

August 7, 2005 by Steve Brandon



Elders: Shepherds of the Church

Acts 6:1-7; 1 Timothy 3:1-7

1. The Role of the Elder (Acts 6:1-7)
2. The Qualities of the Elder (1 Timothy 3:1-7)
3. What's next for RVBC?

When Christians reach the end of their lives and look back to evaluate all that they have accomplished, I have heard it said that one of the things that gives people great joy in those days is to remember their involvement in the planting of a church. Of all the things to remember, it is the process of planting a church that stands out in their minds. Now, certainly, not every Christian has the privilege to be involved in the planting of a church. But those who have had the opportunity to do so will often consider the long-term impact for Christ that a new church brings. Long after they are gone, the church may well continue on as a light, impacting the world for Jesus Christ. To know that they were in on the ground floor will often bring great joy to those in their dying days.

The Lord has been very gracious to me. I have had the privilege of being involved with the planting and establishing of two churches. The first was in 1993 when we established Kishwaukee Bible Church in DeKalb, Illinois. At that time, we had five or six families committed to seeing the Lord raise up a church in my home town. It was through that church that the Lord helped stir my heart for a lifetime of ministry. I remember in those early days working toward two tangible goals.

1. We were seeking to be financially independent of our mother church (Grace Church of DuPage).
2. We were seeking to have multiple elders installed in the church.

It was only when we achieved those goals, we would consider ourselves as fully completing the task of church planting.

Obviously, without sufficient finances, it is impossible to be independent. There would need to be some sort of outside help to fund the church. Perhaps less obvious, was the role of leadership in the independence of the church. But, we considered the leadership of the church not to be completely independent of our mother church, until there was a plurality of elders. The reason is quite simple: In every place the Bible speaks about elders and the church, it speaks using plural terms. Paul planted churches in the Galatian region and later, "appointed elders" (Acts 14:23). Titus was told to "appoint elders in every city" (Titus 1:5). The ministry isn't a one-man show. The ministry isn't the pastor doing whatever he wishes to do, however godly and well-grounded the man is. No, the ministry is to be led by a team of qualified men, consisting of elders and deacons. As the New Testament repeatedly emphasizes, it is the plurality of elders that gives a church a measure of independence.

So, when Kishwaukee Bible Church began, we were under the authority of the elders at Grace Church of DuPage, which planted our church. Don Dumbacher, our only elder at the time, would attend the meetings of the elders at Grace Church of DuPage. Regarding the decisions of the church, it was the elder board in Warrenville that had the final authority when it came to decisions of the church.

I well remember the day when Kishwaukee Bible Church became an independent church. It was the day in which I became the second elder at Kishwaukee Bible Church. We had been independent financially for several years. But, my becoming an elder allowed us to be independent in our leadership as well as in our finances. On that day, Frank Yonke and Gordy Bell came out from Grace Church of DuPage to represent the elders in a special church service to commend Don and me "to God and to the word of His grace" (Acts 20:32). At that point, Kishwaukee Bible Church officially became an independent church.

The story is the same for the second church that I have had the privilege of planting, which is Rock Valley Bible Church. The goals for our church have been similar to the goals of Kishwaukee Bible Church in those early days.

1. Financial independence
2. Leadership independence.

Several years ago, we accomplished the first goal several years from now. At the current time, our offerings are more than sufficient to meet our financial needs as a church. However, the second goal has not yet been accomplished. Therefore, in establishing the church here in Rockford, we have never been a fully independent church.

I recently visited a nice little lake which was surrounded by many, many trees. There were also a bunch of trees that had only recently been planted. Many of these young saplings had some protective tubing or cages around them. They were there to protect the tree and help it to grow, without being eaten by deer or destroyed by other animals. This is a great picture of Rock Valley Bible Church. We are still being helped by Kishwaukee Bible Church, until we can stand on our own. The church plant isn't quite complete.

The reason they continue to provide the help is simple: as of now, I am the only elder here in Rockford. The other elders are in DeKalb at Kishwaukee Bible Church. As such, I have submitted myself to the elders of Kishwaukee Bible Church in every way. I attend their elder's meetings. I update them with the things going on in at Rock Valley Bible Church. I seek their counsel and advice. I ask for their help in some matters. They help me to make decisions about major issues in the life of the church. Periodically, they have come to Rockford to be with us in our service and to see what the Lord is doing here, attempting to be among us.

