

## Beyond Superman – Father’s Day

1 Timothy 3

Westside Fellowship CRC; 16 June 2019

Rev. Heidi S. De Jonge

Back in May, while I was in the Middle East, my dad preached from this pulpit on Mother’s Day. He preached from Proverbs 31, a message entitled, “Beyond SuperWoman.”



In it, he took the wisdom literature of Proverbs as an invitation away from the June Cleaver image of the domestic housewife (on one hand) and away from the radical secular feminist image on the other hand – an image that basically rejects the domestic life entirely. My dad was saying that Proverbs 31 shows that as a woman, you can both rock the cradle *and* rule the world. And at the same time, he said that we as women don’t have to do it all. Proverbs 31 is an invitation to glorify God and enjoy him forever, and that there is freedom to follow however God leads you as an individual.

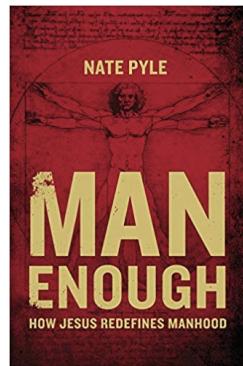
Now, I typically don’t preach an explicit Mother’s Day or Father’s Day message, but because my dad preached a mother’s day sermon, I thought if there was any year that was going to preach a father’s day sermon, it would be this year. And so, the title of this message is Beyond SuperMan.



Before I get to my main point in this message, I need to make a couple of sub-points. First of all, if you want to make a case (as some do) that overseers (elders) and deacons of the church must only be men, this is not the text to use. None of the Greek pronouns in this text are masculine. And the husband-of-one-wife (literal Greek) bit could really be taken to mean faithfulness in marriage... because if you wanted to be totally literal about that, then only married, non-divorced and non-widowed men could bear office, which is clearly not what Paul meant to say.<sup>1</sup>

And secondly, this passage is about leadership in the church – not about fathers, and not about men in general. And yet!... I found myself drawn to it this Father's Day, because generally speaking in the very early church, men were the leaders in the church – not exclusively, but mostly... and, though it is talking about overseers/elders and deacons, there is a sense in which this list of character traits are traits that all men who are followers of Jesus should want to aspire to.

Now, I don't know what it's like to be a man. For centuries, the church has had pastors who don't know what it's like to be a woman – and now you have one who doesn't know what it's like to be a man... but I know enough men to know that there are pressures and confusions about what it means to 'be a man.' A friend of mine, Nate Pyle, wrote a book called 'Man Enough' about his particular journey with this question.



He reflects on culture, broadly, and Christian sub-cultures, particularly, and all the different narratives that are out there about Being Men. In the Christian community, there's been an

---

<sup>1</sup> For more on this conversation, see [Margaret Mowczko, "Must Manage His Own Household Well" – 1 Timothy 3:4-5:](#)

evangelical backlash against Christian feminism that has tried to dig more deeply into the grooves of a kind of masculinity – a kind of masculinity that “TAKES BACK” leadership from women, with a certain kind of toughness, athleticism, and entitlement. There’s a lot of confusing pressure out there, I think, when it comes to ‘being a man.’ You can get his book if you want to know more about what Nate has to say on this. His book is one of several books that struggle with the cultural expectations around manhood and masculinity.

So, going back to this Scripture for today, and its expectations, I wonder if this list of character traits feels, for men, like another heavy load to bear. I’m thinking of the three men who are about to become brand new officebearers at Westside – but I’m also thinking of any man who has served the church as an office bearer – or who will. Any man who is a leader in any sphere. I mean, look at all that you are expected to keep in check:

- if you have a family – your marriage and children... (1 Timothy 3:4-5)
- your attitude and temper... (1 Timothy 3:2)
- the level of your appreciation for alcohol and money... (1 Timothy 3:3)

But beyond keeping these things in check, there are also the requirements of

- being hospitable, (1 Timothy 3:2)
- being a teacher, being gentle, (1 Timothy 3:2)
- and having a good reputation with those on the outside. (1 Timothy 3:7)



And these words for deacons – they must keep hold of the deep truths or mystery of the faith with a clear conscience (1 Timothy 3:9) And finally, they must first be tested, Paul writes, and

then if there is nothing against them, let them serve. (1 Timothy 3:10). NOTHING AGAINST THEM. Basically, Superman.

