



# THE END GAME

*A study in biblical leadership from Links Players International*

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# THE END GAME *Introduction*

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Is there any more incomprehensible balance in Scripture than the careful give-and-take between grace and works? “Saved by grace”—being the recipients of all good things in Christ Jesus apart from anything we can perform on our own—is the hallmark of Christ-exalting truth. And yet God’s own Word, revealed by the Holy Spirit of Christ into the writers of the Old and New Testaments, is chock full of directives about how we should live. The fullness of Scripture makes room for both “no salvation apart from Jesus Christ” and “each will be judged according to what he has done.”

Theologians will tell you that this balance is not impossible. After all, the apostle John wrote that we love because God first loved us. In other words, all the noble things that we do are done in response to Christ’s grace. We do them because Christ is in us, moving us by His Holy Spirit to do God-honoring things.

Of course, this sets up another quandary: how are we supposed to know what this looks like? As we work among leaders in many capacities, we find that there is a consistent desire among them. They want to know what it looks like to “win.” And that’s a fair request. Success should be measurable, or it would be impossible to know whether it has been achieved. Famously, Lou Holtz, the legendary college football coach, at the time when he was still a young man in 1966, created a list of 107 achievements he hoped to reach in his life. Most people would have regarded many of these as “pie in the sky” dreams. Some of those goals he reached—head coach at Notre Dame, dinner at the White House, landing an airplane on an aircraft carrier—and very few he did not—learning a foreign language and becoming a scratch golfer. But all through his life, Holtz has known what “the end game” was. He has known what success would look like. And by 2008, he had achieved 102 of those goals.

Does the Bible allow for such a measure of success? Or should we be content to sit back and let the sovereignty of God do its inexorable work? We believe that God is in charge, and that we cannot foresee the events of our lives as He can. But we do believe that the Bible does encourage us to take intentional steps toward growth in our relationship with Christ, and that growth like that will be reflected in visible ways that others will recognize. More than that, we find that the Bible defines the traits of a mature believer in at least one specific passage.

It is the purpose of this study, **The End Game**, to explore those biblical traits of maturity and leadership, in an effort to make your pursuit of Christlike living a fruitful journey. We pray that as you move through the lessons you find here, you will learn to live as Jesus challenges you to live.



# LESSON ONE THE PLACE OF ELDERS

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IN THE DECADES THAT FOLLOWED THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST IN ANCIENT ISRAEL, His work was followed up by His own promised Holy Spirit working in the lives of those He chose to dynamically proliferate the Good News about Him, both in preaching and in writing. Those leaders were called apostles, and many of them are known to us by name: Peter, James, John, and Paul. Their inspired words are captured in the pages of the Bible, where even now we can read the desires of Christ for His church as it developed and grew in the world.

However, not all of God's chosen leaders were destined for worldwide impact or legacies. In fact, the majority would remain in their local towns and churches, ministering to their families and friends. They would be called upon to teach from the Scriptures, pray for the healing of the sick, spark generosity among the believers, and sometimes administer church discipline when people engaged in God-offending behavior. These leaders had a name as well: elders.

In the New Testament book of 1 Timothy, which is a letter from the apostle Paul to an identified church leader who also was a specific protégé of Paul, the apostle assisted Timothy in understanding particular church matters. Paul's instruction came from his knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, the teaching of Jesus, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but it was also very practical in nature. Among the matters Paul addressed was the selection of elders. What criteria should be in place if a person is to serve the church in a leadership capacity? How might you recognize those most equipped to honor God with a role like this? Anyone who has ever worked or learned under an incompetent leader understands just how critical these questions are, as does anyone who has had the immense privilege of serving with a uniquely qualified leader.

WITH THESE QUESTIONS IN MIND, this first lesson will survey Paul's words to Timothy on the matter of "eldership," the biblical word for the position of leader among fellow believers. We do this under this dual thesis: (1) men and women who are maturing in Christ will attain certain godly characteristics that are both recognizable and ministerial, and (2) all of Christ's followers should endeavor to pursue the development of these characteristics.

As in all of the lessons in this study, *The End Game*, we will explore the text of 1 Timothy 3 and the meaning behind it, as well as explore examples of people in the Bible and church history who provide us with a "skin-on" picture of the characteristic being studied.

## READING

Begin your study by reading 1 Timothy 3:1-16 and 5:17-20. (While this study allows for you to read the translation of your choice, unless otherwise noted the quoted passages throughout will employ the commonly read New International Version of the Bible).

## NOTES ON THE TEXT

Before answering several questions about what you have read, it is important to gain an understanding of some of the common questions that arise out of these passages. Let's explore two of these now.

**1. What is an overseer?** Biblical translations of Paul's letter to Timothy draw from the original Greek language, where you will find the word *episkope*. This is the word translated either as "overseer" or "bishop." Either word suggests an official leadership capacity, and because of the church context of this passage, it points specifically to those who would be church leaders.

The concept (and wording) of an "elder" has also carried traditional weight here, though the normal Greek for an elder in terms of age is not used. However, it is quite easy to infer from the passage itself that the kind of maturity to be in evidence among these leaders would require at least some chronological development as well. For instance, while Paul was himself single throughout his apostolic ministry (though likely married as a Jewish leader at an earlier stage of his life) and likely would have approved of some single men serving in the leadership capacity of an overseer, he added matters of marital and family life as measures of appropriate maturity. Such maturity could only be displayed over time.

**2. Women as elders?** The text of this passage adheres to Paul's consistent argumentation that while women have significant roles in the context of the church—with far stronger place than in other cultural circles of that time—it was the men who were to hold the positions of leadership. All of the pronouns are masculine, and Paul says that an overseer is to be "the husband of but one wife." Additionally, in the previous chapter Paul wrote to Timothy these specific words: "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man."

Through the centuries of church history, many churches have held quite strongly to this position: men should lead. Other churches and denominations, however, have reasoned that Paul's words "I do not permit..." were of a personal directive nature and may not apply outside of his local and/or cultural contexts. These churches have opened the door for female leadership on elder boards. We will not at this time attempt to sort out this long-standing dichotomy. We will, however, consistently use masculine language, so that our wording falls in line with the text, all the while cognizant of the fact that the need for Christian maturity applies equally to men and to women.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. How does Paul describe the aspiration to serve as an overseer (3:1)? From your perspective, does this description inspire you, or simply heighten the sense of responsibility attached to this role?

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2. What characteristics show up in both the list for elders and for deacons? How would you define these characteristics as you understand them?

Characteristic	Definition
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3. Paul told Timothy that he had written these things in order to promote proper conduct in “God’s household, which is the church of the living God” (3:15). What difference do you think it would make in most local churches if the leadership were truly as mature as Paul’s guidelines suggest? How about in the church universal, which is the congregation of believers everywhere?

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4. The emphasis in 5:17 is on the teaching work of a leading elder. Why would you consider this to be an especially important role? Read 1 Timothy 6:3-5. How does passage advance our thinking by helping to show the connection between sound teaching and right action?

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#### **ELDERSHIP EMBODIED MOSES & JETHRO IN EXODUS 18:1-27**

As told in the Old Testament book of Exodus, God worked through Moses to lead his people, bringing honor to His name by the things He did to establish them as a nation (though not yet with a land of their own). One of Moses' tasks was to adjudicate when disputes arose between people, providing wise decisions to resolve their contentions. This work increased as the people increased and began to overwhelm Moses, whose leadership role required more than this one task.

During this time, Moses' father-in-law Jethro visited Moses and was pleased to see the advance of God's people. However, this wise man also took note of the weight of work that was resting on Moses' shoulders. Jethro demonstrated his own wise eldership—and Moses demonstrated his subservience to this eldership—when they engaged in a conversation that Jethro opened with this question: “What is this you are doing?” When Moses explained that he was deciding each and every case, Jethro offered an observation and some excellent advice. He told Moses that what he was doing was not good for him, and that he should select others who could try the simpler cases and reserve only the most difficult cases for Moses.

