

What is a Biblical Deacon?

Selected Scriptures - NCBC, February 12, 2017

Main Point: **Deacons are spiritually mature ministry leaders who assist elders in their shepherding of God's church.**

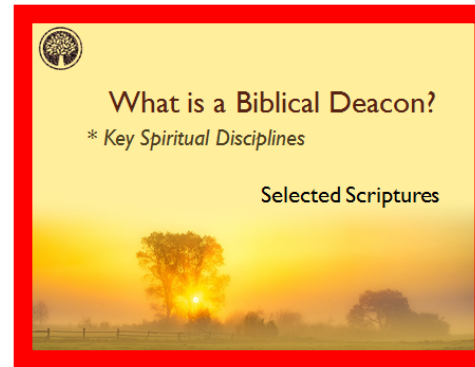
- **Deacons are spiritually mature** (1 Tim 3:8-12)
- **Deacons are ministry leaders** (Phil. 1:1)
- **Deacons assist elders in shepherding** (Acts 6:1-7)

Application: **Pray for our deacons and follow their example in ministry.**

Opening Announcements:

Prayers for 65 NCBCers @ Ice Camp!
Prayers for the BCTC Attendees @ Conference.
Missionary plug? (Delagrange?)

<<Oh Praise (the Only One)>>



We lay every crown down at the feet of Jesus – the lamb of God who became the Chief Shepherd. We gather to praise Him this morning. For when Jesus is our Shepherd, we have all that we need.

I invite you now to prepare for the public reading of God's Word from **Acts 6**.



If you don't have a Bible with you this morning, please catch the attention of the men. You are welcome to take this Bible home as our gift to you, or just simply return it

after our service by placing it on the table in the back of the room.

How was your spiritual dependence this week? Has prayer with God become a sweeter part of your worship in recent days? Keep praying church – the Battle belongs to God! Over 60 of our loved ones are finishing up **Ice Camp** this morning – Pray for God’s Spirit to transform lives one heart at a time.

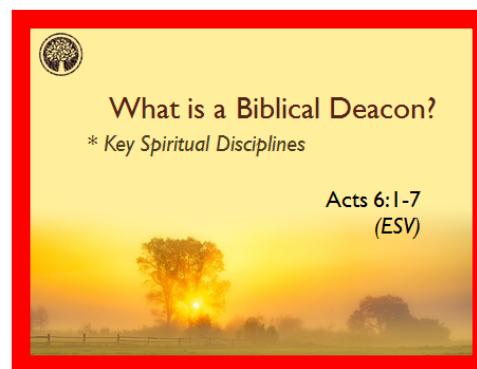
This week 15 of our church members will be attending the **Biblical Counseling Conference**. Pray that God’s Spirit would purify hearts and increase the faith of our leaders who receive this training.

Pray that God will continue to hallow His Name in and through every member of this church this week.

Next week **Jerry McCorkle from Spread Truth Ministries** will be in our pulpit to exhort us towards greater missional faithfulness. And I’m excited to share that **Dave LaFrance, the principal of Oakland Elementary School in Bloomington**, is coming along with him.

Because I’ve been intrigued to note how many of our church family are actively involved in education. God has blessed us with a high population of teachers, coaches, administrators, and professors. And so next week – during the ABF hour – there will be a very special opportunity for all of you educators (and anyone else who is interested) to learn from Jerry and Dave as they talk about SpreadTruth’s evangelistic reach into public

schools. If you are an educator – please plan to attend this special seminar next Sunday morning at **9:30am** here in the Family Center.



This morning we open God’s Word to answer the question, **“What is a Biblical Deacon?”**

I’ve selected **Acts 6:1-7** for our Scripture reading. You can find this text on page _____ of the Bibles we’ve handed out. Please stand with me now in honor of God’s Word as I read from **Acts chapter 6, starting in verse 1:**

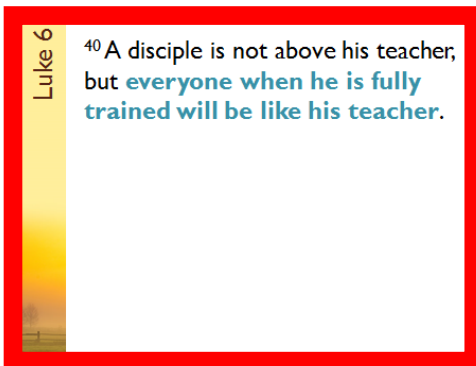
6 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the

word.”⁵ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.⁷ And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

So reads God’s Holy Word. You may be seated.

