

Deacons, Wake Up!

A First-Century Call for Today's Servants



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Dedication

To the deacons of the McDonough Church of Christ:

Denny Dobbs
Kevin Holland
Danny Holtzer
Don Kirkpatrick
Ronny Maddox
Chris Martin
Jeff Wilder
Don Wilson
Todd Wilson

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Ten Commandments for Deacons

Thou shalt meet the qualifications (1 Timothy 3:8–13).

Thou shalt do all to glorify God (Ephesians 3:21).

Thou shalt follow the Servant-King (Philippians 2:5–9).

Thou shalt not be afraid to get thy hands dirty.

Thou shalt serve with gladness of heart (Psalm 118:24).

Thou shalt do thy work with enthusiasm (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

Thou shalt be a team player (Ephesians 4:11–16).

Thou shalt serve out of love-motives (Mark 12:30–31).

Thou shalt prepare thyself for the work assigned.

Thou shalt be faithful in all things (Revelation 2:10).



Introduction

This book is the second in a series of wake-up calls for church leaders. In *Shepherds, Wake Up!* I made a plea for a return to the biblical emphasis on the qualifications and work of shepherds in the local church. This book is in that same vein: *Deacons, Wake Up!* is a plea to return to what the Bible teaches about the qualifications and work of deacons in the local church.

As we move deeper into the twenty-first century, the church faces staggering challenges both within and without. There are needs that didn't exist a few years ago. Likewise, ministries are being neglected and there is a shortage of servants. Fewer and fewer members want to be involved, which has given rise to increasing the paid staff to do the work. It used to be the "20–80 rule": 20 percent of the members do all the work and the 80 percent enjoy it. Now the rule is closer to 10–90.

It's time for deacons to take off their white gloves and go to work. It's time to pick up unused towels and do the work of slaves, just like the Servant-Savior did (Mark 10:45).

This book is an attempt to call attention to the need for training present deacons in the work of serving, as well as encouraging men to prepare themselves to become deacons in the local church. My prayer is that this material will be taught to the whole congregation, not to an isolated few. As congregations become better educated, the work of deacons will become more biblical, effective, and rewarding.

USING THIS BOOK

This book has been written to issue a wake-up call to all the men who serve as deacons, who aspire to serve as deacons, and for every member of the church, so that every member will be on the same page.

In order to gain maximum benefits from this book, I suggest you do the following:

1. Study it in a class situation.
2. Be sure each participant has a book.
3. Do extra research on each lesson, making it your "own."

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4. Study each Scripture and how it relates to the lesson.
5. Use the “Thought and Discussion” section.
6. Work each “Case Study” in class.
7. Study the material thoroughly before coming to class.
8. Make up your own questions about the lesson.
9. Encourage personal application of the lesson.
10. Use the class time to discuss the major points.
11. Pray for wisdom.
12. Stay excited about the study.



CHAPTER

1

A Wake-Up Call

LOSE THE SNOOZE

We have all checked into a motel and asked the desk clerk to give us a wake-up call to guarantee that we would get up early. On the other hand we have fallen into the trap of setting the alarm radio in the room, only to find ourselves playing tag with the snooze button. Oh, for just five more minutes—five more minutes—and five more minutes.

A wise-cracking speaker once said in a church after-dinner speech: “The elders are snoozing, the deacons have fallen asleep, and it is because the preacher is preaching Sominex sermons.”

Wake-up calls are important in the issues of daily life. “The early bird gets the worm.” We need a wake-up call in the church, especially among deacons. In too many congregations the snooze button has been set in concrete; deacons are asleep in the pilothouse while the old ship of Zion is headed for dangerous waters. It’s time to wake up!

As we move toward the midnight hour that will usher in eternity, it is high time to “put on the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11–18) and storm the stronghold of Satan (1 Peter 5:8). All of us, including the deacons, are soldiers of Christ fighting for the souls of men (2 Timothy 2:1–3; Mark 8:36–37). We need battle stations manned as never before. The brigade of servants must be on watch. Sound the alarm!

It’s wake-up time! It’s time for those men who serve in the special capacity of deacon to put their hands to the plow as never before. Every deacon in the church must wake up to some of the following truths, which in turn should ignite his fire so his service will be at a higher temperature.

➤ **IT'S TIME TO WAKE UP . . .** ◀

- ◆ *Acknowledge that we are going in the wrong direction.* The church is declining in all areas: membership, attendance, giving, evangelism, mission work, leadership, and sound teaching.
- ◆ *Recommit to the eternal vision God has given the church (Isaiah 2:2–4).* This vision is the heartbeat of the church. Seeking and saving the lost must be our priority (Mark 16:15–16). Billions are walking toward eternity without the hope of eternal life (John 3:16; 10:10).
- ◆ *Close the back door through which new converts are leaving the church.* We must nurture and help these babes grow up in Christ (Ephesians 4:11–16; Hebrews 5:12–14). We must help keep the saved, saved.
- ◆ *Restore the spirit of boldness that existed in the first-century church (Acts 4:11–13).* We must not be bound by the spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7). We must not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of being “politically correct.” Cowardice is condemned. Servants are brave!
- ◆ *Believe in the power of the gospel, the only message under heaven that can save sinful man (Romans 1:14–16; 1 Corinthians 15:1–4).* Fun and games won’t save souls! Jesus saves (Matthew 1:21).
- ◆ *Get back to the preaching of the word of God with power, conviction, and enthusiasm (2 Timothy 4:1–6).* There is no place for wimpy preaching by soldiers of Christ. We’re in a battle for souls!
- ◆ *Lift God up as the center of our worship (Isaiah 6:1–5).* We don’t select what pleases our flesh but what pleases His heart. God is the one to whom we send our worship; we are the ones who offer it up “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). What does God want?
- ◆ *Walk by faith and not by sight, knowing that without faith we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6; 2 Corinthians 5:7).* Our faith must be larger than the balance on our check books.
- ◆ *Sacrifice time, talent, and money for the spreading of the gospel.* We need to have a selling-out attitude like our brethren had in the first century

(Acts 4:34–37). This is total commitment to the cause of Christ (Matthew 16:24).

