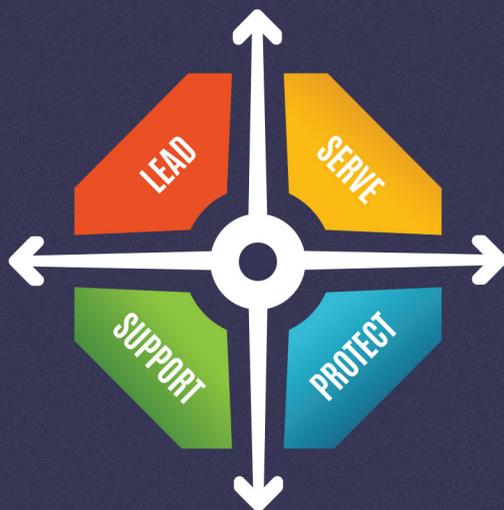


A DEACON ON PURPOSE

FOUR BIBLICAL ESSENTIALS

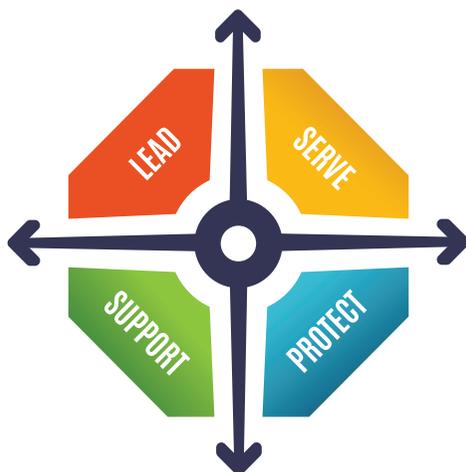


DR. TONY WOLFE

FOREWORD BY DR. JIMMY DRAPER

A DEACON ON PURPOSE

FOUR BIBLICAL ESSENTIALS



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*Unless otherwise noted all Scripture quotations are taken
from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).*

FIVE WAYS TO USE THIS RESOURCE:

1. Have deacons read one chapter (“session”) every month. Set aside the first fifteen minutes of the monthly deacons’ meeting, for six months, to discuss what they have read. Ask, “What stuck out to you in this session?” then employ the Questions for Discussion at the end of every session as a guide.
2. Hold a deacon’s retreat or a deacon’s conference in which you take 3-4 hours to work through the six sessions. Perhaps this is packed into one evening, or perhaps it is stretched out over two days.
3. Use the book as an introductory preparation resource for incoming deacons.
4. Repeat the training with the whole deacon body every 2-3 years as a refresher course and to discuss new issues and opportunities that may have arisen, surrounding the four biblical purposes of a deacon.
5. Consider visiting www.sbtexas.com (or email twolfe@sbtexas.com) for six free 7-10 minute videos corresponding to the six sessions. Use these as discussion starters or as introductions to each session.

If you are holding this book, I have prayed for you. I have prayed that God would multiply His grace to you as you work through these pages, and as you serve the church so faithfully. Thank you for your partnership in the Gospel. Thank you for loving and serving The Bride.

Sincerely Yours in Christ Jesus,
Tony

FOREWORD

BY DR. JIMMY DRAPER

Everyone knows who a deacon is. Most people, including the deacon himself, may not know what he is! To define what it means to be a deacon requires looking no further than the Greek word that is translated “deacon” in the New Testament. The word itself tells us what a deacon is. He is a “servant”, one willing to do whatever is necessary to advance the cause of Christ, the witness and unity of the church. The word itself does not speak of personal authority or personal recognition. It describes a person whose life is totally committed to the Lord Jesus Christ and His church. He is a person who stands tall to set the example for what a genuine believer should be. He is loyal to the Lord, to the church and to his pastor and staff. He is the indispensable ingredient in keeping a church moving forward toward the high purpose for which our Lord established the church. He is the man who always stands with the pastor, determined to protect the pastor’s time so he can truly hear from God and always have a word from God when he stands to preach. He is the guardian of the unity of the church. He is the spearhead of the mission of the church. Without his loyalty and sterling integrity standing prominently for God to always be glorified and praised through the church, the church will likely flounder in its focus on our great, creative, redemptive God.

Sounds like he is indispensable to the church and to the pastor & staff, doesn't it? Truthfully he is! The deacons arose out of the need to protect the time of the Apostles from needed and important things that had become an increasing burden to the Apostles. The enemy of the best is not the worst, but the good. Good and needed things can absorb the energies and passion of God's undershepherds. That happened to the early church. The deacons were called into being in the early church for the purpose of freeing up the Apostles to spend more time in prayer and in hearing from God so they could proclaim God's truth to the church. The same need is present today. A thousand important things can overwhelm the pastor so that he does not have the energy or time to truly hear from God. The deacon was God's provision to be a friend, counselor, support and encourager to the pastor. In that role, he stands to serve in any needed way to strengthen the ability of the pastor to spend more time in prayer and study to always declare God's Word with clarity and application.

I thank God as I look back over my decades of ministry for the deacons God brought into my life. They fulfilled in every way the description Tony Wolfe has given of deacons on purpose. These pages are not rocket science, just simple explanations of the biblical role of the deacon as the one who frees up the pastor to fulfill his ministry that God has given to him. Read them with great benefit. Apply these principles with great blessing!

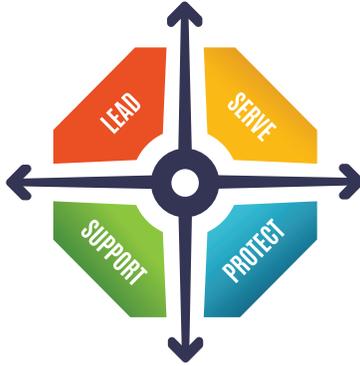


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SESSION 1

INTRODUCTION

Your whole life God has been molding you and shaping you. He has for His grand design the image of His Son Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Admittedly, we are all so far from that finished product. But we're progressing toward it. You were lost and dead in sin but God redeemed you through repentance and faith in Jesus. He deposited His Holy Spirit within you, and set your feet on the path of wisdom—a road that will one day end in your own glory, when you step out of this sin-scarred world and into your eternal home in Heaven. But He's still molding you and shaping you now. Like a Potter, modeling His clay. He is making you into the man He has called and newly-created you to be.

And look at you now. Would you have thought—ten years ago, twenty years ago—that God would have called you to be a deacon in His church? A servant-leader in His vehicle for worldwide Gospel

propagation? “Unworthy” is the only word that comes to my mind when I think about God’s call on my life, to an official position of service in His church. But praise God, He has made me worthy through His son Jesus. And it is now my goal to “serve well” for God’s glory and for the strengthening of my own faith (1 Timothy 3:13).

Your local church family has seen within you the qualities they desire in a deacon. They have called you to serve them. To love them. To lead them. They have ordained you to this purpose. It is a high calling: one that thrusts you underneath the weight of other congregants’ first-world problems, lifting them up and encouraging them in their walk of faith. God has called. The church has approved. You have answered.

So you’re a deacon. Now what?

That thought has passed through my mind every time I’ve taken part in a deacon ordination service. Most churches have outlined specific, biblical qualifications for prospective deacons. Most have a well-defined process for their selection. Most have general guidelines and expectations for deacon service after they are installed. But when it comes to actually serving as a deacon, many churches do not have an intentional plan to train incoming deacons, or to refresh deacons in their purpose as the years pass. This study is designed with that need in mind.

Perhaps you will use this as a training tool for incoming deacons. Or perhaps you will use it as a refresher course for deacons who have served for decades. In either scenario *A Deacon on Purpose* will call the deacon body back to a biblical framework for service in the church.

There are many excellent structural approaches to organizing the functions of the deacon body. Different structures and strategies may fit various churches well, according to the specific needs of the church or the specific giftedness of the deacons. Your church may employ a deacon-family ministry model, a ministry-team leadership model, a shepherding-group model, or any number of other strategies as a structural approach to getting the necessary work done.

This study is not about structures and strategies. Rather, the goal herein is overall purpose. There are four biblical purposes to deacon

ministry in the church. Whatever strategy or structure your deacon body utilizes, it must in some way address these four biblical purposes. Each of the four purposes is explained, illustrated, and practically applied in the subsequent chapters. At the end of each chapter, you will find questions for group reflection and discussion.

