

More than a Building: Deacons - The Lead Servants

1 Timothy 3:8–13 - Pastor Todd Johnson

Good Morning Welcome to Brandywine Valley Church!

(at 10am only) Welcome to those watching online.

Connection Card Spotlight:

We have a few announcements as we get started...

- **Young Adult Fall connect** is on Friday, October 3 at 6:30pm. Enjoy free dinner, hang out, worship, grow through meaningful teaching, Q&A, and community. No registration. Join us in the gym. Pastor Nate teaching.

****10:00 & 11:30 Only****

- We want to invite you to join a **pop-up choir** that will sing at the 10:00 & 11:30 services on Sunday, November 9. There will be three Sunday afternoon rehearsals: October 19th, 26th, and November 2nd (These do not conflict with any Eagles games). This opportunity is open to everyone 6th grade and older, no audition necessary. Sign up by Sunday, October 12 by visiting our website.

Pastoral Prayer: Middle School Students on Retreat this weekend.

This morning, we are continuing in our sermon series entitled **More Than A Building**. Meaning that the church isn't the building, rather **it is the people of God who make up the church**. Last week Pastor Nate taught on the role of the Elder in the church; and this week we are going to be discussing the purpose of the Deacon ministry within the church. But as a way to get into that discussion....

Illus:

How many of you love getting together for family gatherings? Every summer my wife's family has a big family gathering in August because a lot of us have August Birthday's. There is lots of food, games, and conversation. But what you notice if you're paying attention, is that at every family gathering, most people there fit into two distinct groups.

We'll call the first group the "**couch crew**". These are the people who hold the remote like it's the crown jewels, with their plate piled high, balanced delicately on their lap, comfy seat, play-by-play commentary of the game that nobody asked for. This is the "**couch crew**." *[you know who you are out there]...*

And then you've got the second group that we'll call the "**kitchen crew**"—these are the unsung heroes who get things set up early, they're refilling drinks, they get the oven preheated, they keep the little ones in attendance from wreaking havoc. The "**kitchen crew**" somehow anticipates all the needs before anyone asks.

Now, picture a family reunion/get together where the kitchen crew all calls out sick. It would be utter chaos. The turkey is still in the freezer. The table isn't set. The gravy is... let's just say the gravy is "interesting." The trash is overflowing, the smoke alarm's going off because someone just set a potholder on fire. Nobody is arguing about the remote anymore **because without the servants, the entire gathering collapses.**

That's why this series is called **More than a Building** because without **servants**, churches cannot function. **However with servants, the church becomes a family on mission.**

The people of God are not supposed to be a weekly show where a few people "perform" and the rest spectate. No. The church is a family, a living body that is fed, sustained, and propelled by **servants**. And because God is wise, He has designed a specific office in the church for those "**kitchen crew**" lead servants...those who go first in practical love...and that is the role of **Deacon**.

Now, if you're thinking, "A sermon on deacons? I don't *think* I'm deacon material, so I can tune this sermon out. NOPE! This passage is for *all* of us. Not everyone is called to be a deacon, but everyone in Christ is called to be a servant. Deacons aren't the only servants; they're the **lead** servants; they are to be visible models of what *our whole family* is called to be.

Here's my prayer for you today as we open 1 Timothy 3:8–13:

1. You'll leave with a **clear understanding** of what deacons are and why they matter.
2. You'll leave with a **joyful, expectant attitude** about serving Christ in His church.
3. You'll leave **inspired to give yourself away** in servant-hearted ways even if you never hold the title "deacon" because Jesus calls all of us to follow Him. And He is the Ultimate Servant.

Let's read the Word together.

1 Timothy 3:8–13

8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.

9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

11 Women likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.

13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

In verses 8-10 we see **What Deacons Must Be**. And Paul begins with **Character**. Not duties. Not a task list. Not a spreadsheet. **Character**.

