

Relationships with Church Leaders

By Candi Finch

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read the comments related to Titus 1:4–5 in the section **It's in the Book**. After studying those names for church leaders, read Acts 20:28–31. Paul was talking to the leaders of the Ephesian church and describing their job as elders of the church. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: What imagery did Paul use to describe the ministry of church leaders in Acts 20:28?

Assignment Two

Read the comments related to Titus 1:9 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following question: What two tasks are elders to do as a result of holding fast to faithful and trustworthy teaching?

Assignment Three

Read the comments related to 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following question: How are Christians supposed to treat their leaders according to these verses?

Scripture to Memorize

"We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you." 1 Thessalonians 5:12

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will state and understand some basic qualifications and tasks of spiritual leaders and how to rightly relate to spiritual leaders within scriptural boundaries.

Candi Finch is assistant professor of Theology in Women's Studies at Southwestern Seminary. Candi's greatest passion is to see teenagers and women come to know the Lord and become mature disciples of Christ. Several women invested in her life when she was a new believer in high school. The impact they had on her reminds her daily of the positive influence we can have on others for Christ. Candi has contributed to several books for women and youth, including *Women's Evangelical Commentary on the New Testament and Old Testament*, *The Study Bible for Women*, *Impact: The Student Leadership Bible*, and *Critical Issues, Absolute Answers: Solutions for Students*.

It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Imagine you move to a new state and have to look for a new church home. What character qualities or skills do you consider important for the pastor of the church you would consider joining? Why would those particular things in a prospective pastor be important to you?

Qualifications for Spiritual Leaders

Read Titus 1:1–9 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 4. Titus. A Greek by ethnic heritage, Titus came to know the Lord under the ministry of Paul.

Verse 5. This is why . . . Crete. Paul sent Titus to Crete to appoint church leaders and disciple new believers because false teachings and worldly living had invaded the churches. Crete is one of the larger islands in the Mediterranean, and Cretans were often characterized in ancient writings as immoral, rude, and barbaric people.

Church leaders were called specific names in this letter.

Verse 5. elders. This word in Greek can refer to physical age (someone older), but it can also refer to spiritual maturity. An elder is to be a spiritually mature man.

Verse 7. overseer. This word means the manager of a household or family and emphasizes the responsibility of the church leader as God's manager for a specific church family.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share an answer to the following question: What imagery did Paul use to describe the ministry of church leaders in Acts 20:28?

Discussion Question

What is the significance of the names used to describe church leaders in Titus 1:5 and 7 and the description of the church leaders' task described in **Assignment One**?

On Your Own

In the space below, make two columns, one with the "should not be" qualities of church leaders and one with the "should be" qualities. Write the qualities based verses 5–9. When everyone is finished, the group can compare answers to the Scripture passage and make changes where needed.

A Leader Should Not Be . . .

A Leader Should Be . . .

Studying the Passage

Verse 6. above reproach. These two words, also in verse 7, can be translated “blameless.” They come from a word meaning that a person can’t be accused of wrongdoing because of the life he lives. **husband of one wife.** The emphasis is not that the pastor must be a married man, for Paul was single at this time. The charge was that the pastor should be a one-woman kind of man, taking God’s plan for marriage seriously (compare Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:5). **debauchery.** Signifies reckless living and is the same word to describe the prodigal son in Luke 15:13.

Verse 7. violent. This means not a bully or combative, not a person always looking for a fight. **greedy for gain.** This phrase means an elder should not be materialistic or greedy or dishonest with money.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share answers to the following question: What two tasks are elders to do as a result of holding fast to faithful and trustworthy teaching?

Studying the Passage

Verse 9. hold firm. The word literally means “cling to” the faithful Word. **give instruction.** This means “urge” or even “comfort” and comes from the same root where we get the title *Comforter* in reference to the Holy Spirit. **rebuke.** This word signifies actively speaking against, opposing, or objecting, and in context, refers to actively opposing those who contradict sound doctrine.

With a basic understanding of the character qualities of church leaders and some of the tasks given to them, let’s think about the right way to relate to spiritual leaders.

Rightly Relating to Spiritual Leaders

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12–21 out loud.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now share answers to the following question: How are Christians supposed to treat their leaders, according to 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13?

Studying the Passage

Verse 12. Respect. The believers in Thessalonica are exhorted to appreciate or respect those who work with them, have responsibility or charge over them, and give them instruction (a pretty spot-on job description of a pastor!). The word suggests giving honor or recognition or acknowledging.

Verse 13. esteem. This word means “to hold in high regard” and also suggests giving respect. **Be at peace.** All believers are called to live in harmony with one another, including our spiritual leaders, without discord.

On Your Own

In the space below, describe some specific and practical ways you can show respect and appreciation to your spiritual leaders. When everyone is finished, the group can share their responses.

Discussion Question

Paul urged the Thessalonians to relate to fellow believers (that includes the spiritual leaders over them) with specific actions in 1 Thessalonians 5:14–21. What specific things does he encourage them to do? (Hint: look for all the verbs in these verses.)

Studying the Passage

Despite Paul’s encouragement to follow spiritual leadership, there are limits when submitting to spiritual leaders. Titus 1 warns about false teachers, people who professed to know God but were disobedient and worthless for any good deed (Titus 1:10–16).

In 1 Thessalonians 5:20–21, Paul provided three guardrails, so to speak, that can guide how we should rightly submit to spiritual authorities within scriptural limits.

First: **Verse 21. test everything.** The word for *examine* can also mean “to prove” and brings to mind the imagery of giving carefully focused inspection just as a jury in a courtroom would examine evidence in a trial. So, too, are believers to carefully inspect every idea or doctrine or teaching in light of the inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16).

Second: **Verse 21. hold fast . . . good.** After carefully considering a teaching, believers are commanded to cling to what is good. *Good* means those things of the highest reliability or moral excellence.

Third: **Verse 22. abstain.** This means to hold oneself away from—picture a friend holding another friend back from a fight. Each believer should be held back from every form of evil.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

At Home: Nail It Down

Four major passages discuss the qualifications and responsibilities of church leaders (Titus 1:5–9; Acts 20:28–35; 1 Timothy 3:1–7; and 1 Peter 5:1–4). God has given spiritual leaders the task of managing and overseeing the church, guarding and protecting believers, and guiding the church toward spiritual maturity.

Considering some of the specific qualities you looked at with your group, you saw that the Bible wants us to take into account the personal character of leaders we may follow. Moral qualifications for those leaders relate to their family life, their attitude and temperament, and their treatment of people in general (Titus 1:5–8). These qualities are important because the Bible encourages us to observe the life of our leaders and imitate them (1 Corinthians 11:1; Hebrews 13:7).

In addition, what a spiritual leader teaches is *very* important. Leaders are commanded not only to know God's teachings and how to correctly study the Bible (Titus 1:9; 2 Timothy 2:15), but they are also to teach according to sound doctrine and refute wrong teachings. Since followers are commanded to submit to spiritual leaders by willingly placing themselves under their authority, it is important that these leaders are trustworthy (1 Corinthians 16:16). We need to be careful whom we follow!

However, as we do follow godly spiritual leaders, there are ways we can encourage them.

- Believers should respect and appreciate those who serve them in leadership (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13).
- We should encourage and pray for leaders and seek after their good (1 Thessalonians 5:14–17).
- No human being will ever be perfect this side of heaven, so we should be patient with everyone (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

Follow up Question

What are some basic qualifications of spiritual leaders, and how should you relate to spiritual leaders within scriptural boundaries?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.