Let’s Pray.

In His sermon on the plain in **Luke 6**, Jesus teaches us an important lesson on spiritual leadership.



Everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.

Notice what Jesus doesn’t teach here:

- When a disciple is fully trained, he will have all the knowledge he needs.

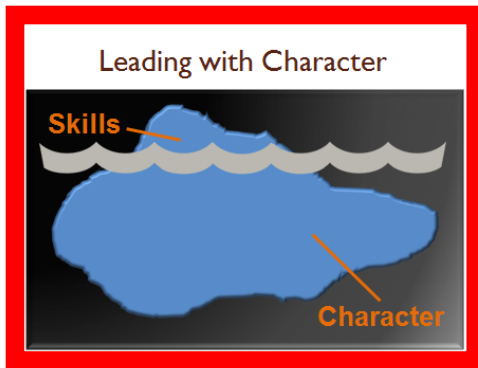
Or,

- When a disciple is fully trained, he will have all the skills he needs.

No. When it comes to spiritual leadership, Jesus’ teaching is radical. Because it’s not about doing. It’s about being. Spiritual leadership is *not* about helping others perform... It’s primarily about helping others become... more like Christ.

The student has matured when his character is *like* his teacher’s. Spiritual leadership is first and foremost about the reproduction of character, not just knowledge or skills. Jesus teaches us the church member will eventually become like his church leader.

No wonder the Scriptures demand such high standards of purity and integrity from spiritual leaders. For who a man is, is always more important than what he does.



Call it the “leadership iceberg principle.” The huge mass of character that is often unseen is far more important than a few necessary leadership gifts or skills which are publicly demonstrated.

Never content yourselves with *skillful* leaders who have disconnected themselves from a lifestyle of personal repentance and faith.¹ “Waterless clouds”² can only fill a church with “dry bones.”³

Christ-like leaders don’t teach, “Do as I say, but not as I do.” No, Paul twice taught the Corinthians to imitate his own example, as he himself was following Christ.⁴

Now rest assured this doesn’t mean that church leaders are perfect themselves. There’s only one Sinless Shepherd – and His Name is Jesus! But it does mean that the leaders must be the “chief repenting officers” of

¹ C.f. Ezekiel 34:4ff

² Jude 11-16

³ Ezekiel 37

⁴ 1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1

the church – modeling a Christ-dependent faith and joyful lifestyle of repentance that is exemplary for others to follow.

So we approach this topic of spiritual leadership this morning with great humility and dependence on one hand – and great awe and thanksgiving in the other. For our God is a God who specializes in converting Sauls to Pauls.⁵ God’s grace transforms a “Son of Thunder” into “the Apostle of Love.”⁶ God’s Spirit delights to use willing hearts like Peter’s and yours and mine ... to show the surpassing power of Jesus Christ through our weakness!⁷

So do you desire to influence others for God’s glory? In your family? In the marketplace? In your church? That is a good desire.⁸ Rest in the power of God’s Spirit, and pursue knowing Christ more and more yourself first – for spiritual leadership is the communication of Christ-like character to those who are following you.

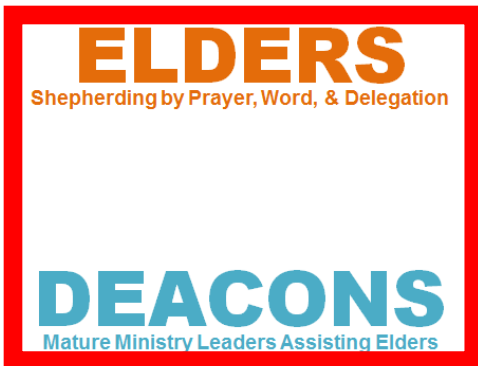
Now for the church, the Scriptures reveal two primary leadership offices.