I encourage you to use *A Deacon on Purpose* as a guide to equip your deacons toward their four biblical purposes in the church. Repeat this training systematically—when new deacons begin their service to your church, and every few years as a way of drawing existing deacons back to their purpose.

Be intentional about this. The church functions well when it is led well and served well. It is my prayer that this will be a tool in your church's hands toward servant-hearted leadership within your deacon body and that the Gospel of Jesus Christ will be advanced because of it.

Our case study for the four biblical purposes of deacon ministry is Acts 6:1-7. Although these seven men may not have been called “deacons” *per se*, I believe the passage demonstrates the beginning of the deacon ministry in the local New Testament Church. You will read and reflect on it often as you work through *A Deacon On Purpose*. But let's start with the end. Verse seven reveals what happened at the church as a direct result of these seven men serving well:

“So the word of God spread, the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly in number, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith.” (Acts 6:7)

That's the whole point. When deacons serve the church well—on purpose—the gospel is advanced, the Great Commission is fulfilled, and people grow deeper into their faith in Jesus. The significance of a biblical deacon ministry cannot be overstated. You are called with a high calling. Serve well and you will advance the cause of Christ; serve halfheartedly and you will hinder it. Your time is too short and your mission too important to be a deacon on accident. So be a deacon on purpose.



Questions for Group Reflection/Discussion

1. Reflect on (share) your story. How did you come to faith in Christ? How did you know He was calling you to be a deacon? What is God doing in your life today, as He continues to shape and mold you into the image of His Son?

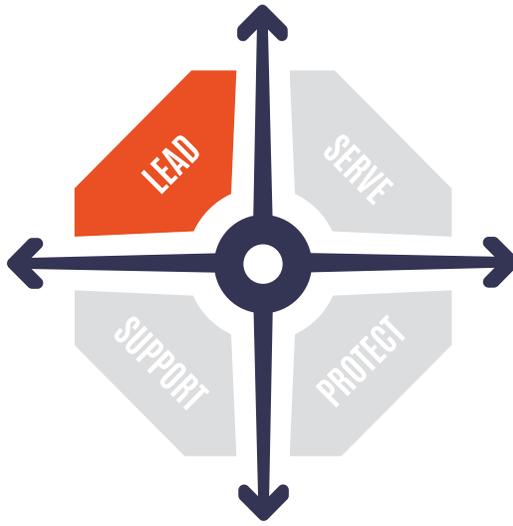
2. Read 1 Timothy 3:8-13. What are some of the qualifications listed, and why are these important to the role of a deacon in the church?

3. Take some time to work through your church's structure for accomplishing the functions of the deacon body. If there is no existing structure or strategy, begin to discuss how you might implement one.

ACTS 6:1-7

“In those days, as the disciples were increasing in number, there arose a complaint by the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. The Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, ‘It would not be right for us to give up preaching the word of God to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’

This proposal pleased the whole company. So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a convert from Antioch. They had them stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread, the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly in number, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith.”



SESSION 2

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

In our case study passage (Acts 6:1-7), the verb used in verse 2 to describe the expected duty of the men selected is the word *diakoneo*. It is the same word from which we have derived our English word “deacon”. The word for “deacon” literally means, in both form and function, *servant*; the office of Deacon in the New Testament Church has always been one of service (see Chapter 2). However, service in the church has never been restricted to those who hold the title of deacon.

The Bible instructs all members of the Body of Christ to serve one another. Consider Peter’s instructions in 1 Peter 4:10: “Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God,” (see also 2 Cor. 8:19, 2 Ti. 1:18, Phm. 1:13, Heb. 6:10). It is the calling of every New Testament believer to serve others in the church body with the giftedness God has afforded him/her.

But the deacon has been called beyond this general instruction to an official position of service within the church. All are called to do the action of serving. But the deacon is called to a biblical office so that he might lead by example in this Christian service. He is expected to be a servant-leader, as a good steward of the “varied grace of God.”

When the members of your church look at you, deacon, they should see the model servant. They should see someone leading not by extortion, but by example. Thus, the first biblical purpose of the deacon is to be an exemplary leader.

My memory of him is so vivid. To this day, thirty years later, I could describe to you the curvatures of his face, the wrinkles on the backs of his hands, and the way his eyes lit up when he talked about the church. His name was “Bro. Kendall.” A deacon in my Dad’s church. I cannot remember many times I was at church when he was not. He was always present. Always working. Always supportive. Always encouraging.

He took a rotation on the bus route. And when it was not his turn to drive, he always had boxes of donuts waiting for us kids when they arrived. He mowed grass, painted walls, fixed coffee, and taught Sunday School. He helped with RA’s and came every day of Summer Vacation Bible School. I remember shaking his warm, firm hands and receiving that infectious smile of his approval—not approval of what I had done, just approval of who I was.

Bro. Kendall prayed the most eloquent prayers. His feet glided across the floor when he served the Lord’s Supper, almost as if they did not touch the floor at all. He was a man of integrity. And character. And grace.

One day during my Dad’s sermon, Bro. Kendall drew his last breath and quietly slipped away into Heaven with Jesus. I admit, I was a bit freaked out about it when I was a kid. But knowing what I know now about his love for God and for his church, there is no more fitting way for him to have died. I wanted to be like him. Thirty years later, I still do.

By nature of the office, deacons have both positional and relational

influence in the church. Of course, positional influence is the least effective of the two, but it is still inherent to the office, to a degree. However, relational influence is a great motivator toward positive congregational movement. And because you are a deacon, you have the ability to build relationships with the people in your church (at a minimum, the ones under your direct care or ministry assignment), and to influence them by your personal example.

Want to know a secret? You are *always* influencing people. Especially as someone with a “title” in the church, you don’t get away from exerting influence. By your action or inaction, your speech or silence, your involvement or absence, you are *always* influencing the people in your church. The question is not “Will I influence?” Only, “Who?” and “How?” As a deacon, here are four areas of church life in which you must lead by personal example.

Attendance

People need to be present at church activities in order to be a part of the body-life of the church. Perhaps that’s what frustrated the writer of Hebrews as he explained the importance of corporate worship, encouragement, and accountability (Hebrews 10:24-25). When believers are disconnected from the church body, they fall away easily. And it is often difficult to jump back into a moving stream from which you have been removed for a while.

Your church has a regular schedule of activities for a reason. Obviously, it is impossible for every single person to make every single worship service or church gathering. But absence should be the exception, not the rule. When someone is regularly present, his or her absence is felt. When regularly absent, his or her presence is awkward.

Announcements, vision-oriented statements, carefully crafted sermon series, and other church-specific thoughts are communicated weekly in scheduled gatherings. When a church member is often *physically* absent from the body life, he is at

WHEN A CHURCH MEMBER IS OFTEN PHYSICALLY ABSENT FROM THE BODY LIFE, HE IS AT RISK OF BEING SPIRITUALLY AND RELATIONALLY ABSENT FROM THE BODY LIFE AS WELL.

risk of being *spiritually* and *relationally* absent from the body life as well.

But you know that. You are spiritually mature—or at least, maturing. You know all too well that there are members of your congregation who constantly walk the line of being committed and being unengaged. It is most likely part of your weekly or monthly assignment to reach out and connect with these wandering sheep trying to gently bring them back into the fold. You know that God has big plans for them in His church. That He has gifted them uniquely through the work of the Holy Spirit, and that your church stands in desperate need of them to use that giftedness for its edification and for His glory. You know these things.

So what are you communicating to your church members by *your* attendance habits? How does your regular presence, or regular absence, influence the line-walkers in your church body? Every week there are a million things vying for their time and devotion: children's sports leagues, major professional ballgames, dirty houses, hunting season, warm beds after long sleepless nights, beautiful sunshine, pouring rain. Every week, the people you lead battle the temptation to be somewhere else, rather than in church.

Do they see in you a model of faithful attendance? You contend with all the same potential distractions they do. But are you committed to the body-life, like they should be committed to the body-life? Just your regular attendance, or regular absence, leads people by way of positional and relational influence. I promise you this: if there are deacons in your deacon body who do not commit to the body-life of the church, you will begin to observe a spiraling, unmanageable sense of detachment among the people in your pews.

