

"As a pastor, I think regularly about what kind of leadership our congregation will have after I am with the Lord and occupied with other things. The challenges of generational transition in church leadership are among the greatest a church will ever face. With that in mind, I welcome Thabiti Anyabwile's fine contribution to this necessary discussion. *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* promises to be a great help indeed."

Douglas Wilson, Fellow of Philosophy and Classic Languages,
New St. Andrews College; Pastor, Christ Church, Moscow, Idaho

"Choosing men who will lead your church is serious work. I commend this valuable resource to you from my friend and partner in the gospel Thabiti Anyabwile. It is both thoughtful and practical. His insights in this book will help you recruit, enlist, and reproduce faithful leaders in your church."

James MacDonald, Senior Pastor, Harvest Bible Chapel,
Rolling Meadows, Illinois

"Out of an obvious love for the local church, Pastor Thabiti takes biblical leadership very seriously. He takes it so seriously that he has written a book designed to be both biblical and accessible to the people of the church—clearly explaining the Bible's teaching on the qualifications for leadership and so much more. After a careful exposition of every leadership qualification, he includes a list of helpful questions for the aspiring leader to ask himself and for those who will be interviewing such aspiring leaders. Thank you, Thabiti, for helping me to reflect more deeply on my calling as an elder and in my effort to raise up God-glorifying and people-loving leaders in Christ's church for the next generation!"

Tom Steller, Pastor for Leadership Development,
Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota;
Dean, Bethlehem College and Seminary

"How do we identify, pick, and train the leaders we so desperately need? Pastor Thabiti has written a practical and theologically faithful book that addresses this critical issue, leaving no stone unturned. It is the kind of book you will want to keep on hand and refer to as you consider potential deacons and elders for the ministry. The book is down to earth, relevant, and thought provoking."

Dave Kraft, Pastor, Mars Hill Church, Orange County;
author, *Leaders Who Last*

"Thabiti Anyabwile's book is a great reminder of the basics that can easily be forgotten in the race for ecclesiastical progress—namely, that we need faithful elders and deacons. Although this book is meant to help those looking for church officers know what to look for, I found the questions to be a good tonic to my soul and a mirror exposing the areas in which I need to shape up as a church pastor."

Conrad Mbewe, Pastor, Kabwata Baptist Church, Lusaka, Zambia;
author, *Foundations for the Flock*

“This is a great book. On the surface, it’s an extended meditation on the biblical qualities of elders and deacons that causes you to think carefully about what God intends for his leaders. What should churches look for? Are you that kind of person? But underneath, it’s a radical reorientation of what leadership in the church is. Church leadership does not depend on academic or professional success but on godliness. This book will help change the way church members and leaders think of leadership, what they value, and what they cultivate. Leaders and members both will benefit.”

Jonathan Leeman, Editorial Director, 9Marks;
author, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love and Reverberation*

“*Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* offers the sort of meditations from the Pastoral Epistles that would-be elders and deacons-in-training need. Yet, pastors and laymen alike will find these chapters to be insightful and poignant, for they are faithful to Scripture, culturally contextualized, and able to be implemented instantly. There are thousands of well-meaning churches peddling along with mediocre religious practice that could be transformed into vibrant, Christ-pleasing, soul-winning, community-transforming churches if the officers of their congregations would humbly embrace the simple exhortations of this gracious work.”

Eric C. Redmond, Senior Pastor, Reformation Alive Baptist Church,
Temple Hills, Maryland

“As a member of a pastoral team that is always at some point in the process of identifying, developing, and affirming elders and deacons, I welcome this helpful book by Thabiti Anyabwile. Right from the start, with the simple clarity and conviction of its opening sentences, this book is marked by sound biblical teaching. The consistent transition into the practical counsel at the end of each chapter, however, is where this book really proves its worth. *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* will be a most useful primer for all those who are committed to doing church leadership by the Bible.”

Mike Bullmore, Senior Pastor, Crossway Community Church,
Bristol, Wisconsin

FINDING FAITHFUL ELDERS
AND DEACONS

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FINDING FAITHFUL
ELDERS AND
DEACONS



THABITI M. ANYABWILE

 **CROSSWAY**
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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In memory of Philip Pedley,
faithful elder and servant,
who honored Jesus

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INTRODUCTION

And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

2 TIMOTHY 2:2

A church without godly leaders is an endangered church. And a church that does not train leaders is an unfaithful church. God gives leaders to his churches for the maturity, unity, and soundness of each local congregation. Without godly, faithful, replicating leadership, churches suffer deeply.

The apostle Paul knew how important such leadership is. In 2 Timothy, the apostle writes his “child” in the faith, Timothy, with several final instructions and exhortations, including the exhortation to find good leaders. Timothy grew up under the spiritual instruction of his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice (2 Tim. 2:2, 5). He traveled, served, and learned alongside Paul. And now the apostle, near the end of his life, instructing in the “shadow of the scaffold,”¹ writes with deep tenderness in almost every verse. Amidst the many jewels in this letter, one of them is Paul’s charge to find and entrust “faithful men.”