Now, is this the ideal situation? No, of course not. Each and every elder in DeKalb would agree that this is far from ideal. But, we don't live in an ideal world. This is the situation before us. In fact, one of the frequent topics of conversation among them is the status of another elder here at Rock Valley Bible Church. You need to know that they are fully aware and concerned about these matters. In the meantime, they have been doing their best to shepherd Rock Valley Bible Church from afar. I commend them in their efforts. However, as you can expect, it has its drawbacks.

It has caused much difficulty for me. With elders in another city, it is hard to lead the church. The elders aren't around the church every week. They don't fully understand the issues at Rock Valley Bible Church. Many decisions take longer, because I need to take them before the elders in DeKalb, rather than here in Rockford.

But, Lord willing, that will all change soon. I am pleased to announce that Gordy Bell has agreed to serve at Rock Valley Bible Church in the position of elder. Gordy has been one of the solutions that the elders at Kishwaukee Bible Church have recommended to me. They have spoken with Gordy and asked him to serve in this role. I have spoken with Gordy and asked him to serve in this role. It has taken some time for him to pray about these things. (In church life, time is OK. We don't need to be about rushing into things.) But now, Gordy has communicated with me that he would like to pursue the process of becoming an elder at Rock Valley Bible Church. When I say that I am pleased with this announcement, it is a bit of an understatement. When I told Yvonne that Gordy was willing to pursue this step, I started to cry uncontrollably. Yvonne was a bit concerned. I'm not sure that she has ever seen me cry like that. She said, "Steve, are you all right?" Through my tears, I said, "Yes. I'm all right! I'm happy. It feels as if the world has been lifted off my shoulders."

I don't know whether or not you will understand the burden that this whole process has been to me. It has always been before me, staring me in the face. "We need more elders. We need more elders." I have known about this. I have prayed and fasted about this on many occasions. Leading the church with elders in another city has been very, very difficult for me. I look forward to seeing another elder here in Rockford.

And so, this morning, I announce to you that Gordy Bell "aspires to the office of overseer" (1 Tim. 3:1) at Rock Valley Bible Church. He isn't becoming an elder today. He is being presented as a candidate for an elder today. Today marks a time in which you, as a congregation, are being informed of our intentions. It is a time of testing and evaluation of Gordy. His official installment will be at a later date. We will keep you fully informed as we progress in the future. (At the end of my message, I will give you a few more details about the process).

In light of this occasion, I would like for us to look this morning into the Scripture to see what it teaches about the structure of church leadership. Who is an elder? What does an elder do?

At Rock Valley Bible Church, we believe that the Bible teaches that there are only two offices that the Lord has given to the church.

1. The Office of Elder
2. The Office of Deacon

Our focus this morning is on the office of elder. I want to expound for you the Biblical teaching of the Role and the Qualities of the elder.

Let's look first at ...

1. The Role of the Elder (Acts 6:1-7)

When talking about the Biblical model for church leadership, I believe that the best place to begin is by looking at Acts 6. Because it is in this chapter that we see the first formation of leadership in the early church. The leadership of the church wasn't fully established at this point. But, you can see some of the seeds of how it eventually worked itself out.

Acts 6:1-7

1. Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." And the statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

The church was growing in numbers. More and more people were repenting of their sin and believing in the only sacrifice that can save. But with more and more people, came an increased responsibility on the part of the apostles, especially as it pertained to helping feed the widows. Quite frankly, the ministry became overwhelming for them. They simply didn't have time to effectively take care of all of them. As a result, it was the Hellenistic widows that were being neglected.

The apostles had only so much time. They had only so many resources. And they chose to serve the Hebrew widows instead of the

Hellenistic ones. I don't blame them. After all, every single one of the apostles were Jews. Loyalty to your kinsmen runs deep.

Verse 1 tells us that "a complaint arose" because of their actions. Even if they had chosen to serve the Hellenistic widows this complaint still would have arisen. It is only the source that would change. How true this is to ministry in the church. The leadership of the church is faced with a decision. Do we pursue option "a" or do we pursue option "b." There are many in the church who want option "a." There are many in the church who want option "b." Regardless of the direction that the leaders choose to take, there is an uproar on behalf of those who didn't get their own way.

