

# Elders and Deacons: Choosing our Shepherds

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[ 0 : 00 ] We will now read from two passages in the Bible. If you have a Bible with you, and then please turn to Acts chapter 6. It's also printed in your bulletin, and you can see it on the screens.

There are, however, Bibles at the back if you would rather like a hard copy in your hands. So first, Acts chapter 6, verses 1 to 6.

Now, in these days, when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows are being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch.

[ 1 : 16 ] These they said before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And then the second passage is 1 Timothy 3, verses 1 to 10, which talks about the qualifications for elders and deacons.

The saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity, keeping his children submissive. For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Deacons, likewise, must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, and let them also be tested first.

[ 2 : 41 ] Then let them serve as deacons, if they prove themselves blameless. This is the Holy Word of God. Amen. All right, well, we are in a month where we are nominating both elders and deacons for office.

And so, in a season like this, a lot of questions come up. Who can be an elder? Who can be a deacon? What is an elder? What is a deacon? Who should we choose?

What do they do, for that matter? Why do we have church leadership in a structure like this with elders and deacons? There are more questions that might come up for you than we can answer today.

So, let's do the most foundational thing, the most fundamental things with this call for elders and deacons that we're having right now and look together at Acts 6.

So, we read from Acts 6 because this is one of the few places in the Bible where we see elders and deacons working together in a really live way. The apostles acting as some of the first elders and then the first seven proto-deacons, as we often say, called here at the beginning, right in the earliest moments of the church.

[ 3 : 51 ] And let's see the realism of the church that gives way to deacons, the reality of what the church is like, the need for deacons, in other words, the priorities of elder and deacon, and then lastly, the people themselves.

Okay, so first, the realism, the circumstances, the reality of the church that gives rise to a need for deacons. That's what we see here. So, in Acts 6, there's a couple circumstances taking place that give rise to the office of deacon for the first time ever.

First, the church was growing explosively. So, Jesus died, He rose from the dead, He commissioned His apostles, and now the church is expanding really rapidly.

And so, we learn in Acts already twice, 3,000 people came to faith in Jerusalem in a weekend, in a day. 5,000 people in the next chapter come to faith around Jerusalem.

And then, in the passage just before this, Acts 5, 14, it says that a multitude of men and women follow Jesus. And so, there's this explosive growth, and they're trying to figure out how to do church and churches in the light of all the people coming to faith in Jesus and following Jesus.

[ 5 : 05 ] The other circumstances, we see really clearly from the very beginning of the church that the apostles, the disciples, the first leaders, were really, really committed to daily distributions of food and clothing to the poor.

So, that's the context that this passage is all about. Now, to understand that, you've got to understand that in the first century, there are a lot of people experiencing abject poverty, true poverty.

So, we have the materially poor, poor people who struggle with material poverty in our city. And here in the first century, you would have had the type of poverty where truly people could often not find clothing.

So, when Jesus says, feed the poor, give a cup of water to the thirsty, and clothe the naked, he was serious. It was not, that was not just a metaphor, that was very real.

There were people who literally could not find clothing. And so, there's a lot of abject poverty here in the earliest moments of the church in Jerusalem. Just in a couple chapters previously, Barnabas, one of the early evangelists, he, we're told that when he experienced the gospel, the transforming work of the gospel in his life, he turned around and sold his land so that he could give the money to cover the clothing and food needs of the poor in Jerusalem.

[ 6 : 25 ] And so, people were doing that all the time. This was not communism. No, it was people who had been transformed by the generosity of Christ in the gospel. And so, we're willing to give away everything to meet the needs of the people all around them.

They had a real needs ministry. And they learned that through God's generosity to them, the generosity of the cross, the love of God in the gospel. So, we read in James, Jesus' brother, James, biological brother, who did not believe in Jesus when Jesus was doing his ministry, but after the resurrection came to faith in his biological brother, his Messiah, Jesus.

In the book of James, chapter 2, this is what he says about needs ministry that Georgie was talking about, what we read about here. He says, if a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warm, be filled, but you do not give them what is necessary for their body to make them warm or fill them up with food.

What use is that? Even so, even so faith, even with faith, if it has no works, it is dead. So James says, faith without the living act of service of people in need is dead faith.

Faith loves, faith works, faith exhibits itself in transformation. And so caring for one another was a really, really big deal in the early church and we learn here just from the example of Christ, the example of the apostles that faith in Jesus must be accompanied by care for one another, by loving works, by good works.