Moses followed Jethro's counsel because he respected the older man's life and words. Even as a leader in both a spiritual and a political sense, Moses needed a fuller wisdom. Additionally, by employing this new group of judges to assist with the work, Moses established an “eldership” based not only on the cultural asset of age but on the power of men united in God-honoring work.



## LESSON TWO A LIFE OF STAUNCH INTEGRITY

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IN OUR TIME, YOU ARE ONE OF A MILLION VOICES IF YOU LAMENT, at least from time to time, the expanding reach of big government—and it makes no difference what political side you are on. The history of the United States Congress’ calendar demonstrates what we all know: legislators are meeting far longer each year than they did a century ago. This means they are tackling more and more legislation, and the cause is not just the rise of America’s population (though there is a bit of that dynamic in the mix).

No, the real trouble is that so many laws are required in our time because so many private corporations, big and small, spend significant amounts of time trying to figure their way “around the rules.” And despite the fact that so many of their devised tactics are blatantly unethical, they will gladly proceed until the legislature of jurisdiction spends mountains of time, money and energy to draft and approve laws that tell them that their ploys—call them creative, if you’d like—are, in fact, illegal.

What this all points to is not a crisis of population growth or government growth. It points to a *crisis of integrity*. As long as people will not police themselves, pondering the ethics and human impact of the decisions they are making and then acting altruistically rather than greedily, government will have to step in to serve and sometimes save the people. Police rarely knock on the doors of law-abiding citizens, and lawmakers don’t spend time crafting legislation that tells people to go on behaving well.

Golfers understand this. The sport is well-known for its high value on personal integrity. Because the playing field is vast and would be impossible to monitor aside from a multitude of officials, golfers are expected to know the rules and use them unwaveringly—even to their own detriment. Golfers call penalties on themselves, understanding that the game is played best by one when it is played with the whole field in mind.

AS WE BEGIN TO EXPLORE IDEAS FROM PAUL’S WORDS TO TIMOTHY about the traits of an always maturing believer, we find that like characteristics arise from his list. In this lesson and those that follow, we will group these similar traits and study their themes one-by-one.

It is appropriate, then, that we begin not only with the first trait listed and theme introduced, but one that is also “the glue” to all other actions of a man or woman who would reflect the nature of Jesus Christ to the world. This is the trait so desperately needed to combat the trends of our own world: integrity. When people possess consistent integrity, they can be trusted in all arenas of life.

## READING

Look at these excerpts from 1 Timothy 3:2&7 (ESV):

*Therefore an overseer must be above reproach... respectable... [and] he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

## NOTES ON THE TEXT

The original letter of Paul was written in Greek. Let's explore the full meaning of the key words in this passage as Paul wrote them.

**1. *anepileptos* (“above reproach”)** This Greek word suggests that a person cannot, because of his actions or words, be apprehended or “laid hold of.” Even if a person above reproach were arrested, false charges would have to be attached to him, as they were to Jesus, if a case were going to be made to stick against him. Peter suggested this same idea when he wrote: “...always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame” (1 Peter 3:15-16). Any blame attached to one who is *anepileptos* cannot be made to stick.

**2. *kosmios* (“respectable”)** The original Greek for this word could actually cause this trait to be placed in one of several groups, for it means, generally, “well-ordered.” There is a decorum about godly leaders, and a modesty. But the fullness of meaning here suggests this: that one is not “putting on airs.” Instead, they live a humble, honest life, noteworthy for its simplicity. Certainly, it can be argued that a simple, straightforward life is easier to maintain, and thus more given to the consistency demanded of one who would be known for his or her integrity.

**3. *kalos martyria* (“well thought of”)** As well as “well thought of,” here the original phrasing points to “of good report.” In either case, this reputation reaches beyond those in the church to catch the attention of those on the outside (those who do not call themselves Christians). It serves us well to explore the fullness of meaning behind *kalos*, from which we draw the adjectives *well* and *good*. This word can capture a range of ideas, including beauty, excellence, commendability, and honor. While some do not share the doctrinal components of one's Christian belief, these “outsiders” may certainly find reasons to respect believers that transcend the circles of faith and stretch into the contexts of business and leisure. Indeed, the president of Links Players International was once employed in a position of complete trust by a man antagonistic to Christ because, this employer said, “I know that you have a standard to live by and a God to whom you must be accountable.” Certainly this fact does not guarantee one's integrity, but it demonstrates that even people of the world recognize the worth of true righteousness.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Consider this list of hallmarks of personal integrity:

- Actions consistent with professed beliefs
- Ethics and righteousness even when one must stand alone
- Consideration of others when making decisions that would benefit oneself

To what extent do you agree with this list? How might you amend some of these hallmarks? What others would you add to the list?

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2. In Mark 12:14, we read this description of an encounter between Jesus and the religious leaders: “They came to him and said, ‘Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.’” What does this contribute to our definition of God-honoring integrity?

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3. In Proverbs 29:10, we read these chilling words: “Bloodthirsty men hate a man of integrity and seek to kill the upright.” This observation may represent the extreme, but what common prices are there to be paid for living a life “beyond reproach”?

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4. Consider this observation by King David: “I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity” (1 Chronicles 29:17). In what circumstances or under what conditions might a person’s integrity be visible only to God?

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How might we prepare for and pass God's test of our heart?

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5. The concluding portion of our noted verses for this lesson points to the fact that the enemy (Satan) will seek to derail our personal integrity, disgracing us both within and outside of the church. However, we see that a good reputation can help prevent this. How does a reputation become advanced through one's actions and serve to protect us as we go forward in life?

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### **INTEGRITY EMBODIED JOB IN JOB 1:1-2:13**

The oldest book in the Bible tells the story of the life of a man named Job. Fittingly, the book is titled with Job's name, and because much of it is written in poetic form, you will find it near the center of your Bible with other poetic books, just ahead of the book of Psalms.

Job, a wealthy man with a large family and successful agricultural business, was known for his integrity. God Himself declared Job to be "blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." Satan took on the challenge of turning Job from this life, first by introducing major catastrophe into Job's life—Job's children were all killed in a great accident and his business was raided by marauders and destroyed by an "act of God." When Job did not allow this to cause him to turn from his trust in God, God again commended Job before Satan, saying, "He still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason." Satan responded that Job would turn sure enough if God allowed the man himself to be harmed. God released Satan then to inflict Job with ills short of death, and Satan did so by bringing boils upon the hapless Job, "from the soles of his feet to the top of his head."

At this stage, even Job's wife called him crazy, confronting the man as he scraped his own sores with a pottery shard. "Are you still holding onto your integrity?" she asked him. "Curse God and die!" But Job never wavered. He had big questions for God, and offered theological speculations along with several others as to why this had happened to him. But Job never deserted his faith in and fear of God. In the end, his integrity was honored and his "good life" was restored.



## LESSON THREE IN CONTROL OF ONESELF

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**N**OT LONG AGO, THE FOUNDER OF LINKS PLAYERS INTERNATIONAL, Jim Hiskey, considered again the 2007 Masters victory of Zach Johnson, a previously unheralded professional from Iowa, who had won just once on the PGA Tour and had given no prior indication of reaching this echelon of the game.

Those who follow golf know that from time to time, surprise winners become major champions. Sometimes it looks like a fluke all the way and proves to be so as time passes. As Zach Johnson made his way through the storied pines of Augusta National on Sunday, he appeared in no way to be a flash in the pan, and his subsequent career has proven this to be true. He has won several more tournaments on Tour, and he has become a perennial participant on the U.S. Ryder and Presidents Cup teams. Not bad for a guy who says he was no better than second best on his college team from little Drake University.

What Hiskey reflected on—the very thing that caused Johnson to appear far more experienced than he was when he won that green jacket—was the golfer’s remarkable self-control.

