What makes someone a good elder or a good deacon? For us here at CrossPoint, one of these roles (deacon) has been around for a long time, while the other (elder) is still quite new. We find several qualifications for those who would serve in either of these two roles in Scripture.

1 Timothy 3 (NRSV)

3 *The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop[i] desires a noble task.* [2] *Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once[ii], temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher,* [3] *not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money.* [4] *He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way,* [5] *for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?* [6] *He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.* [7] *Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.*

[8] *Deacons[iii] likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money;* [9] *they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.* [10] *And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons.* [11] *Women[iv] likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things.* [12] *Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well;* [13] *for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*

In this passage, we see these qualities:

For both an elder and a deacon:

1) Above reproach – in possession of sound character and intact integrity
2) Husband of one wife – fidelity in marriage, purity in singleness (see footnote above)
3) Sober-minded / self-controlled / not a drunkard – their life is governed by Christ, not by any substances; they are able to think clearly because they are not distracted by other influences
4) Respectable / thought well of outsiders – others respect them; they have a good reputation both inside and outside the church
5) Not violent / gentle / not quarrelsome – they possess the gentleness and humility of Christ; they seek to shepherd the flock, not win arguments; they carefully guard the core truths of Christian doctrine while avoiding unnecessary quarrels concerning peripheral issues; they are not harsh, argumentative, or abusive
6) Not a lover of money – not only are they not greedy, they can be trusted to refrain from using their position of influence and authority for personal gain
7) Manage own household well / dignified – they are serious and reverent about the call to serve the church, and their family supports them in this dignified reverence
8) Not a recent convert / must first be tested – the elder or deacon should prove their humility and blamelessness over time before being entrusted with the role

For an elder:

1) Hospitable – literally, "loves the stranger" – welcoming to those both inside and outside the household of faith
2) Able to teach – they can faithfully teach God's word in a variety of settings; they are committed to careful study of doctrine

For a deacon:

1) Not double-tongued – a deacon should be sincere; actions should match words
2) Hold the mystery of faith with a clear conscience – know what you believe and live accordingly with a clear conscience before God and others

When considering a person for the office of elder, we should ask:

- Does this person have a habit of caring for others, for acting as a spiritual shepherd?
- Would I entrust myself to their shepherding care?
- Are they capable of teaching the Scriptures and guarding right doctrine?
- Would I submit to their spiritual leadership?
- When I describe their good qualities, how far do I have to go before I come to "humble?"

When considering a person for the office of deacon, we should ask:

- Does this person already faithfully serve the church?
- Would I be happy to serve alongside this person, following them as they act as a "servant-leader?"
- Do I trust their integrity in matters related to church finances?
- Have they shown themselves to be clear-minded and faithful in all things?
- When I describe their good qualities, how far do I have to go before I come to "humble?"

---

[i] The term used here and in verse 2, "bishop," is taken from the Greek ἐπίσκοπος (episkopos), which means to "look over." Some English translations (including CSB and NIV) translate this word as "overseer." Other English translations (NRSV and KJV among them) translate this word as "bishop." Another term, used in 1 Timothy 5:19 and elsewhere, πρεσβύτερος (presbuteros), carries with it the association of someone who is either older in age or in maturity, and is frequently translated into English as "elder."

[ii] This phrase, "married only once," should be considered as a call to marital faithfulness on the part of the elder or deacon. Other translations render this as, "husband of one wife." This does preclude polygamists from holding these offices. This phrase does not preclude the never married nor the widow/widower from serving in one of these roles any more than the phrase "his children" in verse 4 requires the office holder to have more than one child.

[iii] The term "deacon" is taken from the Greek διάκονοι, which is typically translated as either "servant," "deacon," or "minister" in the New Testament.

[iv] The Greek term used here, γυναῖκας (gunaikas) is translated into English as either "women" or "wives," usually depending on context. Commonly used English translations are split on how the term should be applied here.