[ 8 : 07 ] And we learn that from who? From God himself in the Old Testament. One scholar talks about the quadrilateral of the vulnerable in the Old Testament, this fourfold way of understanding paradigm for who are the most vulnerable in the Old Testament ancient Near Eastern society.

And he says, they are the widow, the orphan, the sojourner, the person who's traveling without a home, and the materially poor. And we all across the Old Testament see God say, I care for the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, and the poor.

Psalms 68, Isaiah chapter 1, do good, do justice. I am a father to the fatherless. I am a home for those who have poverty, God says.

And then he turns and he says to God's people, go and do likewise. Jesus said, love as I have loved. So he gives the church really clearly this example in the early days of the church.

Now, the specific issue in Jerusalem, this specific issue we're reading about here in Acts chapter 6, is that when all these thousands of people came to faith in Jerusalem, there were largely two groups of people that came to follow Jesus in the beginning.

[ 9 : 22 ] They were Hebrew-speaking Jews, Hebrew and Aramaic-speaking Jews on the one hand, and on the other hand, Greek-speaking Jews. So that's what's referred to here in verse 1 as the Hellenist.

And so you've got Jews spread out all over the Roman Empire, and many of them have come back to Jerusalem. And so they would have spoken the lingua franca of the day, which was Greek, not Hebrew, not Aramaic.

And so what's happened is all these people, all these Jews have come to faith in Christ, but some speak Hebrew, some speak Greek. And you know that when you have different languages, you're often separated, and there's cultural difference.

And so in the daily distribution for the poor, the widows who spoke Greek said that they were getting neglected by the apostles in the daily distribution of food and clothing.

So we don't know all that was going on in there, but we learned a couple things about that. One is, and here's the realism of the church. The church, as it grew, was struggling administratively, was struggling organizationally.

[ 10 : 26 ] Now, I'm sure you've never been in a church that struggles administratively and organizationally, right? You've never been in a church that fails to communicate well. You've never been in a church that struggles to get it all in order and get all the volunteers in place, right?

Look, the realism of the church, churches struggle organizationally. And the longer you've been around the local church, the more you know that. And we see that right here.

Even the apostles, they couldn't keep it all together. They were all over the place trying to meet everybody's needs and there was just too many people and they couldn't do it. You know, the church is much more of a family than it is a corporation and so sometimes there's a lot of struggle in the midst of that.

The second real thing we see here is that we don't know for sure but it very well may have been the case that there was prejudice involved in this. So when you're speaking a different language, when you're a Hebrew speaker and there's the Greek speakers, but you're all in the same church, there's a lot of cultural difference, a lot of divide, and it's just a natural thing that probably many people were favoring those that speak their own language from their own culture and community.

And there was maybe an element of prejudice in all this and there's relational messiness from the very beginning even with the lives of the apostles here. And that means we see that churches can be organizationally messy and relationally messy.

[ 11 : 50 ] We are not perfect people and this is not a perfect place and that is the culture and the context that gave rise to the office of deacon. Quite unremarkable in many ways, so important in another sense of it.

But what we do see is that in spite of the messiness, the relational messiness, the organizational messiness, the two things we learn about here that they would not let go of is the apostle said we have an intense devotion to the ministry of the word so we will not neglect the preaching of the gospel, the opening of the Bible on the one hand and we will not neglect the caring of the daily distribution on the other.

We'll do whatever it takes to figure it out. Even God in his providence creating an office called deacon to satisfy this issue and satisfy these needs. Look, in the early church the historians will tell you Rodney Stark, Larry Hurtado, they will say these great scholars of church history, they will say that what gave rise to the rapid growth and expansion of Christianity in the Roman Empire in the first three centuries was two things.

One, people going around in the first generation saying I saw Jesus Christ die on the cross and I saw Jesus Christ alive three days later.

And then that's called the preaching of the gospel, the sharing of the gospel and the apostle said we'll never let that go. On the other hand, the historians will tell you the other thing was the churches care for the poor anywhere they were.

[ 13 : 25 ] And so many people were attracted to Christianity through that means. And it wasn't just care for the poor within the community of faith like our needs ministry does, but it was care for also outsiders, those who are yet to become Christians as well.

We learn this in Galatians chapter 6. Paul says, do not neglect to care for the needs of all, especially those in the household of faith. He says, do not neglect the care of the needs of everyone, especially those in the church community, meaning both inside and outside.

In the late fourth century, the late 300s, Christianity had really gathered momentum. A lot of people had come to faith in Christ across the Roman Empire. But there was an emperor named Julian called Julian the Apostate.

