

December 5, 2010 by Steve Brandon



Growing Up - In Leadership

Acts & 1 Timothy 3

1. Leadership in the Early Church (Acts)

2. Leadership at Rock Valley Bible Church (1 Timothy 3)

Here it is: our 457th Sunday morning that we (as Rock Valley Bible Church) are meeting here at Rockford Christian High School. Lord willing, this will be the last Sunday morning meeting that have here in this facility. Next week, we hope to meet at our building at 7721 North Alpine Road in Loves Park. No longer should you call it, "Grace Reformed Baptist Church's building." Now, you should call it, "Rock Valley Bible Church's building." I know that I'm going to mess up. In many ways, the building is still surreal to me. I haven't been over there since we purchased the building on Friday.. Furthermore, I know that most of you haven't been over there either since we closed. But, hopefully next week, things will change as we have an opportunity to worship in the building for the first time.

Now, the reality is this: as a church, we are growing up. And it is only right that we should be growing up. I know that there are some of you who don't really want to grow up. You like it here at Rockford Christian High School. You like the people here. You like the gym. You like the atmosphere. You don't mind the set-up routine. You don't really mind that we are invisible throughout the week, because, you have found us; you have experienced us, and you sort of like it the way that it is. You have chosen to make Rock Valley Bible Church your church home. You don't mind meeting in homes and coming to the pastor's house for meetings.

I can understand your feelings. Rock Valley Bible Church, meeting in this place, has made an impact upon your life. There is some apprehension about changing a good thing. But, I say to you who feel this way, we need to grow up as a church. It's not healthy for us to stay the same for the sake of staying the same.

With a building, God has given us a tool to accomplish His mission among us. We have a building that we can use to enjoy God's grace. We have a building that we can use to extend God's glory. Those who try not to grow up are like Peter Pan, who taught his friends this song, ...

I won't grow up, (I won't grow up)
I don't want to go to school. (I don't want to go to school)
Just to learn to be a parrot, (Just to learn to be a parrot)
And recite a silly rule. (And recite a silly rule)

If growing up means It would be
beneath my dignity to climb a tree,
I'll never grow up, never grow up, never grow up
Not me! Not I, Not me! Not me!

I won't grow up, (I won't grow up)
I don't want to wear a tie. (I don't want to wear a tie)
And a serious expression (And a serious expression)
In the middle of July. (In the middle of July)

And if it means I must prepare
To shoulder burdens with a worried air,
I'll never grow up, never grow up, never grow up
Not me, Not I, Not me! So there!

Never gonna be a man,
I won't!
Like to see somebody try
And make me.
Anyone who wants to try
And make me turn into a man,
Catch me if you can.

I won't grow up.
Not a penny will I pinch.
I will never grow a mustache,
Or a fraction of an inch.
'Cause growing up is awfuller
Than all the awful things that ever were.
I'll never grow up, never grow up, never grow up,

No sir, Not I, Not me, So there!

I won't grow up! (I won't grow up)
I will never even try (I will never even try)
I will do what Peter tells me (I will do what Peter tells me)
And I'll never ask him why (And I'll never ask him why)

We won't grow up! (We won't grow up)
We will never grow a day (We will never grow a day)
And if someone tries to make it (And if someone tries to make it)
We will simply run away (We will simply run away)

I won't grow up! (I won't grow up)
No, I promise that I won't (No, I promise that I won't)
I will stay a boy forever (I will stay a boy forever)
And be banished if I don't! (And be banished if I don't)

And Never Land will always be
The home of beauty and joy
And never
I'll never grow up, never grow up, never grow up
Not me! Not me! Not me! Not me! No sir! Not me! [\[1\]](#)

Now, obviously, we all know that that's not reality. We all know that it's not healthy. God has made us to grow up. Any child knows that. Any parent knows that. And the reality is that we, as a church, are growing up.