Honestly, your commitment to regularly scheduled church activities is just a beginning. This is a minimum. It's the lowest level of commitment you can possibly have, as a leader in your church. Let's dive into some deeper waters of leadership by example.

Ministry Involvement

Do you serve on any ministry teams? Are you active in the mission projects of your church? Do people in your church regularly see you serving as a faithful volunteer? If you don't, they won't. Leading the church from the deacon chair is a matter of modeling good church

membership. The things your pastor and staff want your church members to be doing... you should be consistently modeling.

It takes every member for the church to be effective in its mission. Consider Paul's words to the church in Ephesus: "From him [(Christ)] the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part," (Ephesians 4:16). When the parts of the body (members of the church) do not serve the mission of the church using the giftedness God has afforded them, the church body is not being built up. It becomes stagnant at best, and dying at worst. But why would church members give their precious time and energy to invest in something when church leaders do not?

You do not need to be involved in every ministry area. But you do need to find a lane and run in it. You can encourage church members to get plugged in and to serve Christ's mission until you are blue in the face. But if you don't, they won't.

Tithing & Giving

As a deacon, you are to model good stewardship of the resources God has afforded you. Your pastor appreciates your time and service, but let's get real... it costs money to run electricity, fund ministry areas, plan activities, pay salaries, promote visions, and operate with excellence. Too many deacons are simply bought-in to God's kingdom work in and through their local church. What we need is not for you to be bought in, but sold-out.

Your pastor may or may not see the tithe as a biblical instruction. But I bet he has some kind of a vision for how he expects church members to steward their financial resources sacrificially and cheerfully. But why would church members give sacrificially and cheerfully to God's kingdom work in and through their local church if their leaders do not?

I am not advocating any kind of public disclosure of your giving. Your giving is between you and God alone. There should be no bragging, publication, or announcement of the deacon's giving habits. However, when tested against your pastor's expectations for church members, you, deacon, should have been exceeding the mark.

Giving to God's kingdom work through your local church is a great blessing. The ability to give is, itself, God's gift to you. He is the One who

“provides seed for the sower and bread for food,” and it is He who “will also provide and multiply your seed and increase the harvest of your righteousness” (2 Corinthians 9:10). It is amazing how generous giving to your local church produces a singular devotion to God’s kingdom work. It is also amazing how, no matter where you keep it, your pocketbook is always in such close proximity to your heart.

**GENEROUS GIVING TO
YOUR LOCAL CHURCH
PRODUCES A SINGULAR
DEVOTION TO GOD’S
KINGDOM WORK.**

Deacon, give freely. Give lavishly. Give cheerfully. And in so-doing, lead by example.

Attitude (On and Off the Court)

Recently I watched an interview with a college basketball coach who was answering a question about the kinds of kids he recruited to be on his team. He explained that there are many talented kids in the game these days and deciding who to recruit is always difficult. For that reason, one of the very first things this coach evaluates is not the player’s skill, but his attitude. He watches how the player acts toward officials, teammates, and the opposing team. But get this: the recruiting coach is not just watching the player while he is in gameplay—he’s watching him while he’s on the bench as well!

If the player has a bad attitude either on or off the court, this college coach says, “I don’t want him.” The player needs to be respectful and coachable while in the game. He also needs to be respectful and supportive of his team while on the bench. If he can’t run the court with a good attitude, and if he can’t sit the bench with a good attitude, the player will be a disease on the team, not an asset. He may be incredibly talented. He may have a natural giftedness in the game. But players’ attitudes are contagious. And this coach doesn’t want a negative attitude affecting the other players on his team.

Deacons need to have a positive, encouraging attitude both on and off the court. You may be amazed at how your attitude can be contagious. Keep a level head. Refuse to show negativity about your church’s direction or its leadership, whether publically or privately. The Apostle Paul instructed us toward this kind of Christian mindset: “Finally

brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things,” (Philippians 4:8).

One of the most difficult things to get through, as a church, is a negative image within the body or in the community. Every negative word feeds a negative image. So focus on, speak about, and encourage others in what is praiseworthy. I bet if you really look at how God is working in your church, there is so much for which to be thankful and grateful. Promote those things. Talk about them. And watch how your positive attitude, on and off the court, will begin to change both your heart and the hearts of the church members you lead by example.

Conclusion

When my children were young, I would often look behind me and see them tracing my steps. Awkwardly, sometimes, trying to mimic my stride or wear my facial expressions. It was so cute. Now that they are teenagers, I realize that they are still watching me. Always. There is not a moment that goes by during which I am not influencing them—whether by action, word, or attitude. I pray daily that if they walk my walk, it will lead them to know God more fully and love Him more deeply.

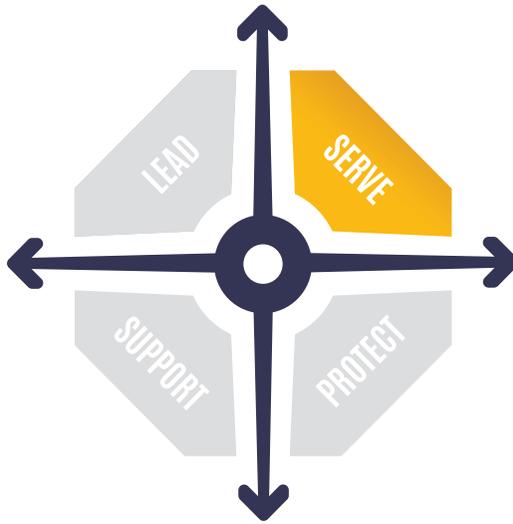
Deacon, you lead by example. People are watching you. Always. You are always influencing the people of your congregation, whether you want to be or not. And your leadership will set the pace for their spiritual walk.

What kind of pace are you modeling for them? Where will your stride lead them? If you ever wonder whether you are influencing positively or negatively through your leadership in the church, just look to the faces and voices of those who surround you. Their actions, words, and attitudes will tell the story of your leadership example. Good, bad, or ugly, over time you will most likely see yourself in them.



Questions for Group Reflection/Discussion

1. Are the people in your church body good at serving one another? If not, do you think that may be a reflection how the deacon body leads by example in this area of church life?
2. In your own words, how is relational influence more powerful than positional influence?
3. Can you think of a deacon who influenced you positively at some point in the past?
4. Think through the four areas of leading by example mentioned in this chapter. How have you personally seen these played out in your own ministry—whether positively or negatively?
5. Be honest. Which of the four areas of leading by example do you need to work on the most right now?



SESSION 3

SERVE THE PEOPLE

At the beginning of Session 2, we explored the action verb *diakoneo*, in Acts 6:2. In that context, the Apostles literally tell the people that they need to focus on the work of preaching and leading instead of having to “wait on tables.” A widow’s ministry had been started in the church. They provided daily staples for both the Hebrew widows and the Greek widows in the fellowship. But as the church grew in numbers, the task became too cumbersome and too time-consuming for the Apostles themselves to manage well. So the makings of a New Testament deacon body were born in the context of, quite literally, table-waiting.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of this truth. The deacon ministry was born out of the need for service. These seven men were not chosen as a deacon board, making decisions for other people to follow. They were chosen to be men who were strong in the faith and were willing to roll up their sleeves, put their feet to the floor, and serve the

people of the church body. The second purpose of the New Testament deacon is good old fashioned, table-waiting service. You cannot be a deacon on purpose if you cannot or will not selflessly serve the people.

There are a number of practical ways that you, as a deacon, can serve the membership. Some of them can be systematized. Others must be spontaneous. But however they are accomplished, these things are non-negotiables for the *Deacon on Purpose*. Here are five areas of service that are essential to your supportive role as a deacon.

**YOU CANNOT BE
A DEACON ON
PURPOSE IF YOU
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NOT SELFLESSLY
SERVE THE
PEOPLE.**

Visitation

There is no way that your pastor and staff can make an appearance at every hospital, nursing home, home-bound need, milestone celebration, wedding, funeral, sports game, and widow's home and still be able to lead the church well. You, deacon, are an extension of his ministry. Your deacon body is the long arm of the pastor's sympathy, celebration, encouragement, and love to the members of your church.