That's his nickname. And he was a big enemy of Christianity. He sort of took the charge on the last ditch effort to try to rid the kingdom of Christianity.

So there was a grand persecution across the empire in that time. But we have a letter from Julian. And Julian writes a letter to the priests of polytheism, the priests of the Greco-Roman gods across the empire.

[ 14 : 36 ] And he writes a letter about the church, about the Christian church. And listen to what he says about it. This is what he says. He writes this in an age where polytheism is in decline and he's really worried about it.

Okay, that's the context. Why do we think that what we have done is sufficient and do not observe how the kindness of the Christians to strangers, their care for the burial of the dead, the sobriety of their lifestyle has done the most to advance their cause in the kingdom?

Each of these things ought to be practiced by us. Tell the priests to stop drinking so much. I'm devising a plan. Erect hostels for strangers in all the cities.

Be kind to strangers for it is disgraceful that when no Jew ever has to beg and the Christians support not only their own poor but our poor as well, all men see that our people are lacking aid from us.

So this is Julian's attempt to try to battle the Christians. He said, look at what they're doing. Look at how they love people. Now in the midst of that point too, we learn in the midst of a context like this the priorities of the elders and deacons.

[ 15 : 50 ] And it's real simple. We've already said it. It said, they said, we will not neglect the ministry of the word, opening up the Bible, preaching and teaching the gospel, and will not neglect the ministry of love.

Right? So we see the priorities of elders and deacons. Very simple. The two offices and what they're supposed to be doing. So here, the apostles say, we will not give up our focus on preaching the gospel to serve tables.

And it's really fascinating. What does it say? It says, we will open up the Bible and do the ministry of the word like we're doing now and we pray. So the apostles, it says, devoted themselves to preaching and prayer.

But then they say, nevertheless, let's raise up seven men to fulfill this task. Now, today, we're in a time where there's a lot of resurgence in the church communities.

And this has happened over really the past century in Scotland especially for recovering the ministry of mercy. Recovering the focus that the church is in the Bible called to take care of the needs of the poor.

[ 16 : 53 ] First inside the church, then also outside the church. So we've had a century of resurgence and talking about that. And notice here that the apostles say, no, we're serious about that.

But a lot of times in our culture, in our past century, that has been at the expense of and neglect of preaching the word, right? So churches might focus on the ministry of mercy, on social causes, on justice in the broad sense of the term.

But oftentimes, there's a false dichotomy or a zero-sum game. Where that just means that the gospel is no longer preached anymore. And you see what the apostles do here? They say, we will never stop preaching the gospel.

And we will appoint seven men to make sure that the ministry of love is taking care of the ministry of mercy. So for them, it's never a zero-sum game. It's never a false dichotomy. It's always a both-and. They refuse to choose. And we see all throughout the Bible that God's people in the Old Covenant, Israel, and in the New Testament, the church, fulfilled through Jesus, they're always called to both ministries.

[ 17 : 59 ] The ministry of the word, the ministry of God's grace, telling people about Jesus, and at the same time, the ministry of loving deeds, of loving service. Now, very simple. Elders, the apostles were the first elders, right?

And first ministers of the church. The elders' job in the church is to be exemplars and lead us in the ministry of the word and prayer. The deacon's job is to lead us in the ministry of tangible deeds of

love, tangible deeds of service.

And these two go together, they fit together, they work together perfectly. You don't become a Christian by committing wonderful acts of love.

You don't become a Christian by deaconing. You don't become a Christian by serving the community or showing works of mercy. You don't. No, you become a Christian only. You become a Christian only by placing faith in the great deacon himself, Jesus Christ, who served you all the way to the point of death.

That's the only way. And faith works itself out in love. Transforming faith, the experience of the grace of God in Christ, transforming faith does work itself out in loving deeds.

[ 19 : 12 ] It shows up in the loving deeds. The deacons are there to lead us in loving deeds. The elders are there to lead us in the ministry of the word of the gospel, focusing on Christ.

Now we see that these are never, it's so not a false dichotomy, so much so that all across even the book of Acts we see that elders will do the work of mercy, deacons will do the work of preaching.

So Stephen, even in this passage, in the very next passage, Stephen, this first, one of the first deacons, he preaches for two whole chapters after this. Right? And think about Paul, the great elder, the great apostle, the great minister.