To their credit, the apostles recognized the problem. They needed more people to help them in the work of the ministry. And so they said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables" (verse 2). It's not that serving tables was a demeaning work. It's not that serving tables was below them. Up until this point, they had willingly served tables. It was a matter of priorities. Other things were more important than serving tables. Perhaps even more to the point is verse 4, "But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

Of all the things that the apostles were able to do. It was these two things that they chose as their greatest priorities:

1. Prayer.
2. The Ministry of the Word.

How often I have heard these two priorities switched in order. I have heard many speak about how the apostles devoted themselves to "the word and prayer." Perhaps those who have said this haven't meant much by it. They haven't meant to imply that "the ministry of the word" is more important than prayer. Should I confront them and ask them why they switched the order of things, I'm sure that they would back down a bit and say, "I don't mean to promote one of these things over another. I just happened to say it that way." But, I simply ask, "Why then switch the order?" I think that it is because in the mind of many, they believe that the ministry of the word takes some priority in their own mind, and become the most important thing.

However, I believe that this is a divinely ordained order that ought not to be switched. For the apostles, prayer took precedence. I believe that it was prayer first, and then the ministry of the word.

I think of how astonishing it is that these apostles felt the need to prioritize prayer in their lives in this way. These are the ones who walked and talked with God in the flesh. These are the ones who were taught by God, Himself. There are things that Jesus taught them that we will never know. Jesus taught them many things that they never wrote down. Indeed, John told us that Jesus did so many wonderful things that it was an impossible task to write them all down (John 21:25). These apostles are the same ones to whom Jesus promised that He would send to them "the Spirit of truth, [Who] ... will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). And the Spirit guided them in all truth. First of all, the Spirit guided them to discern the truth of the mystery of the gospel, so that when others would seek to distort it, they would stand firm. A great example of the Spirit guiding the apostles is recorded for us in Acts 15, when they stood firm for justification by faith alone. Second, the Spirit inspired them to write the New Testament that we hold in our hands today. And they felt the need to prioritize prayer in their ministries.

I believe that they learned this from Jesus, Himself. Luke tells us that Jesus "would often slip away to the wilderness and pray" (Luke 5:16). There were times in which Jesus would prayer all night long (Luke 6:12). In this times of greatest anguish in the garden of Gethsemane, He turned to prayer as His only hope. Perhaps the apostles thought to themselves, "If the Son of God needs to pray, how much more do we need to pray!" The same is true of us. "If the apostles needed to pray, how much more do we need to pray!"

After praying, it was the ministry of the word that took the primary focus of their lives. Now, for these apostles, this took several forms. Certainly, it took the form of preaching. The book of Acts records for us the great evangelistic ministry of the apostles. They took the word of God, the message of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, and were accused of turning the world "upside down" (Acts 17:6). The ministry of the word also took the form of writing. These apostles were the ones who wrote down the Bible for us. The written word had a scope of ministry that they simply couldn't have. The ministry of the word also took the form of advising the church in a non-inspired way. The apostles spent much time with the early church congregations, counseling the church as to how things ought to be done: how to deal with different types of people, how to behave among the world, how to conduct worship services. In 2 Thess. 3:10, Paul referred to the counsel that he gave to the Thessalonians, when he was in Thessalonica.

These were the priorities of the apostles. The serving of tables was given to qualified, spiritual men, who were able to do the task. (They are listed in verse 5.)

I said earlier that this passage records for us the first formation of church leadership. That which the apostles modeled here in Acts 6 became the standard for the churches. In Acts 6, we see a separation of work into two categories. The apostles focused their time on "prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). In other words, they focussed on the spiritual. The seven chosen men focused their time on the "serving of tables" (Acts 6:2). They focussed on the physical. As the early church developed its leadership structure, there came to be two offices in the church. One of them came to focus its attention upon the spiritual matters of the church. The other one came to focus its attention upon the physical matters of the church. The one is called an "elder." The other is called a "deacon."