Often, deacons have scheduled visitation practices that are part of a systematic plan to ensure each member of the church is visited in his or her time of need. But most of the time, visitation needs pop up unexpectedly. Be an extension of your pastor's ministry by showing up at a hospital visit, or cheering on your church's youth or children (by name) at a sporting event. If you get a chance, brag on your pastor while you're there. Give them his greeting, and assure them of his love.

As a pastor, it was such a joy to show up at a hospital and learn that one or two of my deacons had already been by to visit. Or to get that call from one of my deacons to say, "So-and-so has had a rough week in the nursing home. There's no reason for you to go; I saw her yesterday and plan to go back tomorrow. I just wanted to keep you informed."

Offer to get first-time guests' information and make a home visit. Call your pastor and say, "I'm headed to town; is there anyone I can stop by the hospital and visit for you?" This service to your church membership is also a service to your pastor. Be an extension of his ministry. Serve people by visiting them.

Monthly “Touches”

Where I have served as a pastor, our deacons have been given printed lists of families from our membership with whom they are responsible for staying connected. As the church grows, it becomes more and more difficult for your church staff to keep up with everyone. If the only time someone is engaged is when they walk through the church doors, meaningful relationships are impossible to build.

One Sunday morning I noticed a church member present who I had not seen at church in a very long time. I approached her after the service and said, “Mrs. Smith, I am so glad to see you today. I’ve been missing you.” Her reply brought a smile to my face for reasons she probably will never know: “Thank you, Pastor. Bro. Jones has been keeping up with me... calls me about once a week. He came and picked me up this morning. It’s so good to be able to be back with my church family.”

I was pleasantly surprised to know that one of my deacons had been keeping up with this woman for months. I was disconnected from her personally. But because this deacon was intentional about his weekly “touches,” she was not disconnected from her church family.

By “touches” I mean texts, phone calls, home visits, hand-written cards, etc. However you organize it, every single member of your congregation needs to be “touched,” at a minimum, once every month. Often, church members need more frequent touches, depending on season of life or particular difficulties unique to the individual or family.

Believe it or not, the biblical word “fellowship” is not Greek for “pot-luck” or “dinner on the grounds.” It’s so much more than that. Biblical fellowship is about a shared love, a shared purpose, and a shared life—a special sense of connected commonality among a group of born again believers.

At the end of Acts Chapter 2, when the church was experiencing conversion-growth every day, one thing that was characteristic of their body-life was that there was a special sense of connection. They were “devoted ... to the fellowship,” “all the believers were together,” and they “broke bread from house

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to house” (Acts 2:42-47). Our culture pulls us apart, but the culture of Christ’s kingdom draws us together. The church must find a way to stay connected in a culture that is constantly dividing us. The leadership must be intentional about this.

How is the church leadership to stay in touch, monthly, with hundreds—or thousands—of people? The answer: through the ministry of the deacon body. I encourage you, deacon, to come up with some kind of system through which you can be assured that every member of your church is receiving monthly (at a minimum) touches from someone in leadership at the church. Deacon, this is not difficult to do when the load is spread among many. If your church does not have a system in place, ask your pastor if he will allow you to create and manage such a system among the deacon body. If you start connecting with people in your church body monthly, you will be surprised at their level of commitment. And you will be blessed by the intentional interaction with people who walk the church’s journey alongside you.

Widows/Orphans

Orphan care is rising in popularity among the younger generations of Christ followers. And it’s about time. Have you considered, as a deacon body, sponsoring adoptions for couples in your church? Organizing maintenance or grounds-improvement work trips to Christian foster homes? Volunteering at pregnancy-support centers? Leading your church to regularly pray for CPS workers and agencies, and other agencies in the same field of work? In our society, there are many ways for your church to be active in orphan care. You just have to be intentional toward it.

What about the widows and widowers in your church? Does your deacon body have a systematic plan in place for serving them and loving on them? They need your attention. They need your time. Consider organizing a Valentine’s Banquet for your church’s widows. Or take one or two out to eat with you every few Sundays, after church. Do they have special needs with which you can assist them? Transportation to doctors’ appointments? Wheelchair ramps that need to be built at their homes? How about something as simple as washing her car one day, or taking him for a ride in the country, like he used to enjoy in the old days.

In the Early Church, the need for deacons first arose when the church’s

daily service to widows was falling apart (Acts 6:1-7). James wrote that “Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27). Service to widows and orphans in and through your local church body is on the top of God’s list when it comes to living out your faith. Love them. Reach out to them. Serve them.

Benevolence

Along with that new demand for deacon service in Acts Ch.6 arises the interminable reality of benevolence needs in the church. No matter where your church is located and no matter what size congregation you serve, there will always be needs for benevolence. God’s heart is warmed toward the poor and needy:

“If there is a poor person among you, one of your brothers within any of your city gates in the land of the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother.” (Deuteronomy 15:7).

“If anyone has this world’s good and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God’s love reside in him?” (1 John 3:17).

In every season of your church’s body-life, there will always be brothers and sisters among you who have needs. There must be an established network or strategy for meeting these needs. If your church does not have a benevolence team or a benevolence ministry, the deacons are it. If your church does have such a team or ministry, the deacons need to work closely together with them to serve the membership in this area.

When working through a strategy for serving your membership through meeting benevolence needs, here are some questions that may help guide your process:

- ▶ *Is there a method in place for members of your church to*

make benevolence requests in confidence? If so, is this well communicated so that your church members know where to go should a need arise? Perhaps there is a form to fill out online, a request card they can put in a drop box, or a specific point-person (a deacon, maybe) to whom they can speak directly.

▶ *How does your church receive funds for benevolence needs? Is there a line-item in the budget? Is there a designated fund that needs to be monitored? Are the deacons themselves expected to pitch in to help at times? There must be some identifiable resource well from which to draw when requests are made.*

▶ *How will funds be dispersed? Will the requests of non-church members be considered? Are cash-gifts appropriate in some cases, but not in others? Are there gas or grocery store gift cards on hand at the church office? Who is permitted to give the benevolent gift to the recipient?*

▶ *How frequently will someone be helped? Is there a percentage cap or a monetary cap on how much the church is able to help in any given instance?*

Are these policies and procedures clearly set forth somewhere in a church document, so that there are no instances of confusion or accidental mishandling? The deacon body should take the lead in organizing and overseeing benevolent ministries.

Occasional Whole-Congregation Service

Be creative in your service. During your next deacons' meeting, schedule a time slot (10-15 minutes) to discuss creative ways you can serve your church body as a whole group. Make it contextual. What areas of your church's body-life provide unique opportunities for you to show them that you love them and that you support the mission of the church, or of the specific ministry area?

The last thing you want to hear from a disgruntled church member is, "What do our deacons do, anyway?" That question should be far from

the mind of anyone who is connected to the body-life of your church. If all people ever see you doing is gathering in secret corners to make secret plans, or meeting behind closed doors to come up with rules for other people to follow, you're not doing it right. They need to see you serving them.

Deacons are servant-leaders. They may not always be out front in their leadership, but they are always working diligently behind the scenes. It's not a glamorous job. It's not a position of great authority. By becoming a deacon, you have not been placed *over* anyone. Rather, you have been placed *under* the whole church body—lifting them up spiritually, physically, and relationally. The more your church members see you serving them, especially as a group, the more they will catch on to the spirit of servant-hood your deacon body personifies.

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RELATIONALLY.

Conclusion

The church is the Body of Christ. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, it is now the physical representation of Christ on the earth, until the day Jesus comes again. The Church has one prerogative: to carry out Christ's mission in the world. We are to love people with the heart of Jesus, go to people with the feet of Jesus, serve people with the hands of Jesus, and speak to people with the voice of Jesus. As servant-leaders, the deacon body in the local church must provide church members with a tangible picture of how this looks.

If your deacon body gives devoted attention to these five areas of service (Visitation, Monthly "Touches", Widows/Orphans, Benevolence, Whole-Congregation Service), you will model Christlike servitude to your congregation. Be intentional about this. Set systems in place where needed. Hold each other accountable.

When it comes to Jesus's church, you will only lead people to the degree that you sincerely love them like Christ loves them. And sincere, Christlike love is always forged in the fires of selfless service.