⁵ Acts 9

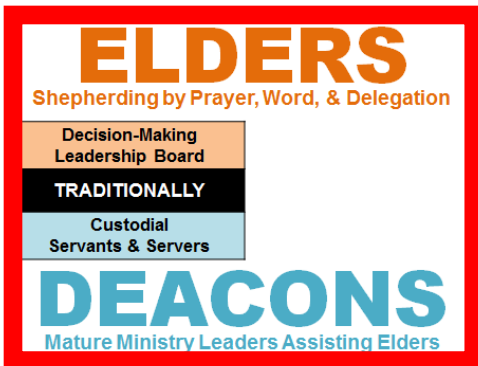
⁶ Mark 3:17; 1 John 4

⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:7ff

⁸ 1 Timothy 3:1, 13

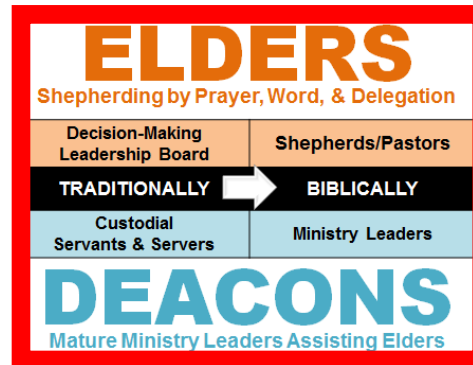


The leadership office of biblical elders, pastors, or overseers... and the leadership office of biblical deacons or ministry leaders.



Traditionally, the elder office was viewed more as decision-making, leadership board responsibility. And traditionally here at New Castle, the deacon office has been more of a custodial servant role. The primary deacon responsibilities have included assisting with church ordinances, distributing benevolence, leading in

hospitality, and serving as trustees for our church building and grounds.



However our biblical studies this past year have shown that a biblical elder should be far more than a faithful decision-maker. A biblical elder *is* a pastor, a shepherd, an overseer of God’s flock. The biblical elder is responsible for teaching, guarding, and caring for the flock of God – in plurality with other God-called men.

And likewise, the work of a biblical deacon extends beyond the necessary ministries of facilities and mercy. The deaconate is a leadership office – people leading together in service – not just doing the ministry themselves.

In short, biblical elders are called to shepherd the flock of God with prayer, the ministry of the Word, and by delegating the saints to do the work of the ministry.⁹

⁹ Acts 6:4

As a church grows, there's more administration required for the proper functioning of the body. Often in a church there can be the expectation or even the demand that the elders ought to be everywhere the ministry is going on. But whenever the elders give in to these expectations, they shift their priorities from God's good design, and end up doing more deacon work than true eldering.

Therefore, the effectiveness of a church's ministry depends on the elders' ability to prioritize and delegate. A biblically effective deacon ministry is necessary to effective eldering in a growing church. God gives a church deacons to keep the personal limitations of its elders from unnecessarily limiting the church's effectiveness for God's glory.

So today we turn our attention to the office of the deaconate. For deacons are

Main Point 

Deacons are spiritual mature ministry leaders who assist elders in their shepherding of God's church.




spiritually mature ministry leaders who assist elders in their shepherding of God's church.

As we walk through this definition today, let's pray that God will strengthen our understanding of His good design for spiritual leadership in His church.

First, let's turn to **1 Timothy chapter 3**, where we observe that,

Deacons are spiritually mature. (1 Timothy 3:8-12)



Biblical Deacons are spiritually mature (1 Tim 3:8-12)

Now this is worth noting. Because some traditions have functionally lowered the bar – making the qualifications for serving as a deacon more about being a handy-man or a “getter-done-r” than about having the character of Christ.

Although deacon's primary function is not teaching in the church, they are to be no less spiritually qualified and respected in their Christ-like character than the pastors and the elders.

Let me read the text for us:

1 Timothy 3:8,

⁸ *Deacons likewise* [now the likewise here refers back to verse 1, which introduced us to the office of overseer or elder. All the 7 verses before this were describing the spiritual qualities of a biblical elder.]

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 *[Women] 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.*

Now don't read over these leadership qualities too quickly. These are very high character standards for spiritual maturity. In fact, the only real distinction between the elder qualities in **verses 1-7** and the deacon qualities in **verses 8-13** is just that the elder must be able to skillfully teach in verse 2.