“Deacons likewise must be **dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain...**” (v. 8)

Let’s slow down and digest each word. There is golden truth for us here.

“**Dignified.**” The Greek word is *semnous*—it carries the idea of *weight*, a gravity of life that is worthy of respect. This isn’t stiff or joyless; it’s someone who walks with **holy steadiness**. There’s a settledness in God that makes their presence reassuring. You trust your kids with them. You trust your church keys with them. You trust your prayer requests with them. They carry God’s people, not like a hot potato, but like a treasure.

“**Not double-tongued.**” The Greek word Paul uses here is striking, it literally means, *not two-worded*. Not saying one thing to this person and another thing to that person. Not whispering, triangulating, or seasoning every sentence with just enough spin to get what they want. Their words have integrity because their heart has integrity. Their “yes” means yes and their “no” means no. And because of this they are a safe person.

“**Not addicted to much wine.**” Notice Paul doesn’t say “never touches a drop.” The issue isn’t a rule about ounces; it’s a warning about mastery. What masters you? What consoles you? What helps you “take the edge off”? A servant of Christ must belong to Christ above all. They don’t need to numb their anxieties; they *name* those anxieties before the Lord. They don’t need to alter their mood to be kind, because they walk by the Spirit.

“**Not greedy for dishonest gain.**” Deacons often steward resources, benevolence, tangible needs so they must be unbribeable. You can’t buy them off with praise. You can’t sway them with perks. They’re not quietly skimming the corners of the budget “because no one will notice.” They don’t use ministry to build a platform; they use their platform to build people.

Then verse 9 gets real interesting:

“They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.” *What in the world does that mean?*

“The mystery of the faith” is Paul’s referring to the gospel, because you see, the gospel was once hidden but is now revealed in Christ: the crucified and risen Lord, reconciling sinners to God, uniting Jew and Gentile in one new humanity. Deacons don’t merely *know* the gospel; they *hold* it, grip it, cling to it with both hands. And not defensively, but with a **clear conscience. How they live their life matches what they say**. They’re not perfect, but they have integrity. Which means when they sin, they repent. When they promise, they follow through. When they serve, they do it for Jesus.

Then verse 10:

“And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.”

“Tested” doesn’t mean a theology pop quiz; **it means to watch their life**. Do they keep confidences? Do they show up when it’s inconvenient? Do they return texts when the need is messy? Do they hold the line when pressure would make it easy to cut corners? Do they grumble along with others or do they shift others toward illuminated thinking? Paul’s challenge here is...**do not ordain potential** (here); recognize patterns, because this is vitally important for the health of the church.

And that brings us to our first truth for this morning: **When deacons serve with Spirit-formed character, the church grows in health and unity.**

Illus:

We have amazing Deacons here at Brandywine. Our Deacons give of their time, talents and treasure to support the work of the ministry here. I am often left in awe, especially by the time commitment some of our Deacons

make. Because in addition to their deacon responsibilities most of them are serving in other areas of the church. Praise the Lord that we have amazing lead servants here at Brandywine!

But you see church the reason why this happens is because of **spirit-formed character over many years of a person's life**. When I say spirit-formed character I'm talking about allowing the Spirit of God (that resides inside the believer) to decide your steps, your priorities. It's a surrendering of your will, and an elevating of His will.

And you see church when you see a person surrendered to God's will in service. It's one of the most beautiful things.

This man pictured here is my good friend, Ken Trbovich. Ken was a Deacon in my church back in Colorado. And Ken is one of the first people I think of when I think about the heart of Deacon ministry. Ken was a former atheist, but he had a persistent wife Sandy that was faithful and won him to Christ. But when God got a hold of Ken's life, he transformed him into such a wonderful servant. As a few examples of this...

