced to eternal judgment. Until someone has been through an extended time of training, testing, and proving, they must not be put in a spiritual oversight position. That protects them from becoming arrogant with God, suffering the consequences, and setting a bad example for the people they lead.

Q16. Give an example of someone you know that was given a leadership role too soon.

17. Good reputation with outsiders (1 Tim. 3:7)

“He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.” It does matter what people outside of the church family think about a spiritual leader. This directive highlights the effects of a leader’s character, conduct, and approach on those who are not followers of Christ. Sound doctrine and biblical theology must never be compromised to be well thought of by unbelievers. However, the spiritual leader can act with integrity and compassion towards outsiders to develop a favourable reputation with them.

A spiritual overseer represents the church family that they serve wherever they are and must always live an exemplary life. The devil sets many traps to ensnare disciples of Christ that you must be constantly aware of. Spiritual leaders are cautioned here to guard their godly reputation at all costs. Even one misstep can damage people’s evaluation of you which reflects poorly on the church family. It is important to be well thought of by others, not for ego-inflating, but to bring credibility to Christ and the gospel.

Paul gives good counsel to all disciples for interacting with those who don't believe: "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." (Colossians 4:5,6). When considering someone to serve as a spiritual overseer, be sure to check out their interaction with those outside the faith. Are they wise in how they conduct themselves? Do they show grace to those who have different beliefs and values? Are they constructive, truthful, and helpful with what they say? Overseers are tasked with equipping the church family for kingdom service while modelling Christlikeness to those checking things out.

Q17. How is it possible to have a good reputation with outsiders without compromising values?

18. Not overbearing (Titus 1:7)

Overseers have different leadership styles developed by various factors like personality, life experiences, examples of their mentors, and learned methods. While no one way is necessarily better than others, how those being led are treated is critical. This qualifier is a caution that stresses the importance of being considerate of others you lead, giving them ample opportunity to learn and grow under your help and guidance. Being bossy and rude is not okay and adds unnecessary stress to the ministry you supervise.

Being overbearing is a sign of arrogance, believing that you are more valuable than others and letting them know it. The term literally means 'self-pleasing' that disregards the needs of others, thinking mainly about what benefits you above all else. It often takes the form of dictatorial rule where the leader only listens to the opinion of one person -themselves. People generally respond to autocratic leaders one of two ways. They either resign themselves to doing exactly what they are told, or they push back and rebel. Either reaction is counter-productive to what must be the overall goal which is making disciples who mature and grow and use their gifts to make more disciples.

As in all the qualifications, it is smart to investigate the potential overseer's leadership style before committing to their appointment. Do the people they serve respond favourably to them and enjoy learning from them? When you interact with the candidate, do they come across as being a know-it-all who thinks things should always go their way or not at all? How do they talk about those they minister with and to? Are they respectful and concerned for the well-being of those they serve? People do need strong leadership to thrive, even if they chafe under it occasionally. However, strong is not the same as mean and over-bearing that oppresses and scatters. It is confidence and competence displayed by someone secure and mature in Christ.

Q18. Describe a strong leader you know who is not overbearing.

19. Not pursuing dishonest gain (Titus 1:7)

This qualification is connected to #12 – ‘not a lover of money’. We examined how money can easily become an idol that you love that takes your worship away from God. This requisite #19 goes further by warning that the fixation on money can tempt you to accumulate it dishonestly. Some have even used their position as a spiritual leader to take from others what does not belong to them instead of serving willingly as they are supposed to (see 1 Peter 5:2).

Being ethical always is an expectation for all followers of Christ, including overseers. Unnecessary disrepute on the church has happened because of shady dealings and false claims. In our day, as in the early church era, people claiming to represent Christ promote false teaching to benefit themselves financially at the expense of gullible and undiscerning novices in Biblical truth and Holy Spirit direction. The so-called prosperity gospel is one example of promising financial reward to those who give money to the false teacher. Too many charlatans have become wealthy by doing this while millions of people have been taken advantage of. This has become a stain on the reputation of the true church and has brought ridicule by those who mock the claims of the gospel.