Without a doubt, a biblical deacon is spiritually mature.

First in **verse 8**, we observe 4 personal qualities.

Deacons		
4 Personal Qualities		
I want to be like you ...		
8a	Dignified	Worthy of Respect
8b	Not double-tongued	Sincere / Honest
8c	Not Drunkards	Controlled / Sober
8d	Not Greedy	Generous / Trusted

Just like the older men in **Titus 2:2**, they must be dignified, or worthy of respect. They must not be characterized by flattery or devious speech, but be sincere and honest in all of his communication.

They must not be addicted to much wine, but rather be clear-minded, and noted for having themselves under control.

And biblical deacons are not greedy for dishonest gain, but rather generous and trustworthy. This is important, since biblical elders will often delegate the financial matters of the church to the deacons so they can keep their priorities on the ministry of the word and prayer.

Next Paul lists out 4 Spiritual qualities of deacons:

Deacons 4 Spiritual Qualities		
I want to be like you ...		
9	Hold faith with a Clear Conscience	Know & Live out the Biblical Gospel
10	Tested and found blameless	Proven faithful
12	Husband of one wife	Morally Pure
12	Managing own household well	Serving Family Well

In **verse 9**, they must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. In other words – they must have a clear understanding of the Gospel, and their walk should match their talk.

Verse 10 describes how the character of a deacon must be adequately tested before they are to be installed into such a significant position of spiritual leadership in the church.

We want to grow in this area. But for the men who we are commissioning as deacons today, let me remind you of the “testing” process they submitted themselves to.

Each of these deacons were selected by the elders based on the observed testimony of their faithful ministry in the church. Every candidate submitted written evaluations based on these qualities from **1 Timothy 3** (one from their wife, and one from themselves). Then the deacon candidates and their wives completed an “interview” with elder representatives. In such a manner, these men have been proven faithful.

Verse 12 goes on teaching that deacons should literally be a “one-woman man” – in other words – morally pure and entirely faithful to their spouse. **Verse 13** underscores how the proving ground for spiritual leadership is how a man manages his own children and household.

But you might have noticed that I skipped **verse 11**, right? Because translations differ how they translate the Greek in that verse. So it’s important to realize several points: first – the Greek word used is the word for woman, not wife. Second, there is no pronoun in the Greek text. Third, there was no word for a female deacon in biblical Greek. And fourth, the “likewise” points back to verse 1 again to suggest an additional category of spiritual leadership. So while our English translations disagree widely on how to translate **verse 11**, I believe it is best to translate it as “Female deacons likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.”

The teaching of female deacons or deaconesses would also be consistent with the mention of Phoebe – the female deacon in **Romans 16:1**, and Priscilla’s example in **Acts 18:1-3**.

Clearly Scripture reserves the elder office for men.¹⁰ So the presence of female deacons is not contrary at all to these complementarian teachings.

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 2:12-14; 1 Corinthians 14:34

Deacon leadership is not authoritative leadership like eldering. Just as we presently have female leaders on our ministry staff here at New Castle – who lead ministries alongside and under the authority of our elder team of men, so I believe the Scriptures reveal God’s design for female deacons.

So **1 Timothy 3:11** teaches us 4 personal qualities that are necessary for female deacons whom God gives to His church:

Female Deacons 4 Personal Qualities		
I want to be like you ...		
11a	Dignified	Worthy of Respect
11b	Not slanderers	Speaking Truth in Love
11c	Sober-minded	Clear-minded
11d	Faithful in all things	Fully Trustworthy

Just like the male deacons in **verse 8** above,¹¹ the biblical deaconess must be dignified, have control of her tongue, be clear-minded, and fully trustworthy in her character.

In short, no matter whether you are a male or a female – you should aspire towards the character of a deacon – for deacons are the personification of spiritual maturity!

¹¹ And just like the older women in Titus 2:3.

Now quickly turn back to **Philippians chapter 1**, where we are going to observe the fact that,



Deacons are ministry leaders (Phil. 1:1)

Paul starts his letter to the Philippian church this way,

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.

Just like what we just read in **1 Timothy 3**, Paul specifically mentions the two leadership offices of the church – elders and deacons.