- The morning that the 9/11 attacks happened Ken drove down to Denver International Airport because he knew people would be stranded there as all planes were grounded. He walked the terminal asking people if they needed a place to stay. A couple from Florida took him and his wife up on the offer, and they ended up becoming life long friends. **Spirit-formed character**.
- Throughout the years the Trbovich home was constantly full not just because they had a lot of kids. But there was always someone living with them who was in need. People in our church who lost their home, people who were just released from prison and had no place to go. If you needed a place to stay, their door was always open. Kaely and I even lived with them for a couple of months while we were in between houses. **Spirit-formed character**.
- When my father died shortly after we moved here, we had the memorial service in this very room. The first person I saw as I entered the lobby (to my surprise) was Deacon Ken Trbovich. He

booked a last minute flight to serve me at that pivotal moment.
Spirit-formed character.

Now church I don't say all of this to glorify Ken. He's not perfect by any means. But by the power of the Holy Spirit, he has the **Spirit-formed Character** that allows him to serve in amazing ways to the Glory of God.

As we continue in examining our text...Paul turns from talking about the public reputation of a Deacon to **private** reality of how they ought to live....this is **Where Deacons Prove It (vv. 11–12)**

“Women likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.” (vv. 11–12)

A quick pastoral note here in 1 Timothy 3:11, some translations read “wives,” others read “women,” meaning women who serve as deacons. Now, faithful churches land in different places on this. But either way, Paul's point is clear: the people closest to a deacon should reflect the same dignified, disciplined, faithful life he's been describing. Whether that refers to women serving as deacons or a deacon's wife, the home and relationships should line up with the gospel.

Our text here gives the qualifications of **“Dignified... not slanderers... sober-minded... faithful in all things.”**

When we are at home, when we are comfortable, in our own space, that is when we discover who we truly are. I find out how I'm doing with the virtue of patience, not by working through an issue with a church member, but rather when it's 10:30 pm on a Wednesday night and my children have forgotten (again) to take out the trash/recycling for the morning collection. You see church, who we are in the kitchen, the hallway, in the car, the family group text—that's who we really are. And so, if our public ministry is wonderful but your private speech is cringe worthy... something is off.

Our text continues to list the virtues, **“Husband of one wife... managing children... managing the household well.”**

This is a person who is faithful, not flirtatious; covenantal, not casual. And “managing” here is not a code word for controlling; it’s a word that means standing before, caring for, giving watchful attention to. It’s the posture of a servant, not a tyrant. What Paul is saying here is that **the home** is a proving ground for servant leadership.

*And that brings us to our second truth for this morning: **A Deacon’s devotion begins at home and builds the church.*** Their first congregation is their household; their first pulpit is their dinner table; their first ministry is their everyday faithfulness.

This passage is referring to the qualifications, the virtues that should accompany the life of a Deacon, but make no mistake, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, this should be the aim for all of our families, Deacon or not. Because we live in a world that isn’t right. We have been reminded this month just how evil the world can be. And as the world looks for answers to the problem of evil that they sense deep down inside, we [the church] need to be prepared with an answer...but not just that...lives/homes, that echo that answer.

Illus:

In the second and third centuries, the Roman Empire was shaken again and again by devastating plagues. Cities emptied, families would abandon their sick, and whole communities were left to fend for themselves. The instinct of most was to flee...self-preservation at all costs.

But Early Church Christians responded differently. Instead of running away, they stayed. They nursed not only their own people, but also their pagan neighbors, often at great risk to themselves. Now they didn’t have modern medicine, just water, food, and care. And yet even those simple acts of mercy saved lives.

One bishop of the time, Dionysius of Alexandria, wrote that while the pagans deserted the sick, *“the Christians took charge of the sick, attending*

to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy.”

Noted historian Rodney Stark points out that this practical charity was **one of the strongest forces in Christianity’s explosive growth**. “In the year 165 ... Christians met the obligation to care for the sick rather than desert them, and thereby saved enormous numbers of lives! ... It is entirely plausible that Christian nursing would have reduced mortality by as much as two-thirds!”

— Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity*

You see, the early church didn’t just preach sermons—they lived them. Their homes became hospitals, their families became safe havens, and their ordinary acts of mercy **turned the world’s attention to Jesus**. Love lived out especially in families and communities preached louder than words.

And here’s the point for all of us. The kind of love that compelled the Roman world to Christ isn’t just the work of a few it’s the calling of every believer. Deacons, by their character and devotion, **model this way of life** for the whole church. Their homes, like the homes of those early Christians, become safe havens where the gospel is embodied in everyday faithfulness.

But this is not just a deacon’s duty—it’s a **foundational Christian virtue**. Every follower of Jesus is called to let their household be a place where mercy is practiced, patience is proven, and ordinary love is lived out. And when we live this way when aspiring deacons, current deacons, and every disciple of Christ embrace this our church grows strong, and our community sees **a living sermon** that points straight to Jesus.

Moving on in our text in verse 13 Paul ends not with a burden, but a blessing concerning **What God Gives Deacons (v. 13)**

“For those who *serve well* as deacons gain a *good standing* for themselves and also *great confidence in the faith* that is in Christ Jesus.” (v. 13)

There are two gifts mentioned here...

#1 “Good standing.”

Not status-seeking. Not applause-chasing. “Good standing” is the spiritual credibility that rises when a life rings true. People trust you—not because you marketed yourself—but because you showed up. You carried burdens. You prayed in kitchens and corridors. You visited after everyone else forgot. You made the coffee when nobody noticed and turned off the lights when everybody left. Over time, God weaves your quiet faithfulness into a public witness: *This is what Jesus looks like in a human life.*

The second gift mentioned here is, “Great confidence in the faith.”

Service grows faith. If gyms strengthen bodies with the resistance of weights, God strengthens faith with the resistance of needs. You lift burdens, and the Spirit lifts you. You pour out, and Christ fills you. You step into messy rooms, and you meet a faithful God. Confidence doesn’t come from hiding; it comes from *helping*. As you serve, you see Christ sustaining you and you start to *expect* Him to show up again.

Illus:

Think back on your own faith journey. Who helped shape you? A great Preacher/Pastor might have stirred you, **but who *formed* you?** The Sunday school teacher who took your questions seriously. The deacon who came to the ER and prayed. The greeter who remembered your name. The meal team who brought dinner when grief overwhelmed you. You see church, heaven will reveal that the loudest applause belongs to hands no one saw.

Think about this...In John 13 “Jesus, knowing the Father had given all things into his hands...” What does He do with *all things*? He takes a towel. The One with everything in His hands *puts His hands in the dirt* between

the toes of disciples. Then He says, “I’ve given you an example... you also should do just as I have done to you.” The path to “good standing” in heaven’s eyes is paved by kneeling with a basin and a towel on earth.

*And this brings us to our third truth for this morning. **Deacons serve with distinction.*** In God’s economy, humble service blossoms into honorable standing. And in walking this path, deacons lead all of us closer to the heart of Christ.

Let’s step back and see the portrait our scripture text just painted:

- A people whose **character** is shaped by the gospel they hold.
- A people whose **devotion** is proven in the home.
- A people whose **distinction** is humility.

That’s what deacons model. That’s what the church becomes when the Spirit has His way in our lives. That’s what our city of Wilmington can encounter when they meet us: not a building with programs, but a family of servants whose life together makes Jesus hard to ignore.

And all of this flows from **Christ Himself**.

Mark 10:45: “For even the Son of Man came **not to be served but to serve**, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

Philippians 2: He *emptied Himself, took the form of a servant, humbled Himself* to death on a cross—*therefore* God highly exalted Him.

The gospel is not “Serve God enough and He will love you.” The gospel is “God has loved you in Christ to the utmost—so now you are free to serve without fear, without keeping score, without chasing applause.” Christ has already carried your sin, wiped your record, given you His Spirit, made you family and handed you a towel and a basin to serve others.