Last week, I addressed one way in which we are growing up - in a facility. It's the course of life that many churches seek, a facility of their own. Well, by God's grace, as of Friday, we own a building. And it's our hope and dream that God will use our building as a tool to accomplish His mission among us. That is, that we might be enabled to enjoy His grace and to extend His glory. But, that's not the only way that we are "growing up." We are also "growing up" in our leadership. This morning, I want to address the issue of leadership. Particularly, I want to address the issue of leadership at Rock Valley Bible Church.

It is my privilege this morning to formally present to you three candidates for leadership positions at Rock Valley Bible Church. First, I have two candidates for the office of Elder: Phil Guske and Darryn Wiebe. Second, I have one candidate for the office of Deacon: Ray Hook. Over the next month or so, you will have opportunity to affirm these men (or raise some critical concerns about these men). My hope is to install these men into their offices sometime in January.

Now, the good news is this. In many ways, all three of these men have been functioning in their leadership positions as elders and deacons for over a year. For the past year, I have been meeting with Phil and Darryn, every two to three weeks. We have been sharing our lives together. We have been digging into Scripture together. We have been praying together. We have been leading the church together. Each of them have been leading a small group (which hasn't happened by accident). Furthermore, I have worked hard to give them a prominent role on Sunday morning, that you might know their hearts for ministry. I appreciate both of these men and their hearts for ministry. When they are finally installed as elders, not much is going to change in terms of leadership of the church. In many ways, it will be merely a formality.

Ray has been involved in deacon-type activities at the church. A few years ago, he taught a class on finances and has financially counseled with several in the church. He has been managing the set-up ministry at the church for well over a year. He has made it run really smooth. With the transition to a building, he has already taken on a prominent role in caring for the building we just purchased. In fact, at the end of the service, Ray will give you an update of what's happening with the building, and what our next steps are going to be moving forward.

Now, regarding my message this morning, I thought it would be appropriate to track development of leadership in the early church, especially as we are in transition as a church regarding our worship. When I am done with this, we'll transition to communicate clearly where we are with these three men in the affirmation process.

So, if you are looking for an outline this morning, my first point is this.

1. Leadership in the Early Church (Acts)

We will take the entire book of Acts as our text. So, open your Bibles to the book of Acts. I hope to travel through much of the book of Acts this morning, with an eye on the development of leadership in the early church, because it developed. Everything wasn't in place on day one. Rather, the leadership in the church developed.

Quite frankly, this is where we are. Our leadership is growing up. Our leadership is developing.

Anyway, in chapter 1, we find Jesus with the disciples. He was teaching them one last class before He ascended into heaven. For forty days, Jesus was speaking with them about the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). At one point, these disciples wanted to know if Jesus would restore the kingdom right then and there (Acts 1:6). But, Jesus told them, "It is not for you to know the times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:7-8).

And then, Jesus left them, by ascending into heaven (Acts 1:9-11). The disciples responded the only way that they knew how, by praying and seeking the Lord for His direction upon their lives. (Acts 1:14). First thing, there was a crisis with the leadership. Jesus had spent His time

with the 12 disciples. But, they were down to 11.

As they were praying, Peter was lead to call for the replacement of Judas, who had defected from among the 12 disciples. They put forward two men as potential replacements: Joseph and Matthias (Acts 1:23) In verse 24, we read their prayer, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place" (verses 24-25). Look at verse 26, "And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles." These twelve men were leading the early church, which, according to verse 15, was comprised of 120 people.

Ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, that would all change. The prophecy of Jesus' words came true. The Holy Spirit came upon them and they received power (Acts 2). They "began to speak with other tongues" (Acts 2:4). That is, they began to speak in other languages unknown to them. It drew the attention of those who were visiting Jerusalem. They were amazed at what was taking place! They said, ...

Acts 1:7-11

"Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—We hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God!"

Indeed, this was amazing! It would be like Phil speaking Russian, and Darryn speaking Portuguese, and Andy speaking Italian, and Tim speaking Greek, and Garth speaking Chinese. And those from Russia and Brazil and Italy and Greece and China saying, "Aren't all of these people from Rockford? How is it that we can understand them in our mother tongue?"