At the local church level, this issue is not generally as dramatic or public. There is the potential however for anyone to use their leadership position to gain personal advantages. An example is someone with access to church finances could divert money to themselves by making false expense claims or pocketing cash donations while unsupervised. When considering someone for an overseer role, they should be someone you consider to be principled, honest, and upright with even the smallest things. They should be known for their sacrificial generosity to others, not their lavish lifestyle and material assets. They should be virtuous people who make it a point to practice Biblical standards of morality whatever the personal cost to them. Those are the ones you want overseeing the affairs of the church family because you can trust them.

Q19. How can you tell when you can trust someone with the ‘master key’?

20. Loves what is good (Titus 1:8)

It is easy to glance at this quality and miss how vital it is for every disciple of Christ to have. Check out the word ‘good’ in your Bible concordance and you will find hundreds of references about a multitude of things that are good. Some examples include God himself, God’s creation, God’s word, God’s will, God’s works, the gospel, deeds, kingdom fruit, hope and many more.

The spiritual overseer should be someone who loves what is good and disdains what is evil. That requires being able to distinguish between the two in any situation by maturing in God’s word (Hebrews 5:13,14). It involves testing all things to hold on to what is good and avoid what is evil to benefit everyone you can (Titus 3:8). You must train yourself to be godly by the daily renewing of your mind and focusing on God’s best (Romans 12:1,2 / Philippians 4:8).

You can tell a lot about someone by finding out what they spend their time doing, what they watch, what they listen to, who they look up to, and how discerning they are. When considering someone to be a spiritual overseer, you should see in them a person obsessed with doing what God considers good and cautious about doing anything that might be evil. Do they exhibit goodness of character as evidence of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22)? Do they live sacrificially for God and conform themselves to his pattern of godliness to know his good will (Romans 12:1,2)? Do they have a reputation of doing good deeds for fellow believers and for outsiders (Galatians 6:10 / Luke 6:27)? A spiritual leader must be someone who knows what good is and loves experiencing it always.

Q20. What practical things do you do to be able to choose good over evil in any situation?

21. Upright (Titus 1:8)

Being upright means to live according to God's holy standards. It is being in a righteous relationship with God through faith in Christ. It is learning the ways of godliness and making every effort to follow them with the enabling of the Holy Spirit. Uprightness is not the same as perfection as if someone can be sinless and mistake free all the time. It is having a heart that loves God deeply and wants to live in a way that pleases God.

The Bible is filled with examples and promises of God's blessing on the righteous. Look up the words upright, righteous and righteousness in your Bible concordance and see for yourself why living by God's principles is not just about being obedient to God but it is the absolute smartest way to live. Not only will you experience the Lord's favour in every aspect of life but those you interact with will also be impacted by your blessing. An example of personal blessing of uprightness is "for the Lord detests the perverse but takes the upright into his confidence." (Proverbs 3:32). An example of others being blessed through your uprightness is "Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted..." (Proverbs 11:11). An upright Christ follower will be blessed beyond measure and will be a source of blessing to those they impact.

When considering someone to be an overseer, determine whether they adhere to godly principles and exhibit conduct of righteousness. Are they showing evidence of consistently saying and doing what is honest and just? Do they "hunger and thirst for righteousness" and model it to the full as Jesus said they would (Matthew 5:6)? Are their family, church family, and acquaintances being blessed through their rectitude and probity? Those are the people you want in positions of spiritual leadership that influence everyone around them to be upright before God and enjoy his favour.

Q21. Describe the difference between uprightness and perfection.

22. Holy (Titus 1:8)

Being holy is essentially living your life God's way. When you commit your life to Christ by faith, you are set apart by the Holy Spirit to know, love, and serve God above all else. You choose to be decidedly different from unbelievers who conform to the pattern of the world that runs counter to God's ways. Every disciple of Christ is called a saint which means holy one. While no believer can be perfect or sinless, they are a representative of God who is perfectly holy. Spiritual leaders must be examples of God's holiness (1 Peter 1:14-16).

Holy living is perpetual worship to God: "...in view of God's mercy...offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Romans 12:1,2a. Being holy requires daily spiritual growth that deepens your relationship with God: "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." Hebrews 12:14. Holy people live according to a high, moral standard: "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people." Ephesians 5:3. These are a few of many Scriptures that teach holy living as a command of God for every believer.