What does Paul do? He says in Galatians 2.10, when I was commissioned to go and share the gospel, the ministry of the word, in prayer to the Gentiles, they told me, do not neglect the poor. And he said, and that was the very thing I was most eager to do. You see, elders, deacon, and deacons, elder. And that's because they're exemplars for all of us. Each of those offices lead us in each of those two things, but it's the whole work of the church, right?

[ 20 : 15 ] And so we saw, if you were around last week, Ephesians chapter 4, Jesus Christ gave the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers to do what? To equip the whole church for the work of ministry.

So who gave us elders? Who gave us deacons? Who gave us apostles, prophets, evangelists? Jesus did. And he did that for what? So they could lead us in the whole work of ministry that we're all called to do.

It's everybody's ministry. And that means that we learn here that deacons are, it's not an A team, B team situation. Elders are not the A team and deacons the B team.

You know, you don't become a deacon and then graduate to an elder. No. These are two distinct callings that are clearly interrelated for life. So what's an elder? And I'll move to the final point.

An elder, I like how one early church theologian wrote about it in the fourth century. He said, an elder is a spiritual physician. An elder is a spiritual doctor.

[ 21 : 17 ] And not in the sense that they do this for status or prestige or to be called doctor. You know, instead, an elder is a carer of souls. So an elder is not a CEO, an elder is not a CFO, a chief financial officer.

An elder is not a trustee or a board member, though sometimes they have to do all this sort of stuff in the life of the church. An elder is a doctor of the soul.

I'll use Harold Sinkbeil, who's recently wrote a book about eldership and pastoring and caring for people's souls so that the current elders don't get mad at me for this, so I'll quote somebody else.

Harold Sinkbeil, he says that elders are nothing but errand boys, errand boys for Jesus. I like, he puts it in another metaphor, he says elders are the sheepdogs of the church.

What is a sheepdog? You know, a sheepdog, you've got the great shepherd, Jesus Christ himself, the great shepherd of the sheep, and then you've got the sheep, the people, and then you've got the sheepdog.

[ 22 : 18 ] And the sheepdog is not a master, you know. What does the sheepdog do? The sheepdog has one ear and one eye always on the master. Being commanded, being told where to go, being told how to serve.

And then the sheepdog has his other eye and his other ear always on the sheep, protecting the sheep, nourishing the sheep, caring for the sheep, making sure the sheep don't get captured by the wolves, right? So elders, they never come for status, no.

They mustn't come for status, they must come as sheepdogs, errand boys for Jesus Christ, the first servants. What's a deacon? A deacon is not a position of status.

There is no money, there is no glamour. I can tell you at St. Columbus there is no money, there is no glamour, there is only service to be had in this ministry. And that means that deacons are not

mere building managers, they're not finance team, they're not a finance team, they're not a board who makes sure that our liability insurance is covered fully, and it is, by the way.

We checked that this week. deacons, I'll read to you one book, it said, deacons are men who desire to serve, who embrace the faith, who live the Christian life in an exemplary way, especially in being a model for tangible, concrete, Christian love.

[ 23 : 39 ] They're the first to show up in crisis, they're the first to serve. That's a deacon. Lastly, finally, the people themselves. Now, in Acts chapter 6, verse 3, there's a brief list of qualifications for what it takes to be a deacon here, and this also, I think, applies to elders as well.

So it says, pick brothers from among you, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom. So we learn there that these men must have a good reputation, they must be full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom.

And then we read from 1 Timothy 3 as well, and if you just cast your eyes across 1 Timothy 3 and see some of these qualifications, okay? And I won't go through them in detail, don't worry, but just what does he say?

He says, they must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, that means not given to extreme behavior, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, opening their homes to people, opening their homes to strangers, able to teach, not drunk, not a drunkard, not constantly drinking, not violent, literally not getting in fights, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, gentle, meek, a manager of their own household.

You can go through these lists, deacons not double-tongued, not, as the King James put it, interested in sordid gain, right? Interested in loving money too much.

[ 25 : 03 ] Now, you could read a list like that, full of the Holy Spirit, wise, above reproach. The very last qualification listed in 1 Timothy 3 about deacons, blameless, and say, where are these people?

Who are these people? And, that's so important to ask, that's so critical and necessary to ask. Let me give you, let me just highlight three qualifications to look for. Number one, we're told here, 1 Timothy 3, verses 8 to 10, and Acts 6.

We see in Acts 6, the apostles say, we will not neglect the ministry of the word. And then, 1 Timothy 3, 8 to 10, a deacon must hold to the mystery of faith, of the faith, with a clear conscience.