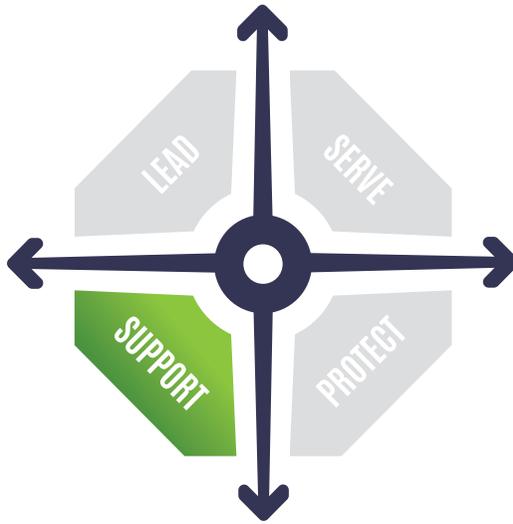
Questions for Group Reflection/Discussion

1. What are some ways that your deacon body is currently doing an excellent job serving your church family? Take a few minutes to celebrate those things.

2. Think through each of the five areas of service in this chapter. Which areas need some improvement in your deacon body? Take a moment to stop and pray for God to open doors of service to you in this area.

3. Be sure to plan a session when you can talk together as a deacon body about creative ways to serve your church membership. If you have the time, discuss this together right now.

4. Are there people in your church body who you know are not connected (give specific names, reasons, etc.)? Discuss some ways your deacon body can be intentional in reaching out to them now. How can you ensure that this disconnection does not happen again in the future?



SESSION 4

SUPPORT THE PASTOR & STAFF

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to see that the seven men of Acts 6:5 were chosen with the understanding that they would be supportive to the Apostles' ministerial role. Through servant-minded leadership, these men would support the pastor-figures of their church body. This is especially evidenced in the phrasing of verse 4: "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Let's just call it like it is; the Apostles were growing weary of the work of the ministry. It was difficult, time consuming, emotionally draining work. They were unable to keep the main thing the main thing, because the supportive things were exhausting them. They needed some men to come along-side them in a supportive role. And that's the role to which the seven were called. The third biblical purpose of the deacon is to

support the ministry of the pastor and staff in the local church.

I grew up in a pastor's home. My Dad was devoted to the church and to the communities where he served. Everything I learned about loving people Jesus's way, I learned by watching my Dad. But I can say with confidence that some of the greatest expressions of love I felt outside my own family came from the heart of deacons who served along-side him. They took me to their homes after church and spent time with me. They came to my ballgames and gave me high-fives in the school hallways. They stopped by the house and brought us snacks and toys. As a pastor myself, now, I know how much that meant to my Dad. When the deacon goes out of his way to love on the pastor's family, he displays an immeasurable amount of love for the pastor himself.

When the deacons support the pastor and staff, it is obvious. When they do not support the pastor and staff, it is also obvious. If you want your church to move forward with Christ's mission, storming the gates of Hell and heralding the light of the Gospel, then do this: support your pastor and staff. You don't have to agree with everything they do. You don't even have to like it. But God has called them to lead and you to serve. If you cannot support the mission, vision, and direction of your church staff, you need to quietly step down as a deacon.

Here are a few areas of suggestion. These are not meant to be comprehensive, but they are a good place to start. These suggestions are born not only from Scripture, but also from my own experience as a pastor's son, church staff member, and pastor. Take these and run with them. Make it your goal to ensure that your pastor, staff, and their families know that they have your full support.

Intentional Encouragement

You may be surprised (or you may not) that your pastor and church staff take a lot of negativity from church members every single week. Every Sunday the Worship Leader hears about songs some don't like, and instruments of which some don't approve. Every Wednesday your Youth Pastor and Children's Pastor are bombarded by parents who

missed a deadline, are concerned about the lack of security in the department, or would rather their child not be around Mrs. Smith's child. Every Monday your Administrative Assistants are emailed about misprints or misspellings in the bulletin. And you probably can't imagine the times of day people call your Pastor or drop by his house just to "speak their mind."

As a pastor I had a conversation one day that left me discouraged, drained and dejected. I felt like a complete and total failure. Thankfully, an older deacon stopped by my office only a few days later. He knocked on the door, eased into one of the chairs across my desk, and simply asked, "Well, how's my pastor doing?" And for about 30 minutes, he just affirmed me and encouraged me. He will never know how timely that support was and how critical it was to my ministry.

Deacon, your pastor and church staff desperately need your encouragement. They need you to take time out of your day and intentionally connect with them, just to say that you love them and support them.

Their families hear a lot of things and see a lot of things that could possibly make them despise church for the rest of their lives. You have to counteract that. You have to reach out to the families of church staff members and just encourage them. Even when it's nothing more than, "You know we love your dad/mom, and he's/she's doing a great job."

I am sure there are things your pastor and staff members do, of which you disapprove. That's because they're human. So are you. So push those things aside and focus on the things you can support. It is not your job to criticize or belittle them. It is your job to support and encourage them.

Wise Counsel

I found him in his garden one evening, pulling peas. After a particularly difficult week, I had a decision to make that I dreaded facing alone. I knelt down beside him and poured my heart out, right there in the garden. He took me inside and we cried together for a while. He did not help me solve the problem that day, but he helped me cry. As it turned out, that's exactly what I needed. A few days later, he showed up in my office and poured into me some of the most godly, sincere

wisdom that I have ever received.

There are many times your pastor needs advice from someone who shares his ministerial context. Be the kind of deacon your pastor knows he can turn to for good, biblical advice: never in arrogance or pride, but always with a measure of humility and solemn respect. Be the kind of deacon that knows when your pastor needs you to help solve a problem, and when he just needs you to help him cry.

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HELP HIM CRY.

Pastoral Care

Your pastor and church staff try very hard to be at the bedside of people in need, write notes of sympathy, make phone calls of encouragement, and keep up with the latest details of each church member's never-ending dramatic saga. And you help them with this in your visitation efforts. They even try to keep up with you, their deacons, to love on you, encourage you, invest in you and be there for you when you need them most. This is their pastoral care to their flock. But who does the work of pastoral care for them?

Who cares for your pastor and your staff members when they are sick, distraught, or facing a timely burden or difficult decision in their lives? You do, deacon. Pastoring can be so lonely at times. You pour your whole life into other people and when you are empty and dry, no one pours back into you. That is, unless you have a great deacon body who knows how to care for their pastor.

Philip was one of the first seven deacons called by the New Testament church in Acts Chapter 6. He became an evangelist, a preacher, and a powerful tool in the hand of God on many occasions. In Acts Chapter 21, the Apostle Paul and his missionary team journeyed from Tyre, through Ptolemais and then to Caesarea. They were tired. Weary. Drained. So the deacon evangelist Philip opened his home to them. For several days, Philip cared for them. He ministered to them. What a great blessing he was to Paul as he allowed himself to be used of the Lord in a moment of much needed pastoral care.

How can you ensure that your pastor and church staff are receiving

the same pastoral care that they are giving to the church body? How can the deacon body pour into them, love on them, and shepherd them while they are investing their lives in so many? How can you, like Philip, be used of the Lord in moments of much needed pastoral care for your pastor and church staff?

Public Endorsement

The “honeymoon” principle is so true. The first six months to one year of a pastor’s tenure are generally fun and exciting. But it does not take long for people to begin compiling complaints against him—whether they keep these complaints to themselves or share them with others. The congregation soon finds out that their pastor is not perfect, as they have presumed, and that he intends to make some changes in the church that they may or may not have been ready to receive. For this reason, the deacon *must* publically endorse his pastor and his pastor’s vision for the church.

Deacon, if you have a complaint against your pastor, take it to him privately. It is *never* appropriate for a deacon to publically criticize his pastor’s leadership. If the church does not sense unity between the deacons and staff, implosion is soon to come.

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PASTOR’S LEADERSHIP.

Take every opportunity you can to brag on your pastor and staff. The more your church members hear public praise for the church leadership coming from your mouth, the more they will think positively about the vision and direction of your church. Publically endorse your pastor and church staff. Be their cheerleader. Always remember this rule: public praise, private correction. This is the only recipe for positive forward direction in the church.

Conclusion

My oldest son played the bass in our church praise band. He was only a young teenager at the time, but was extremely gifted in musical ability. One of my deacons played the electric guitar beside him. There were forty years difference between the two of them, but they were the best of friends. They texted each other and pulled jokes on each other. My son

knew that this man loved him with the love of Christ. I hope he never forgets the intentionality with which this deacon invested in him, served him, and supported him.

