

Should I Be a Pastor?

1 Timothy 3
BQ022213

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. (3:1)

Those who seek the office of overseer must have a Spirit-given, compelling desire for it. **Aspires** is from *orego*, a rare word, appearing only here, 1 Timothy 6:10, and Hebrews 11:16 in the New Testament. It means “to reach out after,” or “to stretch out oneself to grasp something.” The term does not speak of internal motives, but only describes the external act. Here it describes someone who is taking steps to become an overseer.

Desires is from *epithumeo*, which means “a passionate compulsion,” in this context for good rather than for evil. In contrast to **orego**, this verb refers to the inward feeling of desire. Taken together, the two terms describe the man who outwardly pursues the ministry because of a driving compulsion on the inside.

Some men seek spiritual oversight in the church because people they respect have encouraged them to do so. Others pursue it because they have decided the ministry is their best option. They love the Lord and His church, so they attend Bible college or seminary to prepare for service. Because they are not driven by an internal passion for the ministry, however, it can become a mere academic exercise for them.

On the other hand, some have a great passion for the ministry, but lack self-control and devotion to priorities for preparation. They can't seem to get their lives disciplined enough to get on track to achieve their desire.

The man truly called to the ministry is marked by both an inward consuming passion and a disciplined outward pursuit. For him the ministry is not the best option, it is the only option. There is nothing else he could do with his life that would fulfill him. Accordingly, he works diligently to prepare himself to be qualified for service. While some may be called later in life, from that point on nothing else will do.

As already noted, some seek the office of overseer for wrong motives, such as money, power, or prestige. The true motive for seeking the ministry was described by Patrick Fairbairn: “The seeking

here intended ... must be of the proper kind, not the prompting of a carnal ambition, but the aspiration of a heart which has itself experienced the grace of God, and which longs to see others coming to participate in the heavenly gift" (Pastoral Epistles [Minneapolis: James & Klock, 1976], 136). It is not the office the truly called seek, but the work itself. Samuel Brengle wrote that "the final estimate of men shows that history cares not for the rank or title a man has borne, or the office he has held, but only the quality of his deeds and the character of his mind and heart" (C. W. Hall, Samuel Logan Brengle [New York: The Salvation Army, 1933], 274).

Simply put, ambition for office corrupts, desire for service purifies. Our Lord described the true character of spiritual service in Mark 10:42–44:

And calling [the disciples] to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all."

In a striking sermon known as "The Sermon of the Plow," the noted English Reformer Hugh Latimer blasted the passionless, self-promoting clergy of his day:

And now I would ask you a strange question; who is the most diligent bishop and prelate in all England; that passes all the rest in doing his office? I can tell, for I know who it is; I know him well. But now I think I see you listening and hearkening that I should name him. There is one that passes all the other [sic], and is the most diligent prelate and preacher in all England. And will ye know who it is? I will tell you—it is the Devil. He is the most diligent preacher of all others; he is never out of his diocese; he is never away from his cure; you shall never find him unoccupied; he is ever in his parish; he keeps residence at all times; you shall never find him out of the way; call for him when you will, he is ever at home. He is the most diligent preacher in all the realm; he is ever at his plough; nor lording or loitering can hinder him; he is ever applying his business; you shall never find him idle, I warrant you. ... Where the devil is resident, and has his plough going, there away with books and up with candles; away with bibles and up with beads; away with the light of the gospel and up with the light of candles, yea at noonday; ... up with man's traditions and his laws, down with God's traditions and his most holy word. ... Oh that our prelates would be as diligent to sow the corn of good doctrine as Satan is to sow cockle and darnel! ... There never was such a preacher in England as he is. The prelates are lords ... and no labourers; but the devil is diligent at his plough. He is no unpreaching prelate; he is no lordly loiterer from his cure; but a busy ploughman. ... Therefore, ye un-preaching prelates, learn of the devil: to be diligent in doing of your office. ... If you will not learn of God, nor good men, to be diligent in your office, learn of the devil. (Cited in John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 27–28)

The church must be led by men of passion who are compelled to the ministry.

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