An overseer must be known as holy, sanctified, and set apart by God to live for him. They must be experienced in living in the world but not being worldly. They will stand out for their dedication to growing in godliness and their determination to set a holy example for others to follow. They will not be perfect in everything but will always care deeply about pleasing God and representing Christ well.

Q22. Why is the command to be holy like God is holy both sobering and motivating?

23. Disciplined (Titus 1:8)

This quality is similar to #4 'self-controlled' included in this verse and 1 Timothy 3:2. The emphasis of 'self-controlled' is on the inner transformation of mind and emotions to think and act rationally. The focus of 'disciplined' is on the inner strength essential for experiencing transformed living with its benefits to lead others by example over the long term. It describes being in control of one's passions, impulses, and desires to live the way God intends. Self-discipline is necessary for staying focused on your mission and not giving into distractions that can side-track you.

Being disciplined is evidence of maturing in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23). It is harnessing your energies for productive use. It is the last of nine fruits listed which shows its importance for giving opportunity for the other fruit to grow. Like all these attributes, the seed of self-control is already in you as a believer through the Holy Spirit who is prepared to develop it in you as you surrender to his control.

It should be obvious that an overseer must be disciplined. The challenges faced by spiritual leaders can be intense and unrelenting at times. Sticking to the mission and not caving into opposition and pressures takes supernatural ability provided by the Holy Spirit. Even when things are going along smoothly without much disruption, discipline is needed to not slacken off and develop bad habits that diminish personal growth and ministry gains. When considering a candidate for overseer, look for evidence of balanced living by how they take care of themselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually. How dependent are they on the Holy Spirit to prepare them to deal with anything that comes up? Those who are committed to daily spiritual training will prove to be well balanced and prepared.

Q23. How has discipline benefited your growth and your influence with others?

24. Spiritually deep (Titus 1:9)

“He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” This verse has three major qualities that contribute to someone’s spiritual depth. We deal with the first aspect in this section and the others in the next two. Here the focus is on being trained and competent in Christian doctrine as a baseline for spiritual acumen. Basic discipleship requires knowing, obeying, and teaching others to obey Christ’s commands (Matthew 28:19,20). A spiritual leader is first and foremost a disciple of Jesus.

Spiritual competency is also a requisite for being a deacon: “They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.” 1 Timothy 3:9. At every step of a believer’s development, knowing and doing God’s word is indispensable. The point was made earlier that someone being considered for an overseer should first be qualified to be a deacon, preferably already serving in that role. And someone being vetted for a deacon position should be recognized as a productive disciple already. Both leadership roles have the necessity of ongoing spiritual growth in common.

The apostle Paul outlines the mentoring process for all potential ministry leaders in his directive to Timothy, a young pastor trained by Paul: “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.” 2 Timothy 2:2. Paul understood the importance of spiritual leaders being rooted and grounded in solid Biblical doctrine through equipping of the Holy Spirit: “What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Jesus Christ. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.” 2 Timothy 1:13,14. Being diligent at becoming spiritually deep will build the leader’s faith and will equip them to administer the Word effectively. The next two sections discuss the overseer being able to encourage and correct others doctrinally with competence.

Q24. Why do we keep stressing the importance for everyone to be trained in the Word?

25. Encourages others by sound doctrine (Titus 1:9)

This competency is the teaching part of administering the Word examined in section #7 above. The spiritual leader must give their best effort to become a diligent and effective minister by utilizing the Bible correctly for every situation faced (2 Timothy 2:15). In this section we highlight the power of God's word for dynamic ministry equipping of others.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."
2 Timothy 3:16,17.

An overseer must know how to encourage others effectively using God's word in any circumstance. When you are spiritually deep (#24 above), you have confidence that what you have learned is useful for teaching others, equipping them for whatever they face in daily life and ministry. The leader must grow in the knowledge and application of sound doctrine to be able to correctly use the Bible to train and equip believers thoroughly. Regardless of the issue or challenge being faced by people, the best thing you can give them is the reassurance of God's truth to encourage them.