My youngest son was thrust from the city into the country at a very awkward stage of life. He wanted to shoot guns and be a country boy like the other kids his age, but he had a bit of a learning curve to overcome. One of my deacons took to him like a fish to water. He had my son over at his house once or twice a month and let him shoot chickens, clean them, and bring them home. My son loved this deacon, and he knew that the deacon loved him. I hope he never forgets the way this man and his wife approved of him, supported him, and loved him.

Sometimes the simplest little things you do as a deacon are what mean the most to your pastor and staff. Maybe you can show your support in other creative ways. Maybe it's a double date with your wife and the pastor and his wife. Maybe it's a simple, handwritten card in the mail. Maybe it's a stop by the office just to say, "I love you, and I'm proud of you."

However you go about this, be sure that your pastor and staff never have to assume your support. Show it to them. Tell it to them. Herald it from every public platform possible. Don't leave room for your pastor or church staff to doubt your support. Make sure they feel it.



**BE SURE THAT
YOUR PASTOR AND
STAFF NEVER HAVE
TO ASSUME YOUR
SUPPORT.**



Questions for Group Reflection/Discussion

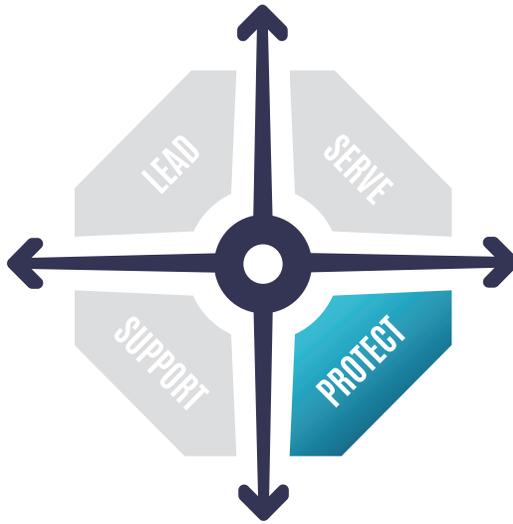
1. In what ways were the seven men in Acts Chapter 6 supporting their pastors (Apostles, at the time)?

2. What are some ways you currently show support to your pastor and staff? What are some creative ways you can begin to do this better?

3. Does your pastor or his family assume your support, or are they constantly assured of it? How can you make sure they never have to assume your support again, but instead, that they would always be assured of it?

4. How can you begin to develop the kind of relationship with your church leadership that would invite them to ask for your counsel/advice?

5. Do you have a plan in place for the pastoral care of your pastor and church staff?



SESSION 5

PROTECT THE PEACE

Most things that are precious are also delicate. Such is the case with unity and peace in the church body. As you read the New Testament epistles, it is almost daunting how much ink and space is used to address the issues of keeping the peace and building/protecting the unity of the church body. Apparently, Christians in the First Century AD were real people with real problems, too. Their everyday struggles, varying life stages, and clashing personalities gave rise to a number of potential disruptions in the body-life of the church.

In Acts Chapter 6, the reason these seven (presumably) deacons were first called to service was because “there arose a complaint” (Acts 6:1). From day one, deacons have been peace-keepers. The nature of their service to the church body demands that they be ever ready to diffuse conflicts and redirect people to the cause of Christ, the mission of the church.

The fourth and final biblical purpose of the deacon is to be a peacekeeper; to be a deacon on purpose, you must constantly labor to protect the peace.

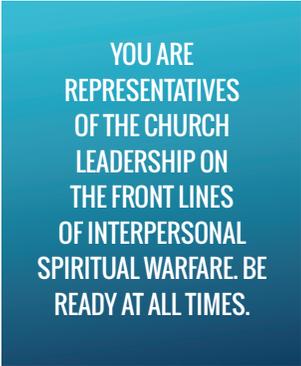
In a very overgeneralized sense, police exist to serve and protect the people. Deacons are to serve the people; this is their primary role. But they also carry with them the burden of protection: not physical protection, but spiritual protection. They are to protect the church from the undercurrents of division that can so quickly bring discord and disruption within the body. Here are five ways that you, as a deacon, can protect the peace within your church body.

Be a Diffuser

The fuse is lit. Emotions are high. Careless words are flung. Accusations are made. And there you are, right in the middle of it all. As a keeper of the peace, it is your job to diffuse this situation before it explodes. These things often happen when you least expect them. Such conversations are born in the hearts of disgruntled church members, incubated in the closed circles of secret conversations, then taken home atop the carpeted floors of church hallways or in the circled chairs of Sunday School discussion times. Your deacon body is dispersed among the church body during all regularly scheduled and special activities. You are representatives of the church leadership on the front lines of interpersonal spiritual warfare. Be ready at all times.

How can you diffuse such a situation before it explodes? Here are some suggestions:

- ▶ *Step into the conversation. Sometimes, when you overhear such a conversation, if you will simply step into it the talking will stop. You may not have to say anything. Or you may have to turn the conversation around positively.*
- ▶ *After the conversation, ask the main dissenters to talk with you privately so that you can better understand their concerns.*



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- ▶ *When the concern is an accusation against church leadership, listen for understanding. Be very careful receiving an accusation against a pastor or elder in the church (see 1 Tim. 5:19). If there is any substance to the concern, encourage the dissenter to refrain from discussing it with anyone else while you bring it to the attention of the appropriate person.*
- ▶ *Sometimes, the concern is based on false or incomplete data. Correct false information in a gentle way. Learn to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).*
- ▶ *Sometimes the stirring conflict has a simple solution. How can you suggest or make a simple change that will solve the problem immediately?*
- ▶ *If it is a personal grievance between believers, encourage them to practice the guidelines for resolution set forth in Matthew 18:15-17. If you are not sure what these steps look like, ask your pastor now, during a time of peace, about the process.*

Correct, Reprove, Admonish

“That’s just not true,” he told the middle-aged woman as he stood beside her hospital bed. “And now you need to call everyone you’ve gossiped to about this and retract the false information you’ve spread.” He was visiting her in the hospital after she experienced a mild heart problem. When a church member is on her back in a hospital bed, it is often easy for her to assume a level of sympathetic kindness from her visitor. But when her complaint to this deacon about some decisions the pastor had made was tested against the truth, it just did not measure up. “But I’ve heard from several people...” she insisted. And he responded, “Well, I know for a fact that what you’re saying is false. And I love you enough to tell you the truth: that by repeating this, you are spreading false rumors and disrupting the good fellowship of our church.”

Protecting the peace often means confronting falsehoods with an unwavering insistence. The people in your church family are real people with real problems. They are all on a journey toward Christlikeness

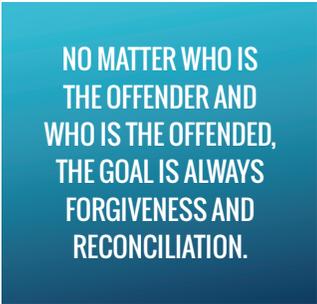
but just like you, they have a long road ahead of them. Some of the most meaningful teaching moments happen not in a classroom, but in a hallway. Not from a pulpit on a stage, but from a recliner in a living room. Not from behind a megaphone, but from behind a telephone.

The people under your deacon body's care are not to be placated in their unrighteousness. They are to be loved on while being challenged toward godliness. Paul wrote to young Timothy: "All Scripture is inspired by God, and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It is the duty of every deacon to confront the unrighteousness or untruthfulness of church members when such an opportunity arises. In doing this, you become a protector of the peace and you become an instrument toward spiritual growth in the hands of God.

Give Others the Benefit of the Doubt

It is all too easy to come to a quick conclusion. But as a deacon, you must refuse to make up your mind about an issue before you hear both sides. Proverbs 18:13 teaches the wise reader that "The one who gives an answer before he listens—this is foolishness and disgrace for him." Any time an accusation is made, deacon, you *must* listen to every side of the argument before formulating opinions or judgments. This is absolutely crucial to keeping the peace in the church body.

Keep in mind, also, that deciding who is wrong and who is right is not always a matter of your concern. Generally speaking, you are not a judge but a peacekeeper. No matter who is the offender and who is the offended, the goal is always forgiveness and reconciliation—on both "sides." That leads us nicely to the next way you can actively protect the peace as a deacon in Jesus's church.