- ◆ *Train and prepare men to serve in various leadership capacities in the church: elders, preachers, deacons, and teachers (Titus 1:5; 1 Timothy 3:1–7).* This will guarantee a sound and continuing future for the Lord’s church (Acts 20:17–38).
- ◆ *Restore the moral purity of the church (Matthew 5:8).* The world must be left behind as we move onward in fulfilling the mission of the church (Philippians 2:4–9). Integrity and biblical values must be returned to the front burner of Christian living and service.

Are you awake? Do you get the message? It’s time for a biblical wake-up call in the ranks of God’s army, especially among the deacons. That’s what this book is about!

LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Perhaps you are thinking, *I am only a server of tables; what do these things have to do with me?* They have to do with you because you are, or will be, a “special” servant in the Lord’s church, and you must be concerned with these and other issues facing the church. You are part of the solution for two reasons: (1) you are a Christian and (2) you are a deacon (or will be). Every child of God must relate to these needs and issues in the church. But as part of the local leadership team, you have an extra measure of responsibility (Luke 12:47–48).

For some reason, deacons in the church have become a “laughingstock.” Why? I’m not sure, but I suspect it is because many have fallen short of being what God demands. Second, it may be because many men are serving as deacons without proper training. And third, some aren’t biblically qualified. Whatever the reason, it’s time that the image of God’s deacon takes on a new look. This new look begins with answering the wake-up call. Look in the mirror—what do you see?

*Integrity
and biblical
values must be
returned to the
front burner.*

*Wake up and
become a
more dynamic
servant!*

It's wake-up time! Time for servant-soldiers of Christ to arise and take up a towel and serve in needed ways. There is no advantage in waiting until tomorrow. Each second we delay, a lost person dies somewhere in the world. There is a widow who needs food (James 1:27); there is a person who is down and out who needs help (Galatians 6:10). Needs are everywhere! There are tables that need bussing! Look around! There are ministry opportunities everywhere. Open your eyes!

My prayer is that this study about the deacon and his work will wake you up to a new awareness of how essential and important you are to the Lord's kingdom.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO GOD'S SERVANTS?

In a day when the church has a shortage of leaders in every category, and in a day when we have scores of in-name-only leaders, it's obvious that something has happened to God's servants. Men who have the title, men who have job assignments, men who should know what being a servant is all about have jumped ship. Many have gone on vacations or thrown up their hands in disgust.

Part of the wake-up call relates to the question: What has happened to God's servants? Where are they? Here are some possible metaphorical answers:

- ◆ They have gone to positive-thinking rallies.
- ◆ They have gone to cross-training classes to change careers.
- ◆ They have decided to do their own thing.
- ◆ They have moved into the corner office with a view.
- ◆ They have stepped on the neck of the competition.
- ◆ They have bought a getaway cottage.
- ◆ They have traded their towels for gadgets.
- ◆ They are fighting to stay on top.
- ◆ They have retired from service.
- ◆ They have changed their priorities and interest.

- ◆ They have quit because of discouragement.
- ◆ They are hiding in their comfort zones.

This book is prepared to help *you* wake up and become a more dynamic servant in God's mighty army. It's not a reflection on your present status, which may be at 101 percent, but rather a call to turn it up another notch. God wants each servant to be highly productive in the vineyard.

FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Why may some deacons need a wake-up call?

2. What are some values of wake-up calls?

3. Is a wake-up call necessarily a negative thing?

4. What are some areas in which we need to wake up? Why?

5. How alert are you?

___sleeping ___snoozing ___slumbering ___awake ___wide awake

6. Why have some deacons become the object of ridicule?

7. What is your understanding of the word *servant* (deacon)?

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8. Why is the morale low among some deacons?

9. What additional observations do you have?

10. How do you plan to use this lesson in your ministry?

➔ CASE STUDY ➔

The Downtown congregation was having problems with some of the deacons not fulfilling their ministry assignment. The question was: *How should this problem be approached?* It's easy to say, "We need a wake-up call." But we need something more than a wake-up call to get deacons to do their jobs properly. How would you sell the church on studying materials like those in this book? Be specific and biblical in your approach.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



CHAPTER

2

Unhappy Slaves

THE TWO-SIDED DEACON COIN

Several years ago I heard a speaker at a lectureship say that the elders are doing deacons' work, the deacons are sitting on the back pews with their coloring books feeling frustrated, and the preacher is running the church. I have reflected on those words numerous times over the years, wondering if they are true. Why do some churches have problems with deacons and some do not?

As I travel among congregations conducting leadership training programs, some of the most frequent remarks I hear relate to deacons and their work. There are two sides of the deacon coin. Here are some of the remarks I have heard, both positive and negative:

POSITIVE

- ◆ "Our deacons are on a roll . . . look out!"
- ◆ "We are blessed with great deacons."
- ◆ "If you want something done, give it to a deacon."
- ◆ "Our deacons are the greatest."
- ◆ "Our deacons are pace setters and dreamers."
- ◆ "We are losing a good deacon to the eldership."
- ◆ "Our deacons are very spiritual men."
- ◆ "Our deacons are Acts 6 deacons."