What's that saying? That's saying that the first thing to ask is in elders and deacons, and your own heart as a Christian, if you're a Christian today, do I hold to the mystery of faith?

What is that? What is that? He's talking there about the doctrines of the Bible. Very simple. He's saying, are these men that we're choosing, are you holding fast to the doctrines that the Bible teaches?

[ 26 : 15 ] The gospel itself and the answers to questions like, who is God? Who am I? What is wrong with me? Is this world redeemable? How has Christ done it?

How can I be saved? What is to happen at the end of the world? These are the doctrines of the faith, right? And so, in the Bible, sometimes there is two uses to the word faith.

There is the faith that we believe by, so your personal faith. When you rest in Christ, that's faith. You believe in more than your eye can see right now. Then there is the language of the faith, the mystery of the faith.

What is the faith? It's not your personal faith. It's the objective faith that can be written down on paper and said, this is what the Bible teaches. So the first thing we learn is that an elder and a deacon and all of us are called to open the Bible and say, what does the Bible teach?

Orthodoxy, we call it. Right teaching. That's a necessary step in choosing any leader. That has to be there. But secondly, it says they must, and I'll just focus on this because this encompasses that whole list, that elders and deacons must be beyond reproach or blameless.

[ 27 : 24 ] That's the word that's used. Now, does this mean that all of these character qualities that we read about here in 1 Timothy 3 and Acts 6, when we read the word blameless, that's a summary word.

We're looking for men without sin, that they've gotten past it, you know, they've beat it finally. And if it was saying that after 2,000 years of church history, we would still be looking forward to the first ordination of elders and deacons, okay, this is not saying that we are looking for perfect people, that we are looking for men without sin.

No, not at all. Instead, if you could summarize the whole list and the concept of above reproach or blameless in modern language, it would be something like this. Not engaged in two different

lifestyles.

Where on the one hand, they're saying, I'm an Orthodox Christian, I'm a follower of Christ, I'm walking the walk in this community, but then living a completely different way outside of it. Not living differently privately, not hypocritical.

That's the concept of above reproach. They're not living two different lives. In other words, you could say it like this, they are the biggest repenters in the room. They're the first to repent. They're daily confessing their sin.

[ 28 : 38 ] They're daily looking to Christ once more for gospel grace. They're daily coming and saying, I need thee, oh, I need thee. Every hour, I need thee. That's what it means to be above reproach. Not hypocritical, but truly behind closed doors, Christian, walking with Christ, in Christ, towards Christ, all the time.

Lastly, thirdly, Acts 6-3 summarizes it so well, I think, full of the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? Full of the Holy Spirit. It means so many things.

We can't, I can't, you wouldn't allow me to talk about it too much right now, but one thing that means this is that we're looking for leaders who are not interested in serving because they want to be good people.

They're not interested in serving because they want to earn their way to heaven. They're not interested in serving because they want to be known for status and reputation of being a great servant.

Or they're not interested in serving because they want to be known as an elder in the community.

No, none of that. Full of the Holy Spirit means we're looking for people who have been transformed by the grace of Jesus Christ, that the Holy Spirit has encountered them.

[ 29 : 47 ] They've had an encounter with God and they'll never be the same because of it. That's what it means to be full of the Holy Spirit. Think about Paul, Paul who gives us some of these lists of qualifications.

Paul says, I am the worst of sinners, but by the grace of God I am what I am. Full of Holy Spirit, elders and deacons, men, do you know, men, leaders in this room, do you know that you, have you had an experience of grace that you're daily being transformed by saying, I am the worst.

I have the biggest need of God's grace in my life. That's the leaders we need. That, the Holy Spirit at work in your heart that you can say that every day. Think about Peter. He gives a list of qualifications for elder in his letter.

Peter, Peter, he's the one who committed treason against Jesus Christ and he was restored by the grace of the gospel by the Holy Spirit and encounter with God the Holy Spirit.

Elders and deacons are not perfect people. They are men that are willing to say alongside Paul, I'm the first person to express my need of grace. Close with this.

[ 30 : 57 ] What we're looking for is Christians. Christians, because elders and deacons are just examples and the calling that we've read, the list of qualifications here in large measure with some add-ons, with some takeaways, this is what we all want for ourselves.

people in need of grace growing and that's why God has given the church, apostles, elders, prophets, evangelists, pastors and shepherds and deacons to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

The work of ministry is grow in Christ and serve people's needs and it's all of our calling. So what we're looking for here in this is leadership where we know these people do not have functional saviors other than Christ.