When considering someone to be an overseer, determine how God's word influences the way they think, pray, and act. Do they have a high regard for the adequacy of Biblical teaching to transform lives for eternity in Christ? When they are facing personal challenges, do they find strength and inspiration in God's word and move forward by applying its truth? When they are tasked with helping others through a tough time, do they go to the Word with them to find direction and courage? If someone cannot do that, they need further growth in the Word to become a legitimate instructor and practitioner of sound doctrine as a spiritual leader.

Q25. Give an example when you used the Word to encourage a believer to keep growing.

26. Refutes those who oppose sound doctrine (Titus 1:9)

This ability is the disciplining part of administering the Word by a spiritual overseer. As examined in sections #24 and #25 above, spiritual depth with a proficient knowledge of God's word is essential for anyone leading others. A primary goal of leadership is to make sure every believer is thoroughly equipped to thrive in daily living and kingdom service. The previous section focused on the teaching aspect to encourage spiritual progress in someone. This section looks at the importance of training others in righteousness by helping them return to sound doctrine when they get off track.

An overseer must be able to recognize true and false teaching by being fully trained in interpreting and handling God's word. To refute someone in error is to point out that what they believe and teach is false and must be corrected. The Bible is God-breathed and totally reliable when used accurately with the guidance of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16,17 quoted above).

Sometimes the error addressed is relatively minor committed by someone new to the faith or lacking in Bible training. Helping them to see where they are off base and how to get it right is basic discipling. And then there are times the error is by someone opposed to orthodoxy and church authority that is trying to influence others to believe with them. A strong and necessary response to their inaccurate teaching is required by mature overseers positioned to do so.

Refuting someone's false teaching is a corrective measure that should be done sooner than later. A spiritual leader must be able to point out doctrinal errors and why they should be replaced with what is sound and true. Hopefully, opponents who are confronted by godly overseers will recognize where they are wrong and are willing to change and adopt to what is true and approved by God. They will benefit personally if they do and those they have influenced will be rescued from going down a wrong path. If false teachers do not accept rebuke and instruction, they will suffer the consequences of being judged by God and will be designated as off limits to other believers. This strong measure is meant to help keep the church family doctrinally pure and relationally healthy.

Q26. What are some benefits of spiritual leaders using God's word effectively?

Summary

This may be a lot of information to digest if it is your first time working through each of the 26 necessary attributes listed. It is reasonable to ask who is capable of being qualified as a spiritual overseer. If being perfect in every category is required, then no one measures up. However, it is maturity, not perfection, that is needed in anyone serious about leading others. As mentioned in the Introduction, it is important to see some evidence of each quality in this list present and growing in a spiritual leader candidate to be considered eligible for the task.

It is not known how many local churches use this grid in some form to evaluate overseers. It is my suspicion that there are not many based on my life-long church and denominational experience and interaction with multiple ministry participants. It is my contention that every church would benefit greatly by producing qualified people to equip others to effectively do the work of the ministry in its various forms. Rather than settling for choosing those who are unqualified to fill roles because no one else is available, how much better would it be to have those who are capable and competent to serve?

What is needed is a long-term process of making disciples and training leaders for the entire church organization and each local church family. This can be accomplished in every assembly by instituting a disciple-making component to every ministry as a defining value. An ongoing discipling process is the natural and ideal training ground for everyone in ministry including those who have leadership potential. Over the long term, the number of people qualified to lead will increase substantially.

This intentional focus will also benefit the denominational organization significantly as every local church makes true disciples of their members and produces qualified spiritual leaders. Denominations and institutions will experience increased kingdom impact by focusing their efforts and resources on supporting every local church to be disciple-making machines that fulfill the Great Commission. This approach is also how leaders for national and international entities are practically trained and qualified.

In the Introduction, three groups were identified who could benefit from this article. For you that are already in an overseer position, this document provides a helpful self-evaluation tool to use. If you are currently being considered for an overseer role, use this study to assess and confirm your eligibility. If you are responsible to vet a candidate's appointment as overseer, this outline provides a useful grid for assessing.

As a spiritual overseer for decades, I recognized the need for developing spiritual leaders who could equip others to do kingdom ministry. This essay is my attempt to provide an accessible and practical summary of what Biblical leaders should look like and a realistic standard to work towards. I offer this survey to you with humility and anticipation of renewed kingdom advancement through all our efforts.

Del Wells



This course is part of the Life Transformation series available online from:

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The Overseers Qualifications

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