The office of elder is called by several different names in the New Testament. The elder is also called an overseer. The elder is also called a pastor (or shepherd). We know that these terms are all talking about the same office because of several passages that use the terms interchangeably. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is in Acts 20, when Paul is speaking with the Ephesian "elders" (Acts 20:17). In speaking them, he says that "the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (Acts 20:28). So, an overseer is the same as an elder. In that same verse, Paul tells the elders to "shepherd the church" (Acts 20:28). The word "shepherd" is word from which we derive the word, "pastor." And so, these elders in Ephesus were to do the work of being a pastor.

Also, when Peter wrote his letter (which we call 1 Peter), he also did the same thing. He wrote to "the elders" as a "fellow elder" (1 Pet. 5:1). (Note how Peter came to view himself as an "elder" and not merely as an "apostle.") He told the elders to "shepherd the flock of God" (1 Pet. 5:2). Or, you might say, "pastor the flock of God." He told them to do so by "exercising oversight" (1 Pet. 5:2). In other words, "be an overseer." Be the shepherd who looks after your flock by observing the dangers that are coming and by leading them to the fertile fields in which to feed.

Furthermore, when the qualifications are given for church leaders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. In one passage, these people are called, "elders" (Titus 1:5). In the other passage, they are called, "overseers" (1 Timothy 3:1). It's not that they are separate offices. When you look at the qualifications given, this becomes obvious. Rather, it's that they have different names given to describe the same office.

By the time that Paul wrote to the Philippians (You can see these two offices having been formalized by the time that Paul wrote Philippians some 25-30 years after Christ's resurrection). In his greeting, Paul wrote, "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons" (Phil. 1:1). He wrote to the church, and included the leadership of the church: overseers and deacons.

These names help you to see the role of these men. The elders/pastors/overseers are the ones who are responsible for leading and guiding in the spiritual matters of the church. This includes the church as a whole, in being the final authority in all decision making. Elders also help to shepherd individuals in the church, who need council with some particular issues in their lives.

The elders are those who have devoted themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. This can take many different forms. It can be in evangelism, as the word is spoken to unbelievers, as the apostles did so well. It can be in preaching on Sunday mornings. It can be in training and equipping, as the word is taught. (This can be done in a formal classroom. ... Or, this can be done while relaxing on couches in a living room someplace). It can be in counseling, as the word is skillfully applied to the specific situations of a person's life, remembering the character of God and all that we are in Christ Jesus, confronting their sin, or giving Biblical direction to them. It can be in normal conversation, It can be in merely reading the Bible to another believer in times of sorrow in an effort to comfort them. It is using the word of God in the lives of other people to help them in their need. This is the "ministry of the word."

As a footnote, please realize that all of us should be involved in ministering the word to each other. This isn't something that is only for the elder to do. In Colossians 3:16, Paul writes, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." This is what the "ministry of the word" is. It is dwelling on the word of Christ. It is letting that which is in you come out and be used in the lives of others to teach them and to admonish them in the ways of God. The command of Colossians 3:16 is that this ought to be happening to "one another." This isn't something exclusively to be done by the leadership of the church. The difference between the congregation and the elders is merely one of authority and calling from God.

We have seen (1) The Role of the Elder (Acts 6:1-7). Let's look now at ...

2. The Qualities of the Elder (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

The Bible is very clear about these things. I ask you to turn in your Bibles to 1 Timothy 3. This passage speaks about what type of character the overseer of a church must have. When identifying men for this office, it's not those who are successful in the world, nor those who are natural leaders. It isn't the ones who have good speaking skills or good administrative abilities to round up people for a cause. It's those who have seen and understood the grace of God. It's those who God has so transformed to be a model for all to follow. It's those who God has graced with a character that can be easily trusted.

1 Timothy 3:1-7

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?); and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Paul gives us here a list of 16 different qualities that are true of an elder. As is true with most of the lists that Paul gives us, these things are only suggestive. They aren't exhaustive. They are suggestive. In other words, they give you a flavor of the sort of man that should be serving as an elder. But, there may be some things in a man's life that isn't in this list that prohibits him from becoming an elder.

For instance, suppose that a man has all of the qualities listed above, but suppose that he is a chronic liar. This list doesn't speak anything about being a deceiver. And yet, it would disqualify a man from this office. Or, suppose that the man was an idol worshiper. This list doesn't mention idol worship at all. But, such a quality would disqualify a man for serving as an elder in the church.