Such amazement gave Peter an opportunity to preach the gospel to a crowd of people who were willing to listen. Peter preached one of the greatest sermons ever preached. He began with the issue at hand of the speaking in tongues. He then transitioned to preach Jesus Christ, crucified, raised from the dead and ascended to heaven, now sitting and God's right hand until His enemies be made a footstool (verse 35). Peter then ended with a sharp point of application (in verse 36), "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

Those who heard the word preached were "pierced to the heart" with conviction of sin (Acts 2:37). So, they repented of their sin and were baptized - some three thousand people! How's that for church growth? The church went from 120 praying believers to 3,000 believers in one day.

Now, I want for you to think about the difficulties in leadership. You had 12 men who were seeking to lead this church of 3,000! It would certainly be a challenge. Yet, despite the fewness of the leaders, the church was healthy. They had a healthy fellowship. You can see their health expressed in verse 42, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." And, this group was growing. According to verse 47 we see that "the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."

At this point, let me just comment. There are those who think that sweet fellowship can only happen in a small church. They think that in a large church, people can get lost in the crowds. But such is not the case. Notice here that you have a large church with sweet fellowship. And God was adding to their number day by day.

I do believe that there were difficulties in leadership. A newly formed church of thousands of people with only 12 leaders is going to face some difficulties. And within a short time, things got more difficult for the leaders in the church. If you look over in chapter 4, and verse 4, you see, "Many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about out five thousand" (4:4).

One expression of the leadership crisis is recorded for us in chapter 6. You are probably familiar with the story. But, for our purposes this morning, it serves us well to look at it.

Acts 6:1

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.

The problem that arose here in the church was a problem of resources. The apostles simply weren't capable of doing everything that was required of them. They were leading thousands of people who had come to faith in Jerusalem. They were teaching them the word of God. They were continuing to preach the gospel to many more who had not come to faith in Christ.

Acts 5:42

And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

On top of that, they were serving tables for the widows. And quite frankly, they weren't doing a good job. We know this, because a complaint arose among the Hellenistic Jews, that is, among the culturally Greek Jewish people. They were complaining that their widows were being neglected in preference to the native Jews. I believe that the complaint was valid, because of how the apostles respond in verse 2, "So 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.'" These apostles felt the pull from both sides. They saw the need of the widows. They needed provision. They were attempting to provide for them. But, they also saw the need for the ministry of the word of God.

My guess is that both ministries were hurting. They weren't doing a good job in caring for these widows (otherwise, such a complaint would never have arisen). They were neglecting the word of God (by their own admission). We see their proposed solution in verses 3 and 4, ...

Acts 6:3-4

Therefore, brethren, select from among you 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.

In other words, they wanted to delegate their responsibilities. They wanted to place seven men, who would take responsibility for the task of serving tables. In this way, they could devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. I love how the congregation responded, ...

Acts 6:5

The statement found approval with the whole congregation.

The congregation knew full well of the difficult situation in which the apostles found themselves. They saw that they had too much on their plate. They affirmed the priority of prayer and the ministry of the word. And so, they found seven men who could fulfill this responsibility. And I want for you to note the care with which these men were selected. Ability to do the job wasn't enough. Rather, they placed a high priority on the spiritual qualifications of these men. Look again at verse 3, ...

Acts 6:3

Select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, who we may put in charge of this task.

These men needed to have a good reputation. These men needed to be full of the Spirit. These men needed to be full of wisdom. In other words, they needed to be spiritual men.

You say, "Why is this?" Why not pick just anybody who can do the job? Why does he have to have a good reputation? Why does he need to be full of the Spirit and full of wisdom? Because we are dealing with the church. The church isn't merely a social institution to serve people. No. It's a spiritual organism that God uses to bless His people, and there is a great need for spiritually minded people to be engaged in the work.

And when it comes to Rock Valley Bible Church, we need the same thing. We need spiritually minded men who will lead and serve the people of God with God-given wisdom. Anything else is a disaster.

In verse 5, we see these men identified, ...

Acts 6:5

... 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.

In verse 6, we see these men appointed to the task, ...