So make sure and note this. The deaconate is a *leadership* office. Deacons are not only faithful servants. They are servants of course – that’s the word deacon means. But they are servant-*leaders*. They are serving in a leadership office of the church.

This means that deacons serve the church – not primarily by doing ministry themselves – but by striving to equip

and develop other members to meet the needs of the Body. So the faithful servants of Christ who serve as deacons in Christ church should exercise some form of leadership gifts.

Remember – there’s only 3 significant differences between a biblical elder and a biblical deacon.

Deacons are ministry leaders. (Philippians 1:1)	
Elders	Deacons
Only Male	Male or Female
Spiritual Priorities	Spiritual & Physical
Gifted to Teach	May or May not be Gifted to Teach

Elders must be male, while deacons can be either male or female. According to **Acts 6:4**, elders focus on the spiritual priorities of prayer and the ministry of the Word. However deacons focus on both spiritual and physical priorities. Elders must be gifted to teach according to **1 Timothy 3:2**, while deacons may or may not be gifted to teach.

So I hope that your understanding of a Biblical Deacon is being strengthened this morning. A biblical deacon is not an entry-level, hands-on ministry. It is one of the highest leadership callings in the church – reserved only for the spiritually mature.

So far then this morning we’ve learned that Deacons are spiritually mature ministry leaders. But what is the nature of deacon leadership?

For that, let’s turn to **Acts chapter 6**, where we observe that the deacons’ leadership aims to,



assist elders in shepherding of God’s church (Acts 6:1-7)

In **Acts 6** there’s no elders and deacons yet...the church is yet in the Apostolic age. But how the apostles handled the pressures of the growing church is very relevant and instructive for our understanding of deacons today.

In **verse 2** – the apostles made their spiritual priorities known. *“It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.”*

So notice right away this first principle for spiritual leaders today –

Deacons assist elders in shepherding (Acts 6:1-7)

- Elders **delegate on the basis of God-given priorities**, not preferences.



Elders are called to delegate on the basis of their God-given priorities, rather than their personal preferences.

Serving the believing widows was a real need. It was a good and necessary work. But it wasn't the highest priority for the apostles.

Elders – we must know and embrace our biblical shepherding priorities. And in case we have any confusion about this, **verses 3-4** clearly articulate the biblical priorities of the elder:

Prayer, the ministry of the word, and appointing spiritually mature people to the leadership of other necessary ministries. Prayer, teaching, and delegation – these are the God-given priorities of the elder/pastor.

All other ministry leadership is to be delegated to spiritually mature¹² ministry leaders who work together in

¹² Note again the high spiritual standards for these ministry leaders who were to oversee the food distribution for the hundreds of widows scattered among the church of 20K+ people in that region.

plurality¹³ under the elders' oversight to shepherd God's church.

Therefore the scope of the deacon ministry in an established church should be quite broad.

Deacons assist elders in shepherding (Acts 6:1-7)

- Elders **delegate on the basis of God-given priorities**, not preferences.
- Scripture **does not limit the kinds of ministries** that deacons may lead.



The Scripture certainly does not limit the kinds of ministries that deacons may lead in a church – in fact there is great flexibility and breadth of ministry implied by the Scriptures.¹⁴

However what is clear are the high standards of spiritual maturity and purity for those who would serve Christ in this role.

To summarize then, we understand that,

¹³ Deacons are always plural whenever mentioned in Scripture: Phil 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8, 10, 12, 13 (except Romans 16:1).

¹⁴ Philip was an evangelist (Acts 8:4-13, 26-40; 21:8-9); Stephen also was a miracle-worker and preacher of righteousness (Acts 6-7); Phoebe was a beloved helper of the church at Cenchreae (Romans 16:1-2); c.f. Tychicus (Eph 6:21) and Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:1-3)

Main Point 

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Deacons are spiritually mature ministry leaders who assist elders in their shepherding of God's church.

They help the elders lead and organize specific ministry initiatives. They help the elders strengthen ongoing ministries. They assist the elders in counseling and caring for the needs of present members. They work together to manage the financial business of the church according to the vision and priorities of the elders. And on and on we could go.

So then, in light of this high calling of the biblical deaconate, as a church family we must,

Application 

Pray for our deacons and follow their example in ministry.