It has been well-told that in spite of Augusta’s tempting par-5 holes, at least three of which are frequently challenged and deliver eagles as rewards, Johnson never surrendered to the temptation. Even while Tiger Woods was making eagles behind him and sending the Augusta masses into a frenzy, Johnson stuck to his game plan: lay up on all the par-5s and trust your wedges. With this plan, Johnson birdied 11 of the 16 par-5s that week. Though Johnson is not generally regarded as one of the Tour’s “boomers,” he manhandled the big course that Augusta National had become by adhering to one of manhood’s finest traits: self-control.

**T**HE SECOND TRAIT REQUIRED OF THOSE WHO WOULD MATURE INTO ELDERS among Christ’s people is this trait of self-control. Its notion is found in at least three instances of Paul’s list to Timothy. This may be surprising, because self-control, both in a general sense and as it appears in this letter, seems to apply to our physical selves, and many teachers and philosophers suggest there is a gap between the physical and the spiritual. One look at Christ’s own life—whereby He purchased our spiritual eternity through His physical suffering—shows us that this is not true; there is no such gap.

So we do not hesitate in this lesson to explore what kinds of behavior (physical, emotional, and spiritual) are included in the self-control that we would have as followers of Christ, as well as where we go to attain this self-control.

## READING

Look at these excerpts from 1 Timothy 3:2&3:

*Now the overseer must be... temperate, self-controlled... not given to drunkenness.*

## NOTES ON THE TEXT

As we have been doing, let's explore the full meaning of the key Greek words in this passage as Paul wrote them.

**1. *nephalios* (“temperate”)** This Greek word pointed specifically in its original use to temperance in terms of alcoholic consumption, chiefly wine. Although complete abstinence was not required (later Paul told Timothy to be sure to take some wine to fight a digestive disorder), very careful attention to one's consumption of wine was being prescribed here.

**2. *sophron* (“self-controlled”)** There are several layers of meaning in this Greek word. First, there is the general state of sanity, or clear-thinking. Those who were self-controlled were, in an elementary sense, “in their right mind,” capable of clear, consistent decision making. Second, there is the function of controlling one's desires and impulses. It has been said that maturity is not overusing your first inclination, and that idea would be applicable here. In this context, careful attention to bodily consumption would again fit, as would matters of pure thoughts and tactful words, for instance.

**3. *paroinos* (“drunkenness”)** Again the idea of caution with regards to alcoholic consumption arises, this time including nuances having to do with the ill effects of drunkenness, including abusiveness and a quarrelsome demeanor.

It is unclear why Paul would have placed repetitive emphasis on this matter of temperance, especially as it relates specifically to consumption of alcohol. Here are three speculations, in increasing weight:

- a. The apostle had seen several examples where intemperate consumption of alcohol turned otherwise excellent people into those incapable of level-headed thinking and thus clear leadership.
- b. The effects of alcohol often included negative turns of demeanor and emotion—incoherence, loose-tongued jesting and conversation, a capacity for boorishness and brawling—none of which were becoming in the church or in culture.
- c. Drunkenness brings a lack of cogent thinking, the kind of thinking that reflects the fullness of intelligence placed into us by God's creative hand. It certainly, then, does not allow for the “transforming of one's mind” for godly purposes, as Paul wrote of in Romans 12:2.

In any case, self-control over one's palette and/or the emotional draw to food or beverage trains the body and the mind to face stronger temptations, as well as to think deeply on the things of God.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Read the following passages as a way of surveying Scripture's view of those who cannot control their intake of alcohol: Proverbs 20:1, Proverbs 21:17, Proverbs 23:20-21 and 29-35, Proverbs 31:4-5, Isaiah 5:21-23, Isaiah 28:7, Luke 21:29-36, 1 Peter 4:3-6. What common threads run through these passages? Which of these passages point specifically to the demise of leadership at the hands of alcohol?

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2. Temperance does not mean abstinence. While some Christian denominations emphasize and teach total abstinence from alcohol, the Bible does not do this. Consider the following passages as they point to the acceptable use of alcohol: Deuteronomy 7:12-13, Deuteronomy 14:22-26, Psalm 104:14-15, John 2:1-11, 1 Timothy 5:23. How might one draw the line between acceptable and unacceptable use of alcohol, according to Scripture? How important are our friends and family in helping us guard this line?

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3. Read Romans 14:13-21. How does this passage help us define the constraints of abstinence, which is not absolute in Scripture, but is shown here to be applicable in certain circumstances?

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4. Read about the standards set for Nazirites and for John the Baptist in Numbers 6:1-4 and Luke 1:11-17. Also consider Daniel's diet in Daniel 1:8-16. How do these passages demonstrate that special circumstances or a special calling on one's life may require one to live in abstinence apart from the general toleration of alcoholic consumption in Scripture? How might a person recognize such a calling or decide to take such a vow?

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5. Consider Ephesians 5:18: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit.” What does this passage say to us about choosing the spiritual over the physical? What do you think this would look like in a person’s life?

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6. We would be remiss if we did not remember here that the broader principle at hand—though the Greek in Paul’s letter had much to do with alcoholic temperance—is self-control. How can these passages regarding alcoholic consumption and leadership be applied more broadly, to self-control in many areas?

### **TEMPERANCE EMBODIED HANNAH IN 1 SAMUEL 1**

In the opening chapter of 1 Samuel, we read of a woman named Hannah, who suffered from the culturally devastating condition of barrenness, a situation made worse by the provocations of her husband’s other wife. On the occasion noted in this chapter, in the temple of the Lord, in “the bitterness of soul,” Hannah wept profusely before the Lord, urging Him to open her womb and give her a child. The priest, Eli, could not help but notice this desperate woman, for she was praying deeply, and while her lips moved in this prayer, no audible words came out. Because of this odd behavior, he presumed her to be drunk and accused her of such.

But when Hannah did turn and speak to Eli, her words were emotional yet coherent. She demonstrated sound reasoning not found among the inebriated. Indeed, it was her sobriety that convinced Eli of the woman’s true spirit, and he turned from cursing her demeanor to blessing her request of the Lord. Hannah received this blessing and “in the course of time” found herself to be pregnant!



## LESSON FOUR AVOIDING THE FIGHT

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**H**OW MUCH DO YOU ENJOY COMPETITION? It is hard in our time not to have at least some competitive blood running through your veins, as we are exposed to everything from the Super Bowl to American Idol, from online Scrabble to mud-bog tractor pulls. In other words, you don't have to be an athlete to find your place against the world. You just need to hear someone suggest that they are better than you.

Of course, business people are plenty aware of this. Competition drives the marketplace, too. How many houses did you sell last month? How many units did you have to unload before the fad went cold? How many companies like yours shut down? If you don't thrive on this stuff, there's not a lot of room for you at the top. There may not even be room for you at the bottom. After all, "this is a team effort and we need everyone's full buy-in to pull this off." Words like those are usually followed by words like these: "Talk to me about a vacation some other time." And that's when you know the going is getting tough.

Yes, if you enjoy competition, there's a place for you in Western culture. Even our sit-coms are full of contention, trying their best to make light of the posturing, scheming and outright argumentation among characters. Some people, it seems, just love picking a fight. And many more of us, it seems, love watching them go at it. Kind of reminds you of school days, when the mob went running at the calls of "Fight! Fight!" Everyone wanted to see who was mixing it up.

**W**HEN PAUL WROTE TO TIMOTHY, HOWEVER, HE MADE SURE TO EMPHASIZE a different trait that should be evident among the maturing elders who are led by the Spirit. This is the trait of gentleness, and it is not far from the characteristic we previously studied: self-control.