The apostle’s teaching must live on, passed from faithful hand to faithful hand. That means that the pastor must be able to spot faithful men and train them. If a man is not given to discipling others, it’s unlikely that he is called to the pastoral office.

I am the product of men who found me, probed my reliability, and entrusted me with gospel treasure. I think of Peter Rochelle. He selflessly granted me the opportunity to labor alongside him in

Introduction

planting a church. He first encouraged me to preach and teach, and his model of exposition has influenced me ever since.

Then there was Mark Dever, an unusually gifted discipler of men and teacher of God's Word. I cannot forget his eager generosity towards me. It began on the day of my membership interview at Capitol Hill Baptist Church. He asked what I wanted to do with my life over the long term. A little intimidated, I answered, "I would love it if the Lord allowed me to pastor full-time."

"Really?" Mark replied, eyebrow curiously raised, head slightly tilted. Then he turned to my wife and asked, "Can he teach?"

Oh no, I thought. *I did not see that coming. What would she say?* To my relief, "Oh, yes," came the quick and confident reply. Mark turned to me and said, "You should call the church office and get on my calendar for regular lunches together. Let's meet up and discuss good Christian books. You should consider my life open to you."

I have never forgotten those words. My five years at Capitol Hill Baptist Church were marked by Mark, Michael Lawrence, Matt Schmucker, and too many men to number—not to mention the church family as a whole—pouring themselves into me, entrusting me with the things they had heard, read, seen, and learned concerning the Lord, the gospel, and his bride.

WHAT DO MULTI-LEVEL MARKETERS HAVE THAT CHRISTIAN CHURCHES DO NOT?

For a number of years, every time I visited a bookstore I seemed to be approached by someone who asked me if I was interested in "earning an extra \$500 to \$1,000 per month working from home only ten hours per week." It was like I had a big sticker on my forehead reading "sucker for multi-level marketing." They wanted me to become a part of their "down line"—to join their league of unsuspecting, gullible, get-rich-quick marketers. They were multiplying themselves in the most zealous way possible.

What do multi-level marketers possess that Christian pastors do not?

Introduction

If direct sale and multi-level marketing businesses are constantly on the lookout for prospective representatives, certainly ambassadors for Christ should be. We've been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. Having come into possession of Christ himself, it's our business and pleasure to cultivate other stewards of God's good news, stewards who will in turn find others to keep and teach the gospel.

But *saying* that a pastor must find and train others is the easy part. Practically, what does this look like? How is it done?

In the chapters that follow, I want to invite pastors and elders to a conversation about finding and training faithful men for the task of leadership in the church. I am no expert. I haven't been at this long, and I'm sure there are tons of men who do it better. You won't find here a ten-step process for turning spiritual duds into elder studs. You won't find a surefire formula for making any and every person a stellar leader.

Instead, what follows are brief meditations on Paul's instructions to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3 and 4. With 1 Timothy 3, we examine the biblical qualifications for elders and deacons and ask, what kind of character must these men possess, and how can we spot it? With 1 Timothy 4, we consider Paul's charge to Timothy as a model for faithful pastoral ministry. With God's blessing, as we walk slowly through 1 Timothy 3 and 4, we will think about what qualities to search for and what duties need to be fulfilled in Christian leadership.

Much more could be said on this very important topic. Many excellent book-length resources are available to the interested reader.² I hope this little volume complements these other resources by helping the already-stretched pastor who wants to cultivate other leaders but needs a conversation partner to stir up some questions and ideas.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS BOOK?

First, use this book prayerfully. Pray for pastors and elders as they shepherd and serve the sheep. Pray for more men to be raised up in the congregation for this important work. Pray that the Lord would pour out his grace on those serving in these tasks. Pray that the members of the church would show genuine appreciation, love, and care for their shepherds. Pray that all the men in the church would grow in the qualities that elders should possess. Pray that men would have a godly desire to give their lives in serving the body of Christ as servant-leaders.

Second, use this book practically. The book does not delve into a lot of detailed argumentation, hoping instead to make application easily and quickly. I want the book to help in actually *doing* something—identifying and training elders—not just considering something. Put the suggestions into practice, and improve them with the experience and wisdom that come from your particular church setting and other faithful leaders.

Finally, use the book pedagogically. That is, use it to teach and instruct. Perhaps a church needs to select its first elders after a period of planning and study. Pastors may wish to use these brief chapters to “flesh out” for the average church member which qualities the congregation as a whole needs to be looking and praying for in their prospective elders. Examination and pastoral search committees may find similar help.

HOW NOT TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is not a sourcebook for leading witch hunts and rebellions against leaders. Shepherds are not perfect men. Though God sets the bar for pastoral ministry necessarily high, he uses the poles of grace to support that bar.