One of the reasons that we know that this list is suggestive rather than exhaustive is that there are a few qualities given in Titus 1 that aren't given in this list. Also, there are a few qualities given in this list that aren't given in Titus. It's not that Paul had one standard for those in Crete, where Titus was, and had another standard for those in Ephesus, where Timothy was a pastor. Though they are different in a few of the details, they give you the same flavor.

It's a bit like tasting an apple pie from two different excellent cooks. They both would be wonderfully tasty. But, they would be a bit different. They would both qualify as an apple pie. With these lists given to us, it is the same type of thing. Though the lists differ a bit, they still give you a great picture as to the type of man that this should be.

I want to go through these qualities to give us a sense of the man we are talking about here. As we go through this list, you can have Gordy in the back of your mind. But, you should also have yourself in mind. Each of these character qualities are given elsewhere in the New Testament as something to which we all should strive. In other words, there is no special, higher calling of Christian character for the elder in the church. It's simply that the elder is actually exhibiting these character qualities in his life. Perhaps you might do well to identify one of your own weak points that you might especially work on over the next few months.

The first quality comes in verse 1.

1. He desires the work (verse 1).

The man has to have a desire for the office. Paul writes, "If any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do." In other words, the man himself is hungry to do the hard work of shepherding the church. He isn't motivated by some external pressure. He hasn't agreed to serve in this capacity only because someone else asked him to do the work. He has an inner push and desire that won't stop. I know that without that desire, the man will quit. It's too hard a task unless God has given you a desire to lead.

Notice that Paul says this in such a way that a man ought not to be ashamed of having such a desire. It is a good desire to have.

I was speaking recently with a good friend, who doesn't attend our church. We were talking about the status of elders at Rock Valley Bible Church. He, himself, talked about what a great desire he has for being an elder. He told me, "Steve, I would love to be an elder. I would love to do that work." And yet, he knows that he is a disqualified man. And he knows that he will never be an elder. But, his desire presses him on to be involved in ministry in whatever way that he is able. Nobody is pushing him to be involved in ministry. You can't stop him. He goes to a nursing home and preaches a couple of times per month. He has been a big push for small groups in his church, leading one himself. He has this hunger to minister to others that simply won't be stopped.

The desire for ministry is a good thing. It will work itself out in many ways in the life of the man. The one with this desire will never have to be pushed to be involved in ministry. He will want to be around God's people. He will want to be used however God would delight to use him.

2. He lives with integrity (verses 2-3).

This comes from verses 2-3. Here we have a list of different character traits of this man.

- He is above reproach. Literally, this means that there is "nothing that can be laid upon this man." In other words, he so conducts himself and his life that those who see him can speak nothing bad against him.

A great illustration of this took place in my life about 13 years ago, shortly before Yvonne and I were going to be married. We were in the midst of our pre-marital counseling. Yvonne and I went in to meet with this pastor doing our counseling. We filled out some kind of personality test to see how compatible we were with each other. When we went in on this occasion, he talked with us about the results of the test, and used it as a springboard to talk about several other things. There came to be a point in time when he was focusing on our relationships with our fathers. He asked me, "Steve, tell me about your father. What's good and what's bad about your relationship with him." I told him some things and it was all positive. Then he said, "Well, tell me about the bad." I said, "I don't have anything bad to say about my father." He said, "No, certainly, there must be something that wasn't good about your father." I said, "No. I don't have anything bad to say about him." He tried several more times to get me to identify some sort of weakness in my relationship with my father, figuring that such a clue would help him to counsel me in the weaknesses that I may well face once married. I continued to insist that I didn't have anything bad to say about him.

It's not that my dad is perfect. I know that and he knows that. It's not that he raised me perfectly. I know of many things that he would do differently. It's simply that he lives in such a way that give me no occasion to speak negatively about him. My prayer for him is that he would continue to do so until his dying day. That is what "above reproach" is all about.

I have spent much time on this first quality, because it is the quality that rides above all the others. It sweeps up anything that might have been missed in the list. I want to zip through these others.