In each person's life, we will find ourselves challenged by circumstances that greatly bother us. Usually these circumstances will come with people attached. When this happens, we are faced with a choice: do we take up the fight or not? Scripture presents us with certain causes that are worth a battle—the fight for justice, the battle against the spiritual forces that would keep people from Jesus, the challenge to stand firm in a covenant like marriage. But this does not mean that we should be fight-loving people, always looking for places to "step into the ring," with the hope of a little competition. Rather, as peacemakers who would be blessed to be called the sons of God, those who are maturing in Christ should look to diffuse escalating conflict and bring instead the amazing reconciliation of God, between people and their Creator, and between one another. This is the characteristic and the calling that we will explore in this lesson.

## READING

Look at these excerpts from 1 Timothy 3:2&3:

*Now the overseer must be... not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome.*

## NOTES ON THE TEXT

As we have been doing, let's use a word study of Paul's original Greek to gain further insight into the meaning of his phrasing.

**1. *plektes* (“not violent”)** The New International Version moves us to an English adjectival phrase, “not violent,” from the Greek noun *plektes*, which means “a bruiser” or “a pugnacious person.” This is why we find the King James Version rendered “not a striker” and the Holman Christian Standard rendered “not a bully.” The original actually points to a person recognizable in nearly any cultural context: one who is prepared to hurt others physically. An elder in the church of Jesus Christ under the influence of the Holy Spirit would never be such a person.

**2. *epieikes* (“gentle”)** Intriguingly, this Greek word includes both the sense of gentleness and the sense of fairness or equity. When a person learns to take his eyes off himself and to see the world more readily from the perspective of others, he is more apt to be gentle with them, understanding the conditions and concerns that influence their lives. Others, because of the events of their lives (current or accumulated) and the long-term forging of their personalities, may be quite ready to engage in contention. But a mature believer has learned that the onus of offense rests with the receiver of an insult or oversight; nothing requires us to take offense. When we learn not to perceive slights, we move toward the gentleness of Christ, who could not possibly have missed the offenses against Him, but chose not to respond in kind (“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”).

**3. *amachos* (“not quarrelsome”)** In the Greek, *amachos* is a very powerful adjective, equivalent to the English *invincible*. When Paul wrote that elders should be “*amachos*,” he may well have been suggesting that their stance, though not contentious, would be impenetrable because of its pure nature. Paul wanted Timothy and those Timothy would teach to understand that there are greater purposes to be achieved than to win a personal battle, and that elders would have the discernment necessary to steer clear of a fight that served no lasting purpose—those who do not enter such a fray cannot be beaten in one! In fact, Paul presented an excellent example of this characteristic, allowing himself to be arrested and jailed for the sake of the Gospel. His own Roman citizenship and lack of illegal activity would have allowed him to be released when he was detained under false pretenses had he not appealed to Caesar for the sake of gaining an audience for his message in the royal court of Rome. Paul knew that those recognized for cooperation rather than contention would have access to larger and more prominent tiers of society.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. At this stage of our study, you may already be wondering how to attain qualities that have eluded you in the past and that seem to be embedded in some people's personalities but not yours. The answer lies in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (which we will explore in depth in lesson 9). For now, read Galatians 5:22-25. How does this passage point to the need for the Holy Spirit in us? How do the qualities emphasized in this lesson show up among the listed "fruit of the Spirit?"

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2. Meditate on Proverbs 15:1, which says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." What situations can you recall in your life that unveiled the truth of this proverb? How might one practice gentle answers over harsh words?

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3. Look at Jesus' words in Matthew 11:29: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." What is the connection between gentleness and humility?

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How is it helpful to have Jesus' example to follow? How is His example fortified by His Spirit in us? What reward does Jesus offer us if we take His approach?

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4. Read 1 Peter 3:15-16. This passage shows us that sometimes we will have to engage in difficult conver-

sations, yet it instructs us in how to go about this. How does the opening phrase “set apart Christ as Lord” connect with the exhortation to reason with gentleness and respect?

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5. Read Titus 1:7, which is a parallel passage to the one we are studying in 1 Timothy. What words/phrases in this verse confirm Paul’s emphasis on the trait of gentleness among leaders?

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### **GENTLENESS EMBODIED THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN JOHN 18 & 19**

Although we are aware of episodes in His life where Jesus confronted the moneychangers in the temple marketplace, driving them out as those who had made the Father’s house of prayer into a “den of robbers,” Jesus nearly always displayed gentleness, especially toward those who received it from few others: women, children, the ill, and the demon-possessed.

But nowhere is Jesus’ gentle nature and remarkable forbearance seen as it was during the days of His passion, when He was betrayed, arrested, falsely accused, and sent to His death. It is impossible to read the accounts of these hours, strung together in horrifying fashion, and not marvel at Jesus’ repeated dispossession of power for the sake of those He would save. When the soldiers came to arrest Him (John 18:1-11), He spoke to them with surrender and even commanded Peter to sheathe his sword after the fiery disciple had used it against the high priest’s servant. When questioned by Pontius Pilate about His kingship (John 18:28-40), Jesus did not demand a royal place, but flatly noted that His kingdom was one of truth rather than worldly power. When Pilate went further and tried to draw self-defensive words from Jesus that would allow the governor to release Jesus (John 19:1-12), Jesus refused to seek His release but relented to the will of the people, knowing that it was God’s will that He die for them. When Jesus hung on the cross, He looked to His grieving mother and offered her the loving support of John (John 19:25-27). And we know as well from the other Gospel accounts that Jesus spoke of all His accusers and crucifiers when He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” In the midst of every action that could provoke a man to anger and the employment of power, Jesus remained gentle.



## LESSON FIVE AN ORDERLY HOUSE

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**C**LOSE TO HOME.” It’s an expression we use when we want to communicate that a matter is especially personal. And it makes sense, because all of us begin our tender lives in the care of those who have established our home. Usually, this is our biological parents, but it can also be adoptive parents or legal guardians related to us in another way. And it is in these contexts, under the direction of these homefront leaders, that we learn to understand interpersonal relationships and intimacy, even when we would not know what to call them.

As we grow toward adulthood, we also grow in our understanding of what a home is, reflecting foremost on our own place of living and growing. Famously, we set to thinking, perhaps lying in our beds at night after a particularly difficult interaction with another family member, *When I’m in charge... when I get married... when I have kids... I’ll do it this way.* Dissatisfaction leads nearly all of us to evaluation, and evaluation to the intention to change things.

So now you’re looking at things from the other side. Have they changed the way you hoped they would? Have you built the home you dreamed of building? Or has your life been full of surprises that you could never have anticipated, some good and some bad?

With almost 100 percent likelihood, that last question rings true. Your life at home as an adult who was supposed to be “in charge” has taken you down many unexpected paths. And for all the advice you have sought through books or counselors or respected friends over other matters, you have gone twice and three times to find out “what to do” about your children, your spouse, even yourself when the doors close at home and it’s just “you and yours!”

**W**HO COULD BE BLAMED, THEN, AT BALKING AT BECOMING A LEADER IN THE CHURCH if Paul’s standards for elders include a number of characteristics that must reflect positively on your home? After all, if we’ve only been married once and are raising a single brood of children, how can we avoid rookie mistakes? Even when we’re trying to do it right, we’re sure to think we’re getting it *all wrong* at least some of the time. And sure enough, Paul’s standards do include several measurements based on how we function in our own households—with our spouses, our children, our extended families, or our guests.

In this lesson, we will assess these measurements and see how we can apply them to our spiritual development in a challenging but realistic fashion.

## READING

Look at these excerpts from 1 Timothy 3:2&3:

*Now the overseer must be... the husband of but one wife... hospitable.... He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.*

## NOTES ON THE TEXT

As we are now in the habit of doing, let's explore what insights we can gather from a study of the original Greek language behind these phrases:

**1. *aner + mia + gyne* (“the husband of but one wife”)** Modern readers might find this phrase somewhat surprising, until we recall that multiple wives were not uncommon in Paul's surrounding culture. So it is possible that Paul was identifying men with only one wife and not engaged in polygamy. However, the meaning of the phrase is disputed among scholars, as it could also point to a man who has not been divorced (as opposed to widowed, as this is a consistently acceptable condition throughout Scripture). More basically, some wonder as well whether Paul was insisting here that elders be married, though this would not fit with what we know to be true of some of the early church's principal leaders, including Paul himself. For our contemporary purposes, we can at least say that elders would be those whose marriage is (1) exclusive, (2) faithful, and (3) enduring.