**NO MATTER WHO IS
THE OFFENDER AND
WHO IS THE OFFENDED,
THE GOAL IS ALWAYS
FORGIVENESS AND
RECONCILIATION.**

Seek Restoration in all Conflicts

Having pastored in a very small East Texas town, I am well aware of the temptation to think that some conflicts are irreconcilable, because

they are generations deep. However, I can say from experience that this is only true when you deny the power of the Holy Spirit working through the gospel of Jesus Christ for the glory of the Father in heaven.

Restoration is *always* possible, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Deacon, do not ever write some conflicts off as irreconcilable. Pray for healing, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Cling to the promises of God's Word. And be ever ready to speak a word of encouragement or exhortation when the timing is right.

Notify the Pastor or Staff when Appropriate

Sometimes it is best not to burden your pastor or church staff if an issue/conflict is relatively small (or relatively contained), and is quickly resolved. Other times, it is vital for church leadership to have a working knowledge of the situation. The last thing you want is for your pastor to be blindsided by a boiling conflict within the church about which you had previous knowledge. Here are some principles to help guide whether or not you should share information about the conflict with your pastor:

▶ *If the conflict involves more than two or three people, always notify your pastor. By "involves," I mean that those people are either actively engaged in the conflict or are actively conversing about it. Your pastor may not be able to do anything about it immediately, but it will be good for him to be aware that the conflict is brewing.*

▶ *YOU, deacon, should do everything in your power to resolve the issue. Ask, "How can I protect the peace by serving the membership in this situation?" "Is there something I can do, right now, that will help resolve this issue?" That's your job, peacekeeper.*

▶ *If you have attempted to help the offended parties seek reconciliation but it has not been effective, or if they are resisting reconciliation, tell your pastor. Even if it is between only two people in the church, if they are not willing to work toward resolution, seek your pastor's advice and counsel in how to proceed.*

- ▶ *If it involves a moral failure or any kind of action that affects the body-life of the whole congregation, tell your pastor. Moral failures do not fizzle out quickly. Your pastor wants to know.*
- ▶ *Any action involving mishandling of church funds or church property, even if only one or two people know about it, needs to be directed to your pastor immediately.*
- ▶ *Any conflict at all that involves a church staff member or another deacon must go directly, and immediately, to your pastor.*
- ▶ *Do everything in your power NOT to bring conflicts to the attention of your pastor Sunday morning before service. He needs to focus on the worship service. Help protect his spirit and his focus by waiting for a more appropriate time.*

Remember, you are an extension of your pastor’s ministry. Sometimes that means being hands that serve. Sometimes that means being ears that listen. When the deacon body is functioning properly, keeping the peace of the congregation on the front of their minds, the pastor can become aware of rising conflicts before they cause irreparable damage within the church.

Part of protecting the peace means notifying the pastor or church staff when appropriate. If you are unsure, always err on the side of informing the pastor. Sure, too much communication can be time-consuming. But too little communication can be absolutely detrimental to the body-life of the church.

Conclusion

Peace within the Body of Christ is about more than functional necessity; it’s about identity. It’s about walking worthy of our calling in Christ Jesus. Consider Paul’s exhortation to the church in Ephesus: “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to live worthy of the calling you have

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received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace,” (Ephesians 4:1-3).

Patience... bearing with one another... making every effort. Keeping the peace within the church body is something that takes determination, consistency, and longsuffering. It is the high calling of every deacon. To be a *Deacon On Purpose*, you must be willing to put forth the effort, energy, and time required to be a protector of the peace.



Questions for Group Reflection/Discussion

1. How did the service of the seven men in Acts 6:1-7 keep the peace within their church body?
2. Are there any conflicts in your church currently that might endanger the peace and the good fellowship of its body-life? How can you best address those issues?
3. Has there been a time when you, as a deacon, have acted contrarily to this important purpose of keeping the peace within your church? Confess that now and seek forgiveness and reconciliation within your deacon body. Watch and learn first-hand, here, how the love of Jesus covers every offense and brings reconciliation among the brethren.
4. Talk together through the bullet points under the subheading “Be A Diffuser,” on pages 37-38. Can you give a personal example that illustrates one of these bullet points?



SESSION 6

CHARACTER AND PURPOSE

Our case study for *A Deacon On Purpose* has been Acts 6:1-7. There is another passage of Scripture that is often referenced when discussing the role and character of a deacon: 1 Timothy 3:8-13. It is to this passage of Scripture we turn our final attention, in hopes that we might see how the *character* of a deacon is so closely related to the *purpose* of a deacon.

“Deacons, likewise, should be worthy of respect, not hypocritical, not drinking a lot of wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And they must also be tested first; if they prove blameless, then they can serve as deacons. Wives, too, must be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything.”

Deacons must be husbands of one wife, managing their children and their own households competently. For those who have served well as deacons acquire a good standing for themselves, and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 3:8-13).

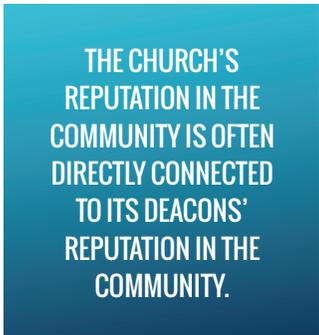
This passage is often considered as a list of qualifications for candidacy into the diaconate. Rightly so. For certainly, these character qualities in a man should have been evidenced long before his name is mentioned as a candidate for service as a deacon in the church. However, what is often missed in this passage is that these qualifications are expressions of character. To take this passage as a simple checklist is to do it a great injustice. The idea is to test the man's *character*, not to check his pedigree or his resume.

In this final session together, let us examine the various components of this passage, keeping an eye out for how the character of the deacon is so closely related to the purpose of the deacon.

His Report (v.8)

The deacon is to be a man who is “worthy of respect.” He is to have good report in the community and in the church body. No one will follow a leader they feel they cannot trust.

“Worthy of respect” is not a pedestal position. It is a description of someone whose character is above reproach. The church's reputation in the community is often directly connected to its deacons' reputation in the community. These men must be above reproach. Peter instructed Christian readers dispersed in a godless culture to testify to Christ with “gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct will be put to shame” (1 Peter 3:16). If the deacon is to lead by example, his Christlike character must be evident both inside and outside the church body.

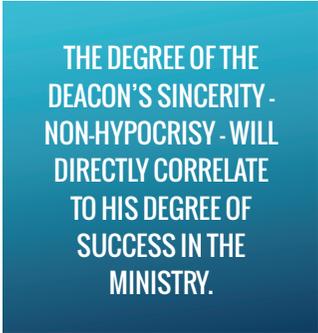


THE CHURCH'S
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TO ITS DEACONS'
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His Sincerity (v.8)

The most frequent answer I get when asking an unchurched person why he or she does not attend church is, “The church is full of hypocrites.” On some level, this statement is true. None of us live up to Christ’s standards perfectly. But when the deacon fails in Christlike character, he admits it, apologizes, and grows from it.

In all four purposes of the deacon position (lead, serve, support, and protect), sincerity is vital. If there is an obvious measure of hypocrisy in the deacon body—any kind of double standard—all four biblical purposes will be undermined. You cannot lead by example without sincerity. You cannot serve the membership without sincerity. You cannot support the pastor and church staff without sincerity. You cannot protect the peace without sincerity. The degree of the deacon’s sincerity—non-hypocrisy—will directly correlate to his degree of success in the ministry.



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His Sobriety (v.8)

Don’t drink alcohol. It really is that simple. The deacon must take the lead in “abstaining from the appearance of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22, KJV). I cannot think of a single time when drinking or being drunk would have contributed to my Great Commission work. And the essence of sincerity insists that your private life is no different from your public life; as a non-hypocritical leader in Christ’s church, it is never okay to indulge yourself in private in a way that you would not indulge yourself in public.

Instead of arguing over the degrees of our liberty in Christ, how about surrendering some temporary freedoms to the eternal cause of Christ’s kingdom? You will find, as a deacon, that you will ask church members to do this frequently. You will often ask them to surrender their musical preferences, comfortable seating, calendar and scheduling traditions, and so much more for the forward advancement of your church’s mission and vision. Lead by example

here. You don't need to drink alcohol to be happy, to calm your nerves, or to be socially acceptable in any situation. Just live under the influence of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). Don't drink. Don't get drunk. It really is that simple.