They're not lovers of money. They're not so interested in career that they've been taken away from the work of the ministry. Non-functional saviors. In other words, they point us away from themselves and to Jesus, the great deacon and the great shepherd.

We have a letter written by a man named Clement of Alexandria. Sorry, a lot of early church today. We have a letter from a man named Clement of Alexandria in the early 2nd century.

[ 32 : 12 ] He became a Christian underneath the Apostle John. So the Apostle John who wrote the Gospel of John, he wrote the book of Revelation and he discipled this young man named Clement and Clement became a leader in the church.

Clement tells a story about the Apostle John, one of the early elders of the church. John had founded, planted the church in Smyrna.

We read about that in the book of Revelation. Smyrna. And John had shared the Gospel with a young man who was an orphan. And the young man came to Christ and started following Jesus. And John had to be taken away from pastoring the church to another town for a long, long time. So John left. And Clement writes that he turned to the minister that they had chosen, the elder that they had chosen in Smyrna to replace John and said this, In earnestness, I commit this youth to you in the presence of all here and in the presence of Christ.

Now what they did was they took this young man in front of the church. It'd be like me calling one of you saying come up front right now and saying I commit you to Simon in the presence of all to be disciplined for the rest of your days.

[ 33 : 23 ] Don't let this man go, this young boy that's come to faith from a rough background come and disciple him. John leaves. He comes back years later and when he comes back to Smyrna he asks, Clement records, where is the young man?

And we learn that the young man, the pastor says, left the church and he is now living in a cave outside of the city with a gang of the text says bandits.

Classic word, bandits. And John says, Clement records, you are a fine guard of that brother's soul. Sarcasm.

In the next breath John said, bring me a horse and a guide, lead me to where he is. And so they take John out of the city to the caves and John comes across a member of this gang and as soon as he's there he says, take me to your captain.

And the men are shocked, this old man coming to this group. And he shows up and there the captain is the young man that he had disciplined and brought to Christ.

[ 34 : 27 ] And Clement says that as soon as the young man saw the apostle John, he ran in fear and shame and guilt as soon as he saw him and this is what John said, my son, why do you flee from me, your father in the faith, old, unarmed?

See my compassion for you, my son. Fear not. You still have hope. I will pray for Christ's forgiveness for you. If needs be, I will take your death as the Lord died for me.

For you, my son, I will surrender my life. Stop and believe Christ has sent me to you today. Now, there's a story of forgiveness and mercy available to anyone no matter what.

And there's a story of a great elder. Right? That's a great elder. The sheepdog. He won't let him go. He's chasing after him. How did John become like that?

He looked at the true deacon. He looked at the true shepherd, the true deacon, Jesus Christ, in John 13, on the night that he was betrayed, facing the horror of the cross, about to be murdered for our sin.

[ 35 : 38 ] What did he do? He got down on his knees in the most demeaning act you could do in the first century and he washed the dirty, stinky feet of the men who were about to betray him. He was about to go to the cross for them.

They were going to betray him and he washed their feet and he said, I serve you. I serve. I came, what did he say? I came not to be served but to serve, to give my life away as a ransom for many. Do you know what that word to serve is when he says that? It's the word deacon. I came to deacon for you. John became like that because he looked at the ultimate deacon. He looked at the true elder, the great shepherd of the sheep.

In John chapter 20, when this same one who died for your sins rose again, for your justification, he was there in the garden and Mary Magdalene comes to him and she doesn't recognize him and she says, is this the gardener?

And what did he do? He said her name, Mary. And she would have been there in John chapter 10 that we opened our call to worship with when he said, my sheep hear my voice and when I call their name, they come to me.

[ 36 : 48 ] And all he does is he says, Mary. And the blindness, gone. She, it says, we're told in the text, she clung to him, she embraced him, she wrapped her hands around him and would not let go.

And he said, you've got to let me go. I've got to go and send the spirit to the church. Right? She wouldn't let go of him. Now look, how did John become an elder like that? We need leaders who help us all cling to Jesus and not let go and say, I won't let go.

That's the leaders we need. Let us pray. Father, we pray for these shepherds, these deacons, and we ask that you would teach us all as Christians to cling to Jesus and to see the true deacon, the one who washed our feet at the cross, the true elder and shepherd, the one who would run to the

uttermost far country and give his life away for the sheep, Lord.  
Teach us the grace that that is and then how to love like that as well. We pray for that in Christ's name. Amen.