**2. *philoxenos* (“hospitable”)** The Greek here is not exceptionally revealing. As we would expect, the original points to generosity toward guests. It might be well-noted here that this does not require one to have an especially suited house. In fact, generosity toward guests can be equally displayed in one's office or church, as well as by entertaining others at a local restaurant. In a church or fellowship setting, overseers/elders would demonstrate an openness to visitors, doing what they could to make these guests feel initially welcome and comfortable thereafter.

**3. *proistemi* (“manage” his family well)** Here the Greek suggests a supervisory leadership that maintains the protection and care of those in the home. As we shall see in our upcoming study questions, Paul places importance in his letters on attention to and provision for one's own family. Because of the intimacy that exists in one's home, it is a proving ground for how one might manage affairs among members of the larger “church family.”

**4. *semnotes* (his children obey him with proper “respect”)** The Greek here is accepted across the board, pointing to respect and dignity worthy of one's position, in this case the position of parent. However, there is interpretive question as to whether the responsibility here rests with the children to offer respect or with the parent to maintain dignity as he commands obedience from his children. Certainly, as we

observe families in the church and culture, we see families where children honor their parents in spite of their parents' obvious mismanagement of the home and of their relationships with their children. Likewise, we see families where the parents make every effort to balance grace and discipline, but the children go wayward, particularly in their younger adult years. Because of these observations, we might be encouraged to choose the interpretation that places the onus on the parent to maintain dignity, but it may be in the hands of the respective church to fellowship to make this judgment.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Read Ephesians 5:22-33. How does this passage help us see the level of marital commitment that should exist between loving spouses under Christ? What is required of wives? What is required of husbands?

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Assuming the fullness of these requirements cannot be reached by men and women who still possess a sin nature: (a) how important is the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives in moving toward the standards of Christ, and (b) how do we use standards that no one can perfect to determine one's qualification for eldership?

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2. Read Matthew 5:43-47, Hebrews 13:1-2, and James 2:1-8. How do these passages serve to inform our application of hospitality (or generosity toward guests)?

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3. Compare Mark 7:9-13 and 1 Timothy 5:8. How do these passages thwart false justifications and

instead move us toward prioritizing the care of our families? And yet, what balanced views keep us from favoring our family to the detriment of others?

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5. Read Proverbs 15:5 and 17:21, as well as Ephesians 6:1-4. How do these passages demonstrate the equal responsibility between parents and children in building respectful, dignified households?

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### **GOOD HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT EMBODIED CORNELIUS IN ACTS 10**

From time to time in Scripture, we are surprised to find accounts of people who “fear God,” though they are not part of the “usual group” (the Jewish people). One such man was Cornelius, a Roman centurion in Caesarea. Luke, the writer of Acts, tells us that Cornelius “and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God daily” (sounds like good elder material!). The most striking insight from this one-line description may be that Cornelius’ family was apparently in unanimous accord in their attention to the things of God.

At the outset of an amazing sequence of events, Cornelius was visited by an angel who told him that he was about to entertain a notable visitor. Meanwhile, the apostle Peter was being prepared by God to take the Good News of Christ beyond the boundaries of Judaism and into Cornelius’ Gentile home. When Peter and his companions entered Cornelius’ house, “Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.” Clearly, Cornelius was a man of influence in his own home and among his circles of relationship. Peter explained the forgiveness that was possible through the risen Christ, and the Holy Spirit came upon these Gentile listeners. They were all baptized into Christ, made possible through their assembly at the urging of their revered patriarch and friend, Cornelius.



## LESSON SIX LEARNING TOWARD TEACHING

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**Y**OU DO KNOW WHAT SELLS GOLF MAGAZINES, DON'T YOU? Take a look at these cover stories: "Swing Easy, Hit Hard," "50 Tips from the 50 Best," "Up & Down Like a Pro," and "Get Your Game in Shape Now!" What sells golf magazines is our desire to find out how to hit it farther and straighter and closer, and then to sink putts—because, we know, this is what will help us shoot a lower score.

Never mind whether shooting a lower score is a higher priority for you than spending time with friends, escaping the office, or belonging to the right club. Everyone loves the game better when they hit at least a few good shots each round and avoid altogether embarrassing themselves with miserable play. Not long ago, we received a letter from a golfer who had "inexplicably and overnight" seen his handicap index go from 11 to 30. Now there's a guy who was yearning for learning! He wanted his regular game back.

**N**OT EVERYONE LIKES TRADITIONAL SCHOOL, but nearly everyone loves to learn. Physics or shop class, English literature or arts & crafts, there were classrooms of interest for all of us. God created in each of us brains that thrive on expanding their inventory of knowledge. So we take up hobbies and read books of continuing interest. We watch documentaries to connect us to history, science and culture, and pore over cookbooks that allow us to copy the best chefs.

And often, what makes these classes or shows or books so good is the one who "delivers the goods"—the teacher. Nearly all of us can trace an interest we have in a particular subject or activity to a person who made it fascinating and easy to grasp. When we find a teacher who makes sense to us, who "speaks our language," we keep coming back to see what that person has to offer, be it in a formal setting like a lecture hall or a lesson tee or in a place more informal, maybe around a campfire or under the hood of a car.

**I**N THE BIBLE, TOO, EXCELLENT TEACHING IS RECOGNIZED AS A HALLMARK among those who would lead. This may be because in many ways teachers are guides, and spiritual instruction, if it is nothing else, is a guide to living life as God intended us to live it. For this reason, when Paul laid out his standards for leaders to Timothy, the apostle included the ability, or aptitude, for teaching.

In this lesson, we will explore what it means to establish oneself as a godly teacher, capable not only of dispensing eternally valuable information, but of dispensing it well!

## READING

Look at these excerpts from 1 Timothy 3:2&3:

*Now the overseer must be... able to teach.*

## NOTES ON THE TEXT

The singular mention regarding this characteristic also limits our Greek word study to a single word. Let's consider that now:

**1. *didaktikos* (“able to teach”)** Paul's phrasing here in the original language brings up no surprises on the surface. We nearly all understand that “able” suggests a skill and a readiness. We also realize that “to teach” means to dispense information. When these two notions are brought together, we find that those who are “able to teach” will dispense information of value in a way that is clear and captures people's attention. We can discern from other scriptural contexts, however, where Paul evaluates the teaching abilities of others, that the emphasis for the apostle clearly would be on the readiness to teach over and above the skill. This would make sense as well because the word *didaktikos* is related to the Greek *didaktike arete*, which means that one possesses a teachable nature. In order to become ready to teach, one must be receptive to teaching.

Now let's move away from our word study and investigate three other matters here:

**2. A succession of elders.** It is important to note that the connection between learning and teaching suggests that there will be an ongoing succession of overseers, or elders. While those established as overseers are teaching, those who would come after are busy attaining the knowledge they will need to move into teaching roles themselves later.

**3. Overseers vs. deacons.** Immediately after the 1 Timothy 3:1-7 passage that set the standards for overseers, Paul wrote to Timothy in verses 8-13 of the standards for a deacon (one who would provide practical service in the fellowship). While several of the standards are similar, or even exactly the same, the ability to teach is listed as a trait of overseers only. Thus, the ability to teach is a characteristic necessary for those who would oversee others but not for those who would help others in the role of deacons.