So what would it look like if we, together, embraced this calling?

- Imagine a church where the first instinct is, “How can I help?”
- Imagine homes where apologies are quick, encouragement is normal, Scripture is opened, and prayer is the reflex.
- Imagine deacons whose steady lives make the gospel plausible to skeptics and precious to saints.
- Imagine a congregation where children *grow up expecting* to serve because they’ve watched it modeled in living color.

This is what we are meant to be. Not perfect. Surrendered. Not prideful. Humbled. Not following the World...Following Christ.

Church family, before we close, I want to offer a word of clarification. As many of you know, we are in a season of transition in our leadership structure. Scripture shows us two offices in the church—Elders and Deacons. Elders are called to shepherd the flock, to guard doctrine, and to lead spiritually (Pastor Nate covered this last week). In our history here at Brandywine we have not had the office of Elder, we have only had Deacons who operated in both roles...something we affectionately refer to as DELDERING.

Biblically speaking, Deacons are called to serve practically, meeting tangible needs so that the gospel ministry flourishes. In God’s wisdom, the roles of Elder and Deacon complement one another. We are proposing to add the office of Elders at Brandywine, thereby aligning ourselves more closely with the New Testament pattern of leadership seen in churches like those in Acts 14 and Titus 1, where a plurality of Elders provided oversight while Deacons led in service. This step strengthens both pastoral care and spiritual oversight for this growing church.

At the same time, we will also be proposing that the role of Deacon be filled by both men and women. The Scriptures do not prohibit women from serving as Deacons, and in fact, Romans 16 commends Phoebe as a deacon of the church in Cenchreae (*sen-kree-uh*). The Greek word that is used to describe Phoebe in Romans 16 (*diakonos*) is that same word used throughout the NT to describe the office of Deacon. Throughout church history, women served faithfully in this role, from the early church to our

own day. Because the work of Deacons is not one of exercising doctrinal authority but of servant leadership, we believe that women, gifted by God and qualified by character, should serve alongside men in this vital ministry. This decision reflects the biblical witness and doubles the pool of faithful servants who can meet needs, extend mercy, and model the love of Christ in tangible ways.

Our Elder Exploration Team has developed a paper on our doctrinal rationale for these proposed changes. We can provide that document for you if you would like to read more about how we arrived at this perspective on a biblical basis. And in addition next week Pastor Nate will be holding a Town Hall in the Connection Cafe area (*just off the left side of the lobby*) at 10:00 am and again at 11:30 am for those who have more questions or would like to hear more about the proposed changes in our leadership structure.

[Pause]

I'd like to leave you with this thought. This week, ask one question every day: "**Lord Jesus, where's my towel?**"

- In my **speech** where do I need to speak truth or speak life?
- In my **appetites** where do I need to bring my need to You instead of numbing it?
- In my **home** what small act of devotion can turn ordinary space into sacred space?
- In my **church** what need can I meet that no one else sees?
- In my **city** who can I bless in Your name, with no strings attached?

Not, "Where can I be noticed?" Not, "Where can I be comfortable?"

But, "**Where can I serve?**"

And here's why this matters: the Gospel itself is the story of the greatest Servant of ALL TIME. People nowadays debate who is the GOAT, who is the greatest of all time. Generally these debates center around sports figures. But Jesus Christ, the Son of God is the true GOAT. We are all sinners who cannot clean ourselves up or save ourselves. But in love,

Jesus humbled Himself, taking on the form of a servant, even to the point of death on a cross. There He bore our sin, and three days later He rose again, proving that the debt was paid in full.

Friend, if you've never trusted Christ as your Lord and Savior, make this the day of your salvation. Turn from sin, believe in Him, and receive forgiveness and eternal life today. Serving will never save you, it is Jesus alone who saves. But once you know Him, serving becomes your joy, because you're following the Servant-King who gave His life for you.

Prayer