

# Explore: Honor God in your service

March 4, 2013

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for March 17 focuses on 1 Timothy 3:8-13; 4:6-16.*

The background for the first passage is an extensive discussion of the qualifications of various church leaders. At one point, in fact, the church is likened to God's household (3:15), a family that works together for a shared purpose. In the first text of this week's selection, the specific church leaders in focus are deacons. The Greek word used for this term, *diakonos*, usually is simply transliterated as "deacon," but it also can be translated as "servant." Right from the start, this should give us pause regarding the nature of being a church leader because the heart of this work is service.

Consequently, the main question for church leaders—including deacons—is "How can I be of service to others?" Thus, rather than associating leadership with prestige and honor, we might better liken ministers to roles in our society not highly esteemed, such as waiters, store clerks and interns. Moreover, Jesus on numerous occasions is described as the one who served others. We are supposed to do likewise.

## **Qualifications for deacons**

The qualifications for deacons are fairly straightforward. They are to be respectable people who exercise good judgment in honest practices and avoiding indulgent behavior and are knowledgeable in the faith. Verse 11 sometimes is read to refer to deacons' wives, though the Greek word simply is "women." However, the grammar of the passage and the logic of the argument support reading this word as "women deacons" rather than "wives of deacons." Note also that Phoebe is described as a deacon in Romans 16:1. It also is important to realize that these women deacons, by

virtue of being deacons, are to behave in a similar manner: respectable, trustworthy and kind.

We should read verses 12-13 as applying to male and female deacons as well. Even the exhortation that deacons be the “husband of one wife” need not exclude women from the discussion. Instead, the emphasis is on being monogamous rather than being of a specific gender. Thus, some translations read “married only once.”

For 1 Timothy, the respectability of a deacon is key, and it partly is located in his or her family. It is not surprising, then, to find effective care for children and prudent household management as important for discerning a person’s potential as a deacon. After all, the church itself is “God’s household” (v. 15).

### **Emphasis on godliness**

The second text from this week’s selection (4:6-16) has a strong link to the first text by use of the word “minister” (also *diakonos*). Here we find an emphasis on godliness in life and ministry. Godliness is not a simplistic piety that exempts someone from tough situations. The letter makes it clear that godliness is hard work (that is, it requires training), and it holds “promise for both the present life and the life to come” (v. 8). Godliness includes the high points of your life and the low points, the exciting and the mundane, the extraordinary and the everyday. Godliness can and should take shape in all types of human experiences.

Like the earlier parts of the epistle, good teaching is highlighted over against distracting and erroneous ideas. Once again, anyone involved in ministry must examine his or her life and doctrine closely. These are the ingredients of a godly life. Notice that this is not simply for older people; Timothy’s youth is mentioned, but even this is not considered an obstacle to living out a life of faithfulness. He is urged to read Scripture publicly,

preach and teach others.

### **Love is the foundation**

In other words, ministry, a task in which every Christian participates, centers on everyday, ongoing tasks like reading, learning, teaching and proclaiming. Notice also that Timothy's gift of ministry was received from the representatives of the church. Everyone is a minister and gifted in some way, but the focus of these gifts is not on self. Rather, these gifts are derived from the church, and they are intended to serve the church. In other words, love is the foundation of the gifts of ministry.

But what is at stake in all of this diligence? The answer is the hope of salvation. As the letter states, "Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (v. 16).

The life of ministry is one that subtly shapes people over time. Love and care for others are joined with good teaching to result in transformed lives of faith united with God in Christ. Sound doctrine is not simply ideas. It is most fully taught when it takes shape in someone's life. Timothy's task, then, is to model good doctrine as he sets "an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (v. 12).