**4. Women who teach.** As we have already noted, various churches and denominations allow or disallow women to function as overseers/elders. Much of this difference of opinion is predicated on Paul's earlier note to Timothy that he did not allow women to teach men (1 Timothy 2:12). Still, there are often opportunities for women to teach other women and children, so the development of this skill in the range of Christian maturation is as important for women as for men, no matter what view a church holds.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Read Deuteronomy 6:1-7. How does this passage establish the role of teaching for all of God's people, whether or not they are chosen overseers in a local congregation? How does it also show the context and extent of our teaching?

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2. Read Acts 4:1-21. How does this account demonstrate the strength of empowered teaching, particularly teaching about Jesus Christ?

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3. Read 1 Timothy 6:1-2. Note the practical nature of this instruction. Not all “biblical teaching” is what we might call “spiritual” in nature, but it is all indicative of the kind of life God wants us to live on earth. In this case, the instructions are addressed to those in the employ of others; later in this chapter, the instructions are intended to be given to the wealthy (those who might do the employing!). Now consider the final sentence of this short passage: “These are the things you are to teach and urge on them.” How does the kind of teaching Paul advocates—involving both the dispensing of information and the encouragement to adhere to this teaching—strike you as similar to the instruction and accountability roles of classroom teachers today? How might this be applied in the church/fellowship context?

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4. In what ways does teaching place demands of personal responsibility and accountability on the teach-

er even when he or she is not in a teaching role? How do Titus 2:7-8 and James 3:1 confirm or inform your thinking here?

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5. Read Proverbs 9:6-10. How does this passage demonstrate the interconnectedness among teaching, learning and living? What do you take from this passage for your own life?

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### **TEACHING EMBODIED EZRA IN EZRA 7, 9 & 10**

Among the Jewish exiles to Babylon was a priest named Ezra who, as time passed, came to be lauded and rewarded by the king of the land, Artaxerxes. When the king released some leaders to return to Jerusalem and reestablish the Jewish presence there, he chose Ezra as the priestly head. This reward, we are told in Ezra 7 came to Ezra because “the gracious hand of God was on him. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its laws and decrees in Israel.” Ezra had the foundations of every godly teacher: a devotion to study, a personal commitment to the instructions of God (and thus, an exemplary life), and practice in teaching.

When Ezra returned to Jerusalem, he discovered that many of the men there had taken foreign wives, directly disregarding God’s commands against intermarriage. This led Ezra to tear his clothes (a symbolic gesture of despair and humility) and to fall to his knees in prayer. Then we read at the outset of Ezra 10: “While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites...gathered around him. They too wept bitterly.” Ezra’s commitment to teaching the people came from his heart and soul, where he served God first and taught others to do the same in the very act of his own obedience. It is this form of personal devotion that builds the kinds of teachers God desires to oversee His followers even today.



## LESSON SEVEN A RIGHT VIEW OF MONEY

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IT NEVER GOES AWAY, THAT LITTLE ADAGE IN THE BACK OF YOUR MIND: “Keep your eye on the ball.” Even those picking up a golf club for the first time will look over at you, their ad hoc teacher, and say, “I know, keep my eye on the ball. Now let me try this.” Maybe it’s a holdover from Little League baseball days.

If you ever want a good scare, you might sit for an hour someday and draw up a list of all the little adages you live by. You might write down where they came from—grandma, Sunday school, a trusted business mentor, a quirky neighbor hidden on the other side of the fence. Then you might put a star by those you consider truly worthwhile. The disturbing part comes in realizing how much stock you have put in these adages, even those that aren’t valuable or virtuous.

Here’s an adage that has run its course through many of our minds and lives: “You can never have enough money,” or its wealthy man’s corollary: “You can never have *too much* money.” Have you ever mulled over these words? Have you lived by them, consciously or not?

Truthfully, most of us have lived by this notion. There’s no shock in that confession. We rarely miss the chance to get that next dollar, through hard work, wise investing, or a \$5 bet on the golf course. Not all of this is meant to accumulate funds for a meaningful purchase, say, or for long-term savings goals, such as a college education or retirement. But they all come from the unspoken idea that there’s more money to be had, so why not go get it?

**B**ELIEVE IT OR NOT, THE BIBLE HAS MUCH TO SAY ABOUT MONEY—in fact, more is said about money than most other subjects. You might be surprised to know, for instance, that Jesus said His followers should use the wealth of this world to gain friends for the sake of eternity! Jesus was not opposed to the free flow of money. But you might be surprised because Jesus also famously taught that we cannot serve two masters, and He drew the line between God and money. He also noted that some would not mature in the kingdom of God because they were “choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures” (Luke 8:14).

With specific warnings like that, it should not catch you off guard to find that Paul also addressed this matter of money when he wrote to Timothy about how to discern exceptional disciples who would become overseers, or elders, in their local churches and fellowships. In this lesson, we will look at how those who would lead put money in perspective and use it generously.

## READING

Look at these excerpts from 1 Timothy 3:2&3:

*Now the overseer must be... not a lover of money.*

## NOTES ON THE TEXT

From this brief phrasing, let's take a look at the chief idea in the original Greek:

**1. *aischrokerdes* (“lover of money”)** Paul used an entire phrase here, apparently seizing upon a set of words that were at least somewhat commonly known among the readers of his day. The expression may mean, more literally, “don't be greedy for money.” And the King James Version, seeking to drive home the point, calls money “filthy lucre.” All in all, money is cast in a pretty poor light here. But the suggestion that money in and of itself is the problem shouldn't really take precedence here, as it does not do so elsewhere in Scripture. One lexicon suggests that the idea here is that leaders would not seek base gain; that is, gain for the sake of gain or gain for the sake of self alone (of course, money is one way God enables our basic provision, so we cannot say that gain for one's self is entirely bad). So we are led most appropriately back to the idea of greed. Leaders will avoid greed, and especially greed for money. It's a fairly simple concept, both in the original and in our translations.

Moving away from our word study, let's consider an important aspect of leadership in today's churches and organizations:

**Overseers of the treasury.** There is a significant reason that this exhortation to be free from the love of money holds great value even today. In nearly all churches, the governing board, which is indeed often “the board of elders,” oversees the collection and expenditure of the church's finances. The church may have a bookkeeper and even an administrative pastor, but decision making regarding fiscal priorities and many expenditures rests with these leaders. How much will the church provide for its paid staff? How much goes to missions, both local and foreign? In churches where the leadership sees the money it collects in tithes and offerings as its own, spending will show this emphasis, with the bulk of the funds staying “at home,” making the church buildings more comfortable for those who attend the site regularly. But there are churches where outward giving prevails, and a foreign church, say, is supported with equal funds to those that are kept in-house. As we shall see in our study questions, generosity is loved by God, so we can understand why He would take pains to inspire Paul's inclusion of this trait among God's leaders—those who set examples personally and corporately (as with a board of elders) for the rest of the local congregants.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Read Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-5:10. What do these passages tell us about the right view and use of money among the people of Christ's church, both in its early history and today?

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2. Read Matthew 6:24, from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. What is the central truth of this verse? Why do you think Jesus specifically selected money as the "other master" in this teaching?

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3. Continue reading in Matthew 6, from verses 25-34. How does this passage show the affects of a mind/heart devoted to money, no matter the level of wealth you possess? Where should our focus be instead?

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4. Read Proverbs 23:4-5. How does this passage help us set a better perspective about money and our approach to it?

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5. Read the parable in Luke 16:1-15. For the purpose of what He was trying to convey here, Jesus emphasized the manager's shrewdness over his dishonesty. What was it that Jesus was trying to communicate? How do these truths come to life for you in the context of your own perspectives and circumstances?

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5. Review the parables in Matthew 18:21-35, Luke 10:25-37, and Luke 15:11-32. In what ways are compassion and generosity encouraged in these parables? How do these stories help us understand God and the way we are to follow Him in some of His richest traits?