His Generosity (v.8)

It's amazing how, no matter where you keep it, your pocketbook is always in such close proximity to your heart. The deacon cannot be "greedy for money," writes the apostle Paul. Greed is a nasty motivator for anything. And generosity is greed's nemesis. There is something special about generosity, when it comes to giving to God's kingdom work through the church: it creates within you a singular devotion to the Great Commission.

Generous investments in God's kingdom work yield eternal returns, but greedy withholdings from God's kingdom work burn holes in the pockets of grace. Keep this in mind when it comes to greed and generosity: unsown fields yield only weeds. Perhaps a close look at the crops you are producing, as a deacon or a deacon body, will bear witness to the kind and measure of sowing you've been doing. The deacon cannot lead by example, serve the membership, support the staff, or protect the peace when his heart is calloused from greed. He must be a generous giver.

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His Conviction (v.9)

Especially in our 21st Century Western culture, "holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience" is a non-negotiable character trait of the deacon on purpose. Christians who are infantile in their faith today will have many questions about the reliability of God's Word, the historicity of biblical timelines, and the validity of their personal spiritual experiences. You don't have to answer all of their questions, and no one expects you to be a professional Christian apologist. But you must be firm enough in your faith to hold to it when it is questioned in new ways.

His Examination (v.10)

It is wise for a deacon candidate to go through a season of testing before beginning the office. But remember, this is as much about character as it is about requirements. James reminds his reader, “the testing of your faith produces endurance,” (James 1:3). Testing for testing sake is pointless. But testing for the sake of perseverance and endurance is biblical. Imagine a deacon body full of men who have been forged through fire. Imagine a group of men charged with the leadership, service, support and protection of the church body who have steadfast endurance in the faith, no matter what kinds of trials may come their way. This is the kind of deacon body the church needs, Paul tells Timothy. Examined. Tested. Forged by fire.

His Home (vs.11-12)

The phrase “husband of one wife” tends to get most of the attention in verse 11. Whatever your church’s position on this phrase, please don’t forget this is as much (if not more) about character as it is about requirements for service. The deacon must be a one-woman kind of man. He must have eyes for only his bride; he must be wholly devoted to his one wife.

**THE DEACON MUST BE
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Similarly, he must be a faithful and wise leader in his home. There should be evidence in his children’s lives (if he has children) that he has sought to encourage them toward righteousness, lead them to Jesus, and disciple them in the home. Eventually, all of our children will make their own decisions and walk their own paths. But regardless the choices his children make later in life, the deacon’s home must have been one in which Jesus was consistently honored as Lord. The deacon’s home must be a place of love, grace, forgiveness, discipleship and hospitality. His wife and children will not be perfect, nor should they be held to that standard. However, he must have managed the affairs of his household well, if he is to lead, serve, support and protect the affairs of God’s household.

His Reward (v.13)

The reward of a deacon who has served well is two-fold: (1) “a good standing,” and (2) “great boldness in the faith.” A good standing in the church is in reference to the relational influence that is developed over time as the deacon is found to be trustworthy. After many years of serving well as a deacon on purpose, the people of the church begin to see this man as someone they can trust and respect. This good standing is not a badge of honor fastened to the sportscoat for recognition in meetings. More like a pair of kneepads, hidden beneath the pant legs for greater comfort while foot washing. A deacon always stands tallest on his knees; he is most honorable when he is most humbled.

The second part of the deacon’s reward is that he acquires a “great boldness in the faith.” Faith is emboldened as men live a lifetime of service in the church. It’s amazing how God uses the events of every passing year to mold and shape us into the men he desires us to be. After decades of being spiritually molded and shaped by God, while always leading, serving, supporting and protecting Christ’s Bride, the deacon’s faith becomes strong. He acquires “great boldness in the faith.” What a blessing! What a reward!



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Questions for Group Reflection/Discussion

1. In your own words, how does this list of qualifications double as a list of character descriptions for the deacon?

2. Think back on the four purposes of the deacon (Lead by Example, Serve the Membership, Support the Pastor/Staff, Protect the Peace). How might a character failure in one or more of the areas listed in this chapter negatively affect the deacon's ability to be a deacon on purpose?

3. What is your church's understanding of 1 Timothy 3:12? In your opinion, has there been sufficient emphasis placed on the character of the candidate and not just the checklist requirement?

4. What are some practical ways your deacon body can encourage each other regularly in these eight areas of character from 1 Timothy 3?

As you finish this final session, spend some intentional time in prayer together for your church, your pastor, and your people.



AFTERWORD

There is a lamp standing tall beside the chair in my living room. It's a beautiful lamp. From its base to the top of its shade it stands about five and a half feet tall. It matches the décor in our living room nicely. However, if you were to come to rest in that chair with a favorite book in hand, needing a bit of illumination in order that you might see clearly to read, you would be quickly disappointed. That lamp is purely decorative. It serves no functional purpose. It has no operational value. In fact, I'm not even sure there is a power outlet on the wall next to which it proudly stands.

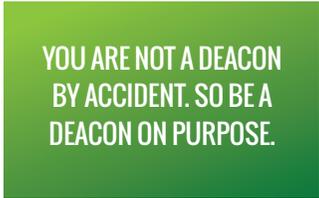
It holds the office of a lamp. It looks like a lamp. But, all things considered, it is effectively purposeless. And quite honestly, I have stubbed my toe on it one too many times in my attempts to navigate the dark corners of my home in the middle of the night. I really should just get rid of it. After all, it's more of a distraction than anything.

Or, perhaps, I can do the work of either supplying it with power where it is or moving it to another location where it can be plugged in and begin to serve its intended purpose with integrity.

Many deacons in our churches share a striking resemblance to the lamp beside the chair in my living room. By all measures they look like deacons. Some of them even wear the title of the office well. But when it comes down to it, they're just not being effective in their role. They are serving no positive functional purpose in the Body of Christ—not because Christ is deficient in some way, but because, well, they're just not plugged in.

I guess we could go on an angry rampage ridding our dusty corners of their presence. But that's not best. It certainly does not seem Christlike. Perhaps it would be better to put a little bit of investment into them, supplying them with the power of purpose where they are or maybe moving them to different roles within the deacon body if necessary. Maybe they're just not positioned where they can be plugged in. Maybe some of them don't even know how brightly they can shine—how magnificently they can illuminate the darkness around them in and through their local church body.

If you are a deacon in your local church, allow me a moment to affirm you once more. God has called you to this office. Your church has affirmed you in this office. You have surrendered to this office in humbled faith. The Bible teaches that “those who have served well as deacons acquire a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus,” (1 Timothy 3:13). You are not a deacon by accident. So be *A Deacon on Purpose*.



**YOU ARE NOT A DEACON
BY ACCIDENT. SO BE A
DEACON ON PURPOSE.**

Lead by example. Serve the membership. Support your pastor. Protect the peace. Look for creative ways to accomplish these four purposes within your church. Let the methods and the strategies fluctuate and change with the culture of your church as the generations pass.

Don't let your processes shape your purpose. Instead, always be sure your purpose is shaping your processes. Serve well. Love much. Give grace to all. Lead. Serve. Support. And Protect.

*Heavenly Father, give us the wisdom to lead by example,
the humility to serve our membership, the strength to
support our pastor, and the endurance to protect the
peace within our fellowship at all costs.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tony Wolfe is the Director of Pastor | Church Relations for the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. He is a graduate of Lamar University, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has served in full time vocational ministry since 1999 in the roles of worship/



media, Christian education, the pastorate, and denominational service. He and his wife Vanessa were married in 2001 and have two sons, Ethan and Aaron, who enjoy serving alongside them in ministry. Tony is also the author of *Mile Markers: Stages of Growth Along the Journey Toward Spiritual Maturity*, and *7 Things You Must Do to Be an Effective Small Group Leader*. He invites you to connect with him on his personal website (www.tonywolfe.net) or any of his social media platforms.



4500 State Highway 360
Grapevine, TX 76051
P.O. Box 1988
Grapevine, TX 76099
Toll Free 877.953.SBTC

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