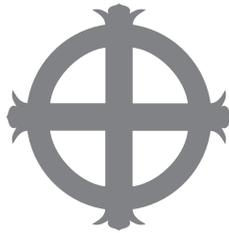
Users should keep the Lord's grace in mind as they read, lest an overly critical, gospel-forgetting, judgmental attitude develop. Few things are as harmful as the Lord's people becoming censorious toward the Lord's under-shepherds. In fact, the Bible itself tells us that rebellion against our spiritual leaders is of no advantage to us (Heb. 13:17). I very much hope this series of brief meditations would be an advantage for both pastors and people.

May the Lord be pleased to use this volume to help us recognize the gifts he has already given to his body for our growth in Christ (Eph. 4:11–16).

Thabiti M. Anyabwile
Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands
October 12, 2010

PART ONE

FINDING TABLE
SERVANTS



CHOOSING YOUR WAITER: AN INTRODUCTION TO DEACONS



I frequent restaurants fairly often. It's where a good deal of one-on-one discipleship happens. I meet with men from the church to discuss the Scripture, our lives, and good Christian books. Aside from the joy of sharing a meal together, having a good waiter helps make these visits fruitful. When waiters enjoy their task as table servers, when they are eager to serve, when they are available but not intrusive, then the experience is quite enjoyable.

The downside, of course, is that restaurant patrons generally don't get to choose their waiters. We arrive, are seated by a host or hostess, and then wait for whichever waiter has been assigned to our zone. We may find ourselves served by a wonderful waiter. But we may not. The server may not know the menu very well, could be experiencing a bad day, might have poor skills, or may be arriving from another table where he or she was treated badly. In secular speak, getting a good waiter is "the luck of the draw."

You might not have realized it, but there is at least one aspect of life in the local church that is like eating a meal in a restaurant. The local church, too, has table servers. We call them "deacons." The joy, peace, unity, and fruitfulness of the local church depends in part on having a cadre of faithful table servants who are present when needed, eager to serve without being intrusive.

The next several chapters focus on finding deacons in the local

FINDING TABLE SERVANTS

church—faithful table servers who give themselves to caring for the needs of the body. In the last decade or two, more and more churches have adopted the biblical model of eldership, which means the deacon role has either been redefined or neglected. But deacons are an indispensable part of serving the body of Christ and of multiplying the church's ministry.

We see this quite clearly in Acts 6, where the apostles charge the church in Jerusalem to find several men full of the Spirit and wisdom. The word *deacons* is not used in this passage, but the passage seems to point in this direction.

The opportunity: Acts 6:1 points out that “the disciples were increasing in number.” It was a time of spiritual prosperity in the conversion of souls and enrollment in the school of Christ. The Word of God was advanced and produced much fruit.

The threat: Inside the church, however, the Greek or Greek-speaking Jews lodged a complaint against the Hebraic or Hebrew-speaking Jews. The former group didn't believe food was distributed equally among their widows. Nor did this unequal distribution appear to randomly occur. It looked as if the widows were being treated differently because they were either Greeks or Hebrews. It seemed that cultural or ethnic prejudice was threatening the unity of the church and the physical well-being of some members.

The solution: so the apostles did two things. First, they determined to prioritize their own ministry of the Word and prayer, over caring for physical needs. Second, they instructed the church to choose seven men to “serve tables”—to deacon (v. 2). In doing so, the apostles made provision for both the ministry of the Word and the ministry of the widows.

To modern sensibilities, “serving tables” sometimes connotes a low-level, demeaning position. A person waits tables when he or she is working through college, or passing time until a career takes off. People regard it as a necessary sacrifice to make ends meet.

But how different it is in the Lord's church! The apostles under

Choosing Your Waiter: An Introduction to Deacons

the inspiration of God's Spirit appear to have created an entirely new office in the church for the specific purpose of serving tables. And the loftiness of the office is seen in (a) the character of the individuals required to fill it ("full of the Spirit and of wisdom" v. 3), (b) the fact that it facilitates the ministry of Word and prayer, and (c) the unifying and strengthening effect it has on the whole church. The deaconate is important!

Are there widows in our churches who are not well cared for? Perhaps we need to consider our work with deacons. Are there inequities in the distribution of benevolence resources in the church? Sounds like a job for deacons.

Are there cultural tensions and threats to unity in the church? Do we wish to see a more diverse church integrated in Christian life? The position of deacon was established to promote harmony across cultural and language lines.

Is the church threatened by a possible split? Deacons were the early church's "shock absorbers."³ They absorbed complaints and concerns, resolved them in godliness, and so preserved the unity and witness of the saints.

When Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus were commissioned for the deaconate, "the word of God spread" and "the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7 NIV). Who among us would not like to see the Word spread, the number of disciples rapidly increase, and *large numbers* of people become obedient to the faith? An effective deacon ministry facilitated this in the early church since it freed the deacons of the Word—the apostles—to do their work. With this hope in mind, I pray the Lord would guide us in our consideration of deacons and how to find them.