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6. Read 1 Timothy 6:3-10, 17-19. What important truths are confirmed for you here? What teachings surprise you in this passage and challenge you to action?

**GENEROSITY EMBODIED THE MACEDONIAN BELIEVERS IN 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-7**

Paul was a traveling teacher, normally moving from place to place with a partner or two in tow, bringing the Good News of Christ to those who had heard it and those who had not. While Paul contributed to his own expenses from time to time as a tentmaker, he was also enabled by the generosity of those who desired to “share in this service to the saints.” Often this included wealthy businessmen and women, who gave from their profits to provide for the advancement of the Gospel.

But in one especially notable instance, Paul praised a group of impoverished believers who would not be held back in their own contribution to the work. These were the people of the churches in Macedonia, and their generosity is regaled in the opening verse of 2 Corinthians 8. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, who were among the beneficiaries of this giving, that while the Macedonians faced “severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.” Without compulsion, Paul added, the Macedonians actually *pleaded* with the apostles to be allowed to participate in the sharing of the financial needs of the ministry. Now that’s responding to joy!



## LESSON EIGHT THE VALUE OF MATURITY

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**W**HEN TIGER WOODS EMERGED AS A YOUNG STAR IN THE GAME OF GOLF, his feats were particularly remarkable because they were being done by someone still in his teens and young twenties. In the past, while young players would sometimes display occasional prowess, it was understood that a golfer's prime came later than athletes in other sports. Woods was displaying golfing maturity beyond his years, living up to the skills and results of players much older than he.

Maturity can be measured in virtually any endeavor in this same way. What skills or characteristics normally take a stretch of experience to develop? What qualities “come with age?” Once we have generally determined these traits, then we can use them, at least loosely, as a measuring rod of someone's maturity. And while these traits may typically align with a person's chronological development, they don't always do so. Moreover, it is quite common for each of us to demonstrate a measure of maturity—even to a prodigious degree—in one area while we are still developing overall maturity in many other ways. It is common, for instance, for a young golfer to have physical ability gained through a combination of innate talent and committed practice, but to lack mental and emotional progression that would enable an early charge to success.

**M**ATURITY MATTERS AMONG THOSE WHO WOULD BE LEADERS, AS WELL. When Paul wrote to Timothy about the characteristics that should be evident in one who would be an overseer or elder in the church, one of his closing notes was that these people should not be “newbies.” Rather, they should have demonstrated, over time, the staying power that comes with a firm faith.

One of the curiosities of Scripture is that while Christ by His Spirit does an instantaneous and powerful work in each of us at the moment of salvation, we find that maturity in Him still comes over time. We are “new creations,” but we are not altogether new. There is much to shed from our “former way of life,” and much to learn and to practice as we grow up in Jesus. This takes time. And interestingly, it is a known aspect of maturity—patience—that helps us live through this slow-moving development of our Christ-like character.

This final specific lesson in our study considers the need for maturity on the part of the church's chosen leaders, a maturity that demonstrates depth in one's pursuit of Christ, as well as experience in the essential skills and practices of one who is called an elder, no matter his age!

## READING

Look at these excerpts from 1 Timothy 3:6:

*Now the overseer... must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.*

## NOTES ON THE TEXT

Using the original Greek, let's begin by considering two key words:

**1. neophytos (“recent convert”)** As you might expect, the phrasing here suggests someone who has not been in the faith for long. In fact, a similar phrasing might have been used to speak of a seedling newly planted. While no definite length of time is specified, the context encourages the thinking that a certain degree of spiritual maturity must be in place before a person is given a position of spiritual oversight. The next phrase gives a specific reason why...

**2. typhoo (“conceited”)** We are helped here by two shades of meaning, one being “puffed up with pride” and the other being “rendered insolent.” A position of stature too soon given to one too early—even though in long run he may prove to have deserved it—can inspire pride that shows itself in the form of “see what I have done” (of course, these words do not have to be spoken for this expression of pride to be conveyed). This kind of pride would be especially hurtful to those who might be assigned to follow this young leader. When that pride is expressed toward those still more mature, including those who might be in a mentoring position over the younger leader, it can certainly come off as insolence, or rudeness, toward those who deserve extra respect.

While we are here, let's consider one other matter of overall context that is applicable in this case:

**Spiritual maturity.** Without question, when Paul is drawing a line to the exclusion of new converts (or “young believers”), he is not necessarily excluding believers who are physically young. Just a chapter later in this letter to Timothy, Paul tells his protege, “Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). Paul's emphasis, then, was not intended to be on physical maturity, but on spiritual maturity. Younger people may be selected as leaders over and above older people, especially if in their young lives they have demonstrated a maturity in matters of the faith, including the several traits we have viewed in the lessons of this study.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Read Galatians 1:13-2:10. With anything we read, it is important to know the credentials of the writer. Here in this passage, we get a sense of the development of Paul as a teacher and apostle. What kind of time frame was involved in his development? What qualities did he gain? What was the value of his confirmation by the apostles who had gone before him? What was it that really made Paul's ministry authentic and powerful (see verses 6 and 8)?

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2. Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 and Hebrews 5:11-6:3. What metaphor do the writers use to distinguish between those who are mature and those who are not? How does this metaphor serve to admonish the readers in their growth?

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3. Read the parable of the sower and its explanation in Matthew 13:1-23. What happens to the four kinds of seed in this parable? How does this parable help us see that some will grow with great health in the Lord while others are instead greatly hindered? What role does time play in helping distinguish between different people and their growth?

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4. Read Colossians 1:9-13. What matters of growth are broken out in this passage, particularly in verses 10-12? Where does the impetus for this growth come from?

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5. Read 1 Samuel 17:32-37, where we find a piece of the account of David's short battle with Goliath. What evidence did David offer to Saul for his experiential maturity? Where did David (and Saul) give credit for the victory he intended to deliver over the Philistine champion?

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### **MATURITY EMBODIED STEPHEN IN ACTS 6 AND 7**

Early in chapter 6 of the book of Acts, we are introduced to a flourishing believer named Stephen. The apostles were encountering increased demands on their time, which was drawing them away from their principal work. A proposal was made to the many followers of Christ that a group of men be selected to serve meals to the widows and perform other acts of service. These were men chosen as the first "deacons" based on their spiritual maturity. The first name on the list of those chosen was Stephen, a man "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit."

As we read further into the chapter, we find that Stephen was enabled by the Holy Spirit to do great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. As happened to the apostles, opposition arose against Stephen and he was seized after false accusations of blasphemy were laid upon him. When Stephen was brought before the ruling council and these claims were stated, many noted something peculiar about Stephen: "They saw that his face was like the face of an angel."

When Stephen began to respond to the leaders and those who had seized him, he did so by laying out the history of God's work among the Jewish people—he was teaching the teachers! But when he fully had their attention through this display of knowledge and eloquence, he unleashed the words they did not want to hear. He declared them to be stiff-necked, utterly resistant to God's work in Christ. For this, Stephen was mobbed, dragged out of the city, and stoned to death. He was the first martyr for Christ. Yet even in dying, this man full of faith prayed to God, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."



## LESSON NINE THE BEGINNING OF THE END

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**W**E HAVE REACHED THE FINAL LESSON OF OUR STUDY, *THE END GAME*, but in order to complete our knowledge of this matter—at least in a studied way, for there is much yet to learn in the way of experience for all of us!—we must ask a critical question that hopefully haunts your heart. That question is this: how can I do all of this?

We are all excited to have the opportunity in life to take on new challenges. That we are willing to do so means we have at least some of our faculties, and perhaps we are even strong in ways that will prove helpful, like a trained athlete for a big race or renowned novelist with a fresh plot.

But challenges can also be frightening, for they nearly always require a quest into newness. They ask things of us that we have never done before, or even things at which we have failed in the past. And yet we know that if we are to grow, we will need to step up to these challenges, to “add one” to our current level of comfort and take up the work God has for us. At times like these, we know we must have uncommon strength—at least uncommon to us!