- He is the husband of one wife. In the day in which Paul lived, this probably had initial references to polygamy. But, a better translation helps to get the sense of things and its applicability for us today. He is "a one woman man." There is no hint of any marital unfaithfulness. His affection and love for his wife is demonstrated and known by all. Pornography isn't an issue in his life. He has pure desires for one and only one woman.

- He is temperate. He doesn't ride his emotions like a roller coaster. He is a stable guy. He isn't overly angered. He isn't prone to depression. He isn't too quickly enthused by something. He isn't too quickly discouraged. He is even keel.

Some of you who know my children know that they each have a different temperament. I have one child who is very easy going. Nothing bothers him. He can go along with anything. I have another child who is very happy the one moment and very unhappy the next moment. I have even told her that she is the most enjoyable of all my children when she is up and that she is the most unenjoyable of all my children when she is down. The temperate man is the one who is steady in all his ways.

- He is prudent. Literally, "He is controlled my his mind." He is a rational man. He is a logical man. Decisions are made with his head.

- He is respectable. Literally, he is "adorned." In other words, you get a good impression of this man. His hair is combed. His shoes are shined. His clothes are clean and pressed. He is on time. He keeps his word. His life is in order. And thus, he earns the respect of others.

- He is hospitable. Literally, "He loves strangers." He can easily come up to somebody he doesn't know and have a pleasant conversation with them. He will express a genuine care and concern for all whom he meets. He loves people.

- He is able to teach. This isn't so much talking about the guy who has great speaking skills as it has to do with the guy who can take the Bible, understand it, and easily apply it in the lives of others. It's one thing to learn. It's another thing to transfer that learning. This is describing a man who can teach others what they need to know to walk with the Lord. It's talking about a man who can share the truth of the word with others as an overflow of his own life.

- He is not addicted to wine. He doesn't need to have alcohol to make it through the day. You can easily extend this to other things. He isn't addicted to cigarettes. He isn't addicted to cigars. He isn't addicted to food. He isn't addicted to caffeine. He isn't addicted to sports. He isn't addicted to video games. In other words, he has self-mastery over these things. He can lose weight. He can skip the ball game. He can stop drinking his coffee.

- He isn't pugnacious. Literally, he isn't a brawler. He isn't a fighter. He has learned well the lesson of Proverbs 15:1, "A gentle answer turns away wrath." When someone comes to fight, his gentle words calm the situation down. He isn't an angry man, ready to vent his frustrations on the next person that walks in the room.

- He is gentle. His words are soft. He has a gentle touch. He genuinely cares for other people. He will be patient with others.

- He is uncontentious. He isn't like the nagging wife, who constantly brings up the same issues with her husband. He is content when things don't quite go the way that he would like. Rather than making trouble, he smoothes over the rough spots.

- He is free from the love of money. Money doesn't control this man. He isn't climbing the corporate ladder to amass a greater fortune. He is generous and ready to give of his resources to others. He is willing to share his worldly possessions with others. He is content to live on very little.

I know that we went through all of these characteristics quite quickly. But the summary of it is that he lives with integrity.

3. He leads his family (verses 4-5).

Verse 4 reads, "He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity." The things of his house are in order. His house isn't a mess. His possessions are well cared for. His finances are in order. He lives within his budget.

His household runs smoothly. His wife gladly submits to him. She is also known for her character, as a godly woman. (A wife can disqualify her husband from leadership, because her character is a reflection of his leadership in the home). His children love him and obey him. (Children can disqualify a man from leadership, because their character is a reflection of his leadership in the home as well. You show me a man with rebellious children and I will show you a man who isn't leading his home.)

Verse 5 tells us why his household is so important, "but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?" In other words, look to see how he is spiritually leading his home. Because, the way in which a man leads his home will be the way in which a man leads the church. If his household is out of control, his leadership in the church will also be inconsistent and incomplete.

This verse has caused me to have many conversations with my children. I often tell them how I am praying that they would be more passionate about Christ than I am. I tell them how I long for them to love Christ with all of their heart. I also tell them that their loving obedience to me is what helps to qualify me for being a pastor. I tell them that if they go astray, and do not follow in the ways of the Lord, that I will quit my job and start working in the computer world again.