Acts 6:6

And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

The apostles laid hands on these men as an expression of giving these men the authority to do the task. The apostles prayed to express their dependency upon the Lord for all things—even something as seemingly small as serving widow's tables. That's how the apostles solved the first major crisis in leadership. They delegated their responsibilities to others, so that they would be able to "devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word" (verse 4).

And it's right here that we see the formation of the pattern of New Testament leadership in the church. We don't have apostles today. Nor do we have men appointed to serve tables. But, we do have those who oversee the spiritual matters of the church. And, we do have those appointed to serve in the physical matters of the church. Those who oversee the spiritual matters church are called elders (or pastors or overseers or shepherds—all of those names mean the same thing). Those who serve the physical needs of the church are called deacons (which is the Greek word for "servant.")

These two offices (those of elder and deacon) are the only two offices that we see in the New Testament. And for this reason, these are the only two offices that we have at Rock Valley Bible Church. We have elders and we have deacons.

I love this passage here in Acts, chapter 6, because it lays out for us so nicely the different rolls of elders and deacons. Elders are those who focus their attention upon the spiritual matters of the church. Like the apostles, they are to be devoted to prayer. Like the apostles, they are to give attention to the ministry of the word. Like the apostles, they are the ones responsible for leading the church. And this is my admonition to Phil and Darryn: devote yourselves to these things. Give much time to prayer. Pray for God to keep your own heart tender. Pray for God to help those who are hurting. Pray for God to use His word to accomplish his purposes. Give much time to the ministry of the word. Study the Bible. Memorize the Bible. Preach God's word. Teach God's word with all of your powers.

Deacons, on the other hand, are like those who were chosen to serve the widow's tables. They are those who focus their attention upon the physical matters of the church, so as to free up the elders to do their work. Deacons help in the distribution of benevolent funds. Deacons help in the matters of logistics. Deacons help in the matters of buildings. And this is my admonition this morning to Lance and Ray: serve the church with all your heart.

See, it is no accident, that Phil, Darryn, and I have delegated much of the responsibility of the logistics of the matters of our building to Lance, Ray, (and Dirk). We have seen in these men a certain giftedness so as to be able to manage the matters of the building well. We have also seen in these men spiritual qualities as well. They are to be trusted. The elders, on the other hand, are to be freed up to devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

In Acts, chapter 6, we see the leadership of the church in seed form. But, soon, there is a transition. And the transition really comes at the beginning of chapter 8, shortly after Stephen was stoned to death. Look in chapter 8, verse 1,

Acts 8:1

Saul was in hearty agreement with putting [Stephen] to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

So, picture the scene. The execution of Stephen was a declaration of war on the church. So, for their own safety, many of the believers flee from Jerusalem and scatter abroad. But, just as the captain of the ship is the last one down with the ship, so the leaders of the church remain in Jerusalem to help those who remain.

But, now, I want for you to think about the scattered believers. There were thousands of them. Who was going to be leading them? Not the apostles. There were only 12 of them, and they remained behind in Jerusalem. Thus, in the book of Acts, we see elders taking the place of prominence, regarding leadership.

Turn over to chapter 14. Here we see Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. They have travelled to Pisidian Antioch, to Iconium, to Lystra and Derbe. And now, they are retracing their steps. Beginning in verse 21 we read, ...

Acts 14:21-23

After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Paul used his authority to appoint leaders in the churches. They are identified as "elders." Here we see the leadership of the church developing. It's not the apostles who are leading the local churches that are beginning to sprout up. Rather, it's the elders.

Anyway, as Paul and Barnabas returned from home to Antioch from their trip, they come back to a dispute. Look at chapter 15, verse 1, ...

Acts 15:1

Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

These men from Judea were cutting at the heart of the gospel, that we are saved by grace, and not by works (Eph. 2:8-9). Circumcision was just one, small work. But, to add that one work to the gospel will destroy the entire house of cards: "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." And so, Paul and Barnabas begin to oppose this measure. Look at verse 2, ...