Certainly, the move toward Christian maturity and leadership presents this kind of challenge, especially when we read of examples like Stephen, as He reflected and served the Lord even unto death. We are told that we must demonstrate integrity, self-control and gentleness. Our houses must be in order. We must be able to teach. And we must be generous with our money. These are tall tasks, so it is good that like David in our previous lesson, we come to this challenge with God as our Source of true character and the power to walk in that character.

**W**HEN JESUS PREPARED TO ASCEND TO HEAVEN, where He dwells with the Father even now, He promised that another would be sent to equip His followers. This one was the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. If we do not look to draw from the Holy Spirit, we will find ourselves frustrated in all that we attempt to do in Christ’s name, because we will be doing those things in our own strength and intellect. Even when we pull off what looks like the work of God, if we are doing these things without placing our trust in the Holy Spirit and seeking His guidance, we will find ourselves worn out and dissatisfied in our soul.

In this final lesson, we will explore the provision God has made for us to serve Him. Chiefly, we will seek to know and understand the Holy Spirit, for it is the Spirit who enables us in every strong and amazing way.

## READING

In an earlier lesson, we briefly investigated Paul's word to the believers in Galatia, found in Galatians 5:22-25. Now consider them closely:

*But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

## NOTES ON THE TEXT

Some of the key words in this passage we have explored in our previous lessons (*self-controlled* in lesson three and *gentleness* in lesson four). While the remaining words here are many, some are well-understood. Let's take a minute to look at some meanings that may be especially surprising or helpful:

**1. agape ("love")** Ancient Greek allowed several different words for love. *Philia* spoke of brotherly love as evidenced by loyalty and companionship; *eros* denoted romantic love, though not necessarily sexual in nature; *thelema* suggested desire, like we might say we would love a hamburger for lunch; and the infrequently used *storge* defined an almost obligatory love, as a parent might have for a child. *Agape*, however, was a more transcendent word, suggesting good will and affection. Biblical writers used it to describe God's own love for us, given without condition, as well as the love He would instill in us by His Spirit.

**2. eirene ("peace")** The peace here may include the absence of discord among people (perhaps best propagated by those who are gentle!), as well as the peace of one soul's when they have found their utmost satisfaction in Christ and His forgiving grace.

**3. sarx ("sinful nature" or, in many translations, "the flesh")** The Greek word *sarx* commonly pointed to the human body itself, but the New Testament writers commandeered the word for spiritual purposes as well, often speaking of "the flesh" as the part of a person that seeks after the offerings of the world to the exclusion of God and His influence. The flesh, then, is recognized biblically as the part of us that is prone to sin—often quite directly connected to our actual human flesh!

**4. stoicheo ("walk in step")** This word, at its roots, means "to arrange in a regular line." In directing them to keep in step with the Spirit, Paul was instructing the Galatians to "fall in" behind the Spirit. In order for this happen, of course, three things must occur: (1) one must be ceaselessly attentive to the leader, (2) one must do whatever the leader directs, and (3) one must go wherever the leader goes. Obviously, the first of these must come first, and so we turn our attention now to how we can attend to the Spirit and bear the fruit that He desires to grow in us.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Read Acts 1:6-14 and 2:1-4. What insight do we gain into the Holy Spirit through examining this first encounter with Him as it was experienced by those gathered in Jerusalem?

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2. Read the opening of Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-21, where he quotes liberally from the prophet Joel. Upon whom will the Holy Spirit be poured out "in the last days?" What remarkable things will happen through the Spirit's influence?

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3. Read Acts 19:1-7. How does this passage show that it is a necessity for us to recognize and make way for the Holy Spirit in our lives if we are to fully access all that God has for us? Is this something you have ever considered before?

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4. Read Romans 8:1-11. What direct lines does this passage draw between Jesus and the Holy Spirit? How does this passage show that it is especially important to live "not according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit" if we are to honor Christ's love and death for us?

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5. Read Galatians 4:1-7. What step is essential if we are to receive the Holy Spirit? Who alone can make us sons of God?

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6. Read again Galatians 5:22-25. Among the fruit of the Spirit listed here, which do you think would be most valuable for one who would lead in Christ's church? In what way does this list constitute another set of measures of a believer's developing maturity? How does the closing line of verse 23 show us that the Spirit's role in our lives covers every aspect of righteousness?

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#### **CLOSING WORDS THE NECESSITY OF HUMILITY**

Before we leave this study, desiring to become those that God would have us be—that is, maturing followers of Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit—we must make mention of a trait not listed in the passages we have studied but essential to our entire relationship with God. This trait is humility. Perhaps surprisingly, Scripture is clear that God plays favorites; He favors the humble. Consider, for instance, Matthew 18:4 - “Therefore, whoever humbles himself like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven,” and James 4:10 - “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.”

At the foundation, we should not desire the traits of a mature believer so that we will be selected as overseers, elders, or any sort of leader in our churches. Rather, in humility, we seek maturity in our faith because it honors God when we pursue the life that He has designated for us to live. Indeed, when we speak of “the end game” so that we might have a picture of what God's work in and through us will look like as we progress in our growth in Him, we are not suggesting eldership. Rather, we are suggesting that you will grow into the characteristics that mark one who *may* be chosen as such a leader. Sadly, in many churches and fellowships, leaders are selected who do not display these marks, and better people are left in positions of subservience. *Such an occurrence never bothers a truly humble person.* Humble people know that their Father, “who sees what is done in secret,” will reward them (Matthew 6:2-4).

Be greatly encouraged in your pursuit of mature Christian character! And pursue it with all humility!



## APPENDIX A PERSONAL INVENTORY

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This extra section of The End Game is provided for those who wish to take a journaling approach to their own current state of Christian maturity, examining where they now stand and where they have to go.

**INTEGRITY** *Therefore an overseer must be above reproach... respectable... [and] he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

- At this stage in my walk with Christ, I find I have these strengths in the realm of maturity:

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- Meanwhile I see matters that still demand attention, so I include this action step here:

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**TEMPERANCE AND SELF-CONTROL** *Now the overseer must be... temperate, self-controlled... not given to drunkenness.*

- At this stage in my walk with Christ, I find I have these strengths in the realm of temperance and self-control:

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- Meanwhile I see matters that still demand attention, so I include this action step here:

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**GENTLENESS** *Now the overseer must be... not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome.*

- At this stage in my walk with Christ, I find I have these strengths in the realm of gentleness:

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- Meanwhile I see matters that still demand attention, so I include this action step here:

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**A HOUSE IN ORDER** *Now the overseer must be... the husband of but one wife... hospitable.... He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.*

- At this stage in my walk with Christ, I find I have these strengths in the realm of household order:

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- Meanwhile I see matters that still demand attention, so I include this action step here:

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**ABILITY TO TEACH** *Now the overseer must be... able to teach.*

- At this stage in my walk with Christ, I find I have these strengths in the realm of teaching:

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- Meanwhile I see matters that still demand attention, so I include this action step here:

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**NOT LOVING MONEY/GENEROSITY** *Now the overseer must be... not a lover of money.*

- At this stage in my walk with Christ, I find I have these strengths in the realm of money and generosity:

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- Meanwhile I see matters that still demand attention, so I include this action step here:

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**MATURING IN THE FAITH** *Now the overseer... must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.*

- At this stage in my walk with Christ, I find I have these strengths in the realm of developing maturity:

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- Meanwhile I see matters that still demand attention, so I include this action step here:

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**A PRAYER FOR MATURITY** *Heavenly Father, There are so many things that I have yet to see develop in my life with You. But I do not wish to be impatient. I want to grow at the pace You set for me, learning to trust You in every victory and every setback. Still, Lord, move me by Your Spirit into situations and opportunities that provide growth in You. And through it all, keep me humble before You. In Jesus' wonderful name, Amen.*