Pray for our deacons and follow their example in ministry.

We solicit your prayers for all of our deacons as they continue to further their service as our ministry leaders alongside our elder team at New Castle Bible Church.

So let's pray for them now, share we?



Deacon Commissioning



God has been very kind to appoint such faithful and humble men of spiritual maturity and servant-heartedness to help shepherd our hearts together towards greater worship of Jesus Christ.

Today we have the privilege of formally commissioning 6 new deacons, and 4 remaining deacons into this ministry. **When I call your names, men – please come forward with your wives. I would also invite the rest of our pastors and elders and their wives to come forward to prepare to lay hands on them as we pray as well.**

**Ben Holman
Rob Huschen
Mike Mathis
Wes Ohnesorge
Mike Rassi
Tim Yoder**



And since we have not yet formally laid hands on the 4 remaining deacons, we want to also invite them and their wives forward now as well:

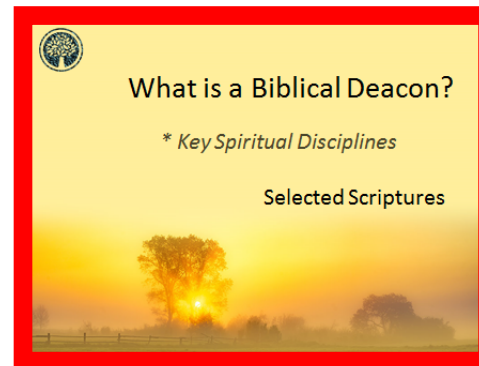
**Craig Delagrange
Kurt Iwankovitsch
Jerry Mooberry,
and Joel Nafziger**

Today we want to publicly lay hands on these men – and together commission them to the ministry of Biblical Deaconing according to God’s divine appointment.

Please join with our elders and their wives now as we lay hands on these dear men – we would invite all of the members of this church to participate in this with us by reaching out your hands towards these men – right from where you are seated, and joining us in this commissioning prayer.

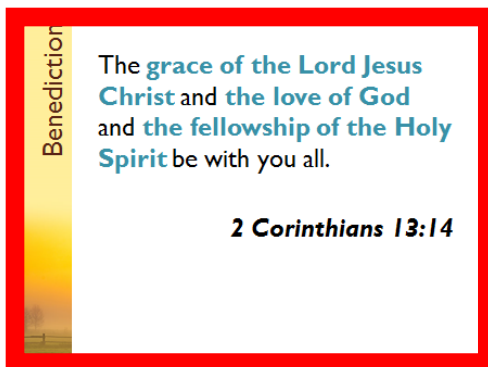
Let’s pray for these men and the ministry that God has entrusted to them by His Spirit.

Amen.



Closing Song – <<Thank You>>

Benediction



The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

2 Corinthians 13:14



Recommended Resources on Deacon Leadership:

- Matthew 20:25-28
- Mark 10:42-45

- Luke 22:24-27
- Acts 6:1-7
- Acts 8:4-13, 26-40
- Acts 21:8-9
- Romans 16:1-2
- Ephesians 6:21
- Philippians 1:1-2
- 1 Timothy 3:8-13, 5:22

- <http://www.desiringgod.org/books/the-marks-of-a-spiritual-leader>
- <http://biblicaleldership.com/effective-shepherding-172/leading-gods-flock-0/directing-deacons/>
- <https://9marks.org/journal/deacons/>

- The New Testament Deacon, Strauch
- Elders and Leaders, Getz
- Old Paths, New Power, Henderson

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. The qualities of spiritual maturity presented in 1 Tim. 3:8-13 ought to be a growing reality for all believers. As you meditate on what spiritual maturity looks like, how could you prayerfully pursue growth in these areas yourself?
2. Compare the list of character qualities for elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3:1-13. What is the primary distinction between the elder calling and the deacon calling? (c.f. Acts 6:2-4)

3. The Bible uses the metaphor of a “shepherd” to describe the spiritual leaders of Christ’s church. Why is it important to remember that God’s “flock” is a family and not a business, government, military, or club?
4. Read 1 Cor. 12:12-31. How has God structured his body (the church)? How can church leaders and members work together to pursue greater joy and unity throughout the body for God’s glory?