Acts 15:2

And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

Look at how they are resolving the issue. They are taking the matter up with the apostles and with the elders of the church. Here we see the transition beginning from the apostles to the elders. It is significant that it's not merely the apostles who have the final say in the matter. Rather, it's the apostles and the elders of the church who will decide the doctrinal disputes in the church. In verse 6, we see how "the apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter." In fact, every time in this passage that the apostles are mentioned, the elders are right alongside of them in authority (verse 2, 4, 6, 22, 23).

Acts 15:2 - And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the *apostles and elders* concerning this issue.

Acts 15:4 - When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the *apostles and the elders*, and they reported all that God had done with them.

Acts 15:6 - The *apostles and the elders* came together to look into this matter.

Acts 15:22 - Then it seemed good to the *apostles and the elders*, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas--Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,

Acts 15:23 - and they sent this letter by them, "The *apostles and the brethren who are elders*, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.

But, the apostles are mentioned only one last time in the book of Acts. It occurs in Acts 16:4, where again, they are mentioned in the same breath with the elders. After that, there is no more mention of "apostles" leading the church.

Acts 16:4

Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the *apostles and elders* who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.

It is obviously a transitional time in the life of the church. The early church was "growing up." They were transferring away from apostolic authority to elder authority in the churches. It is significant to realize that these events took place somewhere around 50 A. D., some 20 years into the history of the church. The transition from apostles to elders didn't happen overnight. It was a slow process.

In many ways, we are in a similar transition. We have had elders here in the past. If you recall, there was a time when Gordy Bell was an elder of Rock Valley Bible Church. There was also a time when Frank Yonke was an elder of Rock Valley Bible Church. Some of you may not even know these men. But, they were helping to shepherd the church. But, for various reasons, these men couldn't continue on with us. Their duties were made especially difficult because neither of them lived in Rockford. Gordy lived in Oregon and Frank lived in DeKalb. In some measure, they were shepherding the church from afar, a bit like the apostles were.

One of the things that I'm most excited about in the transition to Phil and Darryn here at Rock Valley Bible Church is that these men will be local elders. They are engaged in life here in Rockford. Darryn lives right here in Rockford. Phil lives in the country, but he does his business right here in Rockford, coming here daily. They can help shepherd the church in ways that Gordy and Frank never could, not because of giftedness or willingness (both Gordy and Frank were willing and gifted), but rather, because of proximity. And I'm thrilled! I'm thankful to God for these men who have given themselves to this work.

Three words in Titus 1:5 have come to my mind in this process. There is a reason why Paul told Titus, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders *in every city* as I directed you" (Titus 1:5). "In every city." Elders can shepherd best when they are living in the same city as the church.

Now, continuing through the book of Acts, we come to Acts, chapter 20. Here we see one of the most tender scenes in all of the Bible. Paul is again on the move, on his way back to Jerusalem. But, as he is sailing home, he comes near his old friends at the church in Ephesus. He knows that he can't go to Ephesus because it would take him too much time. Instead, he calls the elders to come to him at Miletus. Look at verse 15, ...

Acts 20:15-17

Sailing from there, we arrived the following day opposite Chios; and the next day we crossed over to Samos; and the day following we came to Miletus. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

Paul had spent three years with these men (verse 31). He had seen them come to faith. He had trained them in the ministry. They were leading the church - not the apostles, who were a long way from Ephesus. It's as if the transition in leadership is complete. Because, nothing more is heard of apostles any more in the book of Acts. Now, it's elders who lead the church.

In Paul's final words to these dear men, He gives them counsel in leading the church. Paul spoke to them of his own ministry. Paul spoke to them of the dangers that they would face in the days ahead. I'd love to read the entire passage. But, for the sake of time, I want to begin at verse 28. Paul says, ...

Acts 20:28

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Here, again, we see the role of the elders. They are called to oversee the church. That's why elders are sometimes called, "overseers," because that is their main function: to look over the church and care for her. They are also called to shepherd the church. That's why elders are sometimes called, "pastors," because they "shepherd" or "pastor" the church. They are to love and care for the church that Jesus died to purchase. It's not an easy task. In verse 29 we read, ...

Acts 20:29

I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

The shepherd will ward off the wolf, because he is an enemy. So also, there are times when pastors and elders need to protect from the evil influence of those who would come to destroy the flock.