This verse also addresses the importance of family worship. I'm talking about fathers taking the initiative with their family worshipping the Lord together as a family. I'm talking about reading the Bible with your family. I'm talking about praying together with your family. I'm talking about singing praise to God with your family. Family worship ought to be taking place in every home in the church. It is a must for any spiritual leader. If the man is going to lead the church in spiritual things, it must be happening in the home. The man who leads the church without leading his home is a sham. [\[1\]](#)

4. He is experienced in the faith (verse 6).

Verse 6 reads, "and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil."

This makes total sense. There is something that years of walking with the Lord will do for a man. It will teach him of the Lord's goodness. It will teach him of the Lord's longsuffering. It will teach him of the way in which the church ought to work. You don't want somebody who doesn't have any experience living the Christian life be in the position of leading the church.

But notice, that Paul doesn't give his reasons here as needing experience to do his job well. It's for his own good. To put a novice into leadership is to open him up for a great fall. When Satan looks upon the church, who does he go after? He goes after the leaders. If he can make a leader fall, the damage is unbelievable, both to the leader and to the church.

I can't tell you how many people I have spoken with over the years who have been disillusioned by the church because of the behavior of the pastor. An elder in the church of Jesus Christ has a giant bulls eye on his back. Satan take his flaming arrows and seeks to hit him. A new convert is an easy target.

Perhaps you have gone to a shooting gallery. It's the little, tiny targets that are worth 50 points. But, the large, fat targets are worth only 5 points. It's easy to pick off the big, fat targets, but more difficult to hit the little targets. A new convert in leadership is an easy target for

Satan's flaming arrows.

5. He is respected by the world (verse 7).

Verse 7, "And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."

What we do within the church is far bigger than the church. We are looking to make an impact for the world. It is important that an elder of the church be well known and well respected by the world around him.

If a man is a leader in the church, but fails to live with integrity in his workplace or in his neighborhood, it will bring shame upon him as well as upon the church of Jesus Christ.

3. What's next for RVBC?

Gordy is in a very unique situation for us. He has served for many years as an elder at Grace Church of DuPage. He was in on the ground floor of the planting of Kishwaukee Bible Church. All of the elders at Kishwaukee Bible Church know Gordy very well and have affirmed his character and giftedness. Thus, the process with Gordy is able to proceed a bit more quickly than with another man because of his unique situation.

He has been at Rock Valley Bible Church for five years. I believe that it is in the Lord's sovereignty that he is here. Gordy was moving from his home in Wheaton to his current home in Oregon. He was taking me to the airport one day. (I can't quite remember why. He hasn't taken me to the airport since). Anyway, he asked me, "So, what's happening in your life?" I told him how I have been leading a Bible Study in Rockford and how we are going to begin renting a church building on Sunday nights as soon as I get back from California (where I was headed).

Both he and Ruthie were quite intrigued by this whole thing, especially as they were moving out this way in a few weeks. They thought about whether the Lord would lead them to be involved in Rock Valley Bible Church. They came to our very first service we held at Valley Baptist Church in 2000. And they have been a part of things ever since.

In terms of my processing with Gordy, things have been going for quite some time. I am a younger man. I am fully aware of many of my weaknesses. I know of the need to have older men help me in the ministry. For this reason, last October, Gordy and I began an accountability relationship together. I was seeking advice and council from him with some of the issues involved in my ministry. He has been a tremendous help.

Since October 21, 2004, he and I have spoken on the phone with each other for 1-2 hours every week. I have called him at 8am every Thursday morning. Our phone conversations have helped to pave the way for today. He has come to understand my heart for ministry. I have come to understand his heart as well.

At this point, Gordy is being presented as a candidate for being an elder at Rock Valley Bible Church. Think about my message and how it relates to Gordy's life. Pray about this process. If you have any hesitations about this process, you can talk to me. Or, you can talk with Lance Milton, our deacon. If there are issues in Gordy's life, go talk with him. I will be seeking feedback from you. After a season of evaluation, we will get back to you regarding when exactly he will be installed as an elder. Until then, let's be in prayer for this entire process.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on August 7, 2005 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] For more thoughts about family worship, see the article that I wrote in our monthly newsletter, Food for the Flock, Volume 2, Issue 2. It can be found on our website. Here is a [link](#).