Now if that is not a list to scare off anyone from letting their name stand for elder/deacon, I don't know what is. Notice how I am preaching this message *after* we have selected names for our new office bearers. 😊

If there is nothing against them, let them serve. I have had several conversations with people over the years who hesitate to accept the work of leadership in the church because this bar just seems too high... and aspiring toward it seems like a fool's errand. Who among us is beyond reproach? Who among us has nothing against us?

Now, in many ways, this is a parallel message to when my dad preached on Proverbs 31. He noted the exhaustion *women* can feel when they read that description of the woman whose hand is rocking the cradle and ruling the world. Who among us measures up to all of the qualifications of the woman of noble character in Proverbs 31?... a woman who, incidentally, has almost every single one of the qualities listed here for the overseers and deacons. Let's just take a quick look... Both men and women must be...

#### NOBLE

Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. (1 Timothy 3:1)  
*A wife of noble character who can find? (Proverbs 31:10)*

#### FAITHFUL IN MARRIAGE

Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife. (1 Timothy 3:2)  
*Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. (Proverbs 31:11)*

#### SELF-CONTROLLED

The overseer is to be ... self-controlled. (1 Timothy 3:2).  
*She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. (Proverbs 31: 27).*

#### GENEROUS

The overseer is to be... hospitable... not a lover of money (1 Timothy 3:2-3)  
*She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. (Proverbs 31:20)*

#### WISE

The overseer is to be... able to teach... deacons must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience (1 Timothy 3:2)

*She speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction is on her tongue. (Proverbs 31:26)*

#### STRONG

The overseer is not to be violent, but gentle. (1 Timothy 3:3)

*She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. (Proverbs 31:17).*

#### DIGNIFIED

The overseer is not to be quarrelsome (1 Timothy 3:3)

*She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. (Proverbs 31:25)*

#### HONEST

Deacons must not pursue dishonest gain (1 Timothy 3:8)

*She selects materials, brings in food, purchases fields, plants vineyards, trades profitably, makes clothing. (Proverbs 31:13-22)*

#### RESPECTABLE

The overseer must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full<sup>[a]</sup> respect (1 Timothy 3:4)

*Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her. (Proverbs 31:28)*

#### REPUTABLE

He must also have a good reputation with outsiders. (1 Timothy 3:7)

*Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate. (Proverbs 31:31)*

One of these passages is poetry, the other is a letter – one sounds like it's about a woman, one sounds like it's about a man, but the qualities are the same. And it seems as though one might need to be super-human (a super-man / a super-woman) to live into all of them.

And if that is the case, then we're all in trouble. Moms and dads. Men and women. Children and older adults. Married and single. Office bearers or not... And so, we need the rest of 1 Timothy 3... because it is there that we find the grace that we need... Paul writes (1 Timothy 3:14-16):

<sup>14</sup> Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, <sup>15</sup> if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. <sup>16</sup> Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great:

He appeared in the flesh,  
was vindicated by the Spirit,  
was seen by angels,  
was preached among the nations,  
was believed on in the world,  
was taken up in glory.

True godliness doesn't spring from our strivings and our being the best and our being super... True godliness springs from the great mystery of Jesus who lived our life, died our death, gave us his righteousness and forgiveness, and who now is simultaneously at the right hand of the Father and in us! Because of Jesus, you are beyond reproach Through the blood of Jesus, nothing stands against you! .As Paul says in Colossians 1:27 – CHRIST is IN US – and this is the hope of glory.

I want to close this sermon with the end of one of Jesus' sermons (from Luke 15:11-32).



He told the story of a father who had two sons. One of the sons ran off and squandered his inheritance. The father waited and waited and finally the son came back, repented, received his father's forgiveness. And the father threw him the biggest party the village had seen. But the older son was angry and didn't want to go to the party... So the father went out and pleaded with him... But the son said, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. [I have lived above approach, I've managed my family, I have a good reputation! I've been temperate, self-controlled, and respectable!] Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.<sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes [who has gotten into fights, been a drunkard, been completely dishonest] comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!"

And the Father responds... often, we just hear the last bit of what the father says: We had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." But listen to the first bit... 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours."

Brothers, sisters... you spend a lot of energy striving to be supermen and superwomen. The Father understands – a lot of this striving comes from a good place of wanting to love him and to love others with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. But some of your striving comes from your fear and your pride. Experience this morning the embrace of the Father and hear him say – "You are always with me. Everything I have is yours."