If you read First and Second Timothy, you can get a flavor of how this prophesy was fulfilled. False teachers came into the flock at Ephesus, seeking to pull the disciples to follow them. Paul even names several of them: Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20), Phylgelus and

Hermogenes and Philetus (2 Tim. 1:15; 2:17). Timothy, as the pastor of the church, was to lead the charge in guarding the gospel that had been entrusted to him (2 Tim. 1:13-14).

Well, there is the Leadership in the Early Church (Acts) It transitioned over time from the apostles to the elders. Let me talk briefly about ...
2. Leadership at Rock Valley Bible Church (1 Timothy 3)

So, turn in your Bibles to 1 Timothy 3. Here we see the most definitive statement regarding the qualifications necessary for elders and deacons in all of the New Testament. By the time this is written, the leadership structures in the churches are complete.

Now, as we read this chapter, I want to catch you up to speed with where we are in the process of installing Phil and Darryn and Ray. I trust that you can see the division here. The first 7 verses speak about the elders (or overseers as they are called). The next 6 verses speak about deacons.

1 Timothy 3:1-13

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, peaceable, 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, so that he will not 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 will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

These are the qualities that qualify (or disqualify) a man for serving in the church in the role of elder or deacon. At Rock Valley Bible Church, we take these qualifications very seriously.

With Phil and Darryn and Ray, I have given them opportunity to evaluate themselves in these areas. I have given them a sheet of paper listing all of these qualities and have asked them to rank themselves. For instance, on a scale of 1 to 10, where would you rate yourself in the matter of being temperate or prudent or respectable (1 Tim. 3:3). Now, in evaluating these things, the specific rank isn't as important as the relative ranking of these things. In other words, I asked them to identify their strengths and their weaknesses of character.

I also had their wives rank them in these things. Nobody knows them as well as their wives. I had these men discuss these things with their wives, comparing how they ranked each other. And then, I visited each of these men in their homes and discussed these things with their wives. I spoke with their wives about the role of an elder or a deacon. I spoke with their wives about the sorts of things that such a position would require of them.

Then, I walked through each of these qualifications one by one and asked their wives to evaluate the character of their husbands. I asked for examples. "You say that your husband is temperate, so tell me about it." "You say that your husband is prudent; tell me about it." "You say that your husband isn't always so gentle; tell me about it." They affirmed everything that I knew about these men. They aren't perfect. But, they have a love for God and an integrity in the home that is seeking to live above reproach in this day and age.

But, the evaluation didn't stop there. According to verse 7, these men must have a good reputation with those outside of the church. And so, I have sought for the counsel of those outside the church to comment on the character of these men. I met with a co-worker of Ray. I met with Phil's personal trainer at the gym he frequents. I met with a neighbor of Darryn.

All of these guys are outside the church. I took them to lunch, pulled out my Bible and explained to them what Darryn, Phil, and Ray were seeking in the life of the church. Then, I went through the qualification of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 and I asked them about these qualities regarding Darryn, Phil and Ray. I asked them to comment on these things to the best of their ability. I asked for examples. In the process, I had an opportunity to share the gospel with each of these men and giving them a "Two ways to live" tract. Everything up to this point has continued to point positively.

And thus, we are presenting these men to the church as potential candidates for elders and deacons. Now begins a time when you have opportunity to give feedback on these men. If you have a problem with any of these men serving in these ways, it's best of you address the problems personally. Find an appropriate time to take Phil aside and say, "Phil, I heard what Steve said in his message and I have a few things that I would like to say. I appreciate your heart for the work. I appreciate the way that you have served the church here. But, I have a few concerns, and here they are..."

If you find it too difficult to speak with them personally, then come and speak with me. We'll see what needs to be done to address these concerns. Maybe we don't install them in January, as I hope to do. Perhaps later in the year. Perhaps not at all. But, in all, you need to trust your leaders. I'm looking forward to a great day of rejoicing when these men may be officially confirmed in their roles as elders and deacons.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 5, 2010 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] "I Won't Grow Up" from the TV musical "Peter Pan" starring Mary Martin. 1960.