

Introduction

When I was a young boy, I dreamed of playing professional golf, and being on the PGA Tour. As a young man, I worked hard and pursued that dream. Then, in the summer of 1978, I shot two-under par on the final round of the PGA Tour Qualifying Tournament and earned my PGA Tour Card. It was a dream come true. I was really excited to have made it to the tour. The fulfillment of a desire is a tree of life. This morning we are here to ordain Tom Swenson and celebrate with him the fulfillment of a desire and a calling on his life. In 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul wrote that if “anyone aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.” In many ways, this is similar to me earning my PGA Tour card. Tom has aspired to the office of overseer, and he has worked hard to prepare himself for this work. He is a faithful man and has been faithfully serving in this capacity without the title and recognition. Today, we are here to recognize and confirm him in the office of overseer.

(Pr 13:12) “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life.”

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

I will be covering three points this morning. First, we will look at the Preparation and Process. Second, we will look at the Qualifications. Third, I will be giving two charges to Tom. Then, I will be turning it over to Joe Warner, who will be giving a word to Tom, and to our body. Finally, we will lay hands on Tom and ordain him as an overseer.

Ordination of Tom Swenson

1. Preparation and Process of Tom
2. Qualifications of Tom
3. Charge to Tom

1. Preparation and Process of Tom

Jesus began His ministry by gathering together a group of disciples. He invested Himself in those disciples, and out of that group of disciples, He appointed twelve of them to be apostles. Jesus had trained them, and spent lots of time with them, and He had prepared them for the work that He had called them to do. He did not take the ordination of these apostles lightly; He prayed all night before He did it.

(Lk 6:12–13) “It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. {13} And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles:”

The apostles clearly understood Jesus’ pattern of raising up leaders, and they followed His example. In Acts 14, we find Barnabas and Paul raising up elders in every church. They had spent time with the disciples, had trained them, and after a period of time, they prayed and fasted about the men they were considering, and then they ordained them.

(Ac 14:23) “When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

The reason for praying and fasting is to get confirmation from the Lord before putting someone into the office that is not called to do that work, does not meet the character requirements, or is not capable of doing the work. Paul told Timothy not to lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others. So, we have to be very careful about putting someone into this office. We need to make sure that they have the calling, the character, and the capability.

(1 Tim 5:22) “Do not lay hands upon anyone *too* hastily and thereby share *responsibility* for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.”

Tom has been through extensive training. He has been through two classes on preaching, and he has had opportunities to put that training into practice. He has been through training on leadership, church government, and pastoral ministry. He has been through cell group ministry training. He has been through evangelism training. He has also been through a course on hearing God. Tom has been through much training and is already functioning as an overseer.

2. Qualifications of Tom

Over the past couple of weeks, we have studied the office of overseer. We looked in depth at the different areas of character, and the work of overseers. The overarching requirement is that they are above reproach. The life of an elder needs to be in order. Paul said that if a man could not manage his own house, how was he going to take care of the household of God, the church. Tom’s house is in order. There was a time that his family was not in order, but a number of years ago a pastor gave Tom a prophetic word that God was putting Tom’s house in order. I believe that God has done that. I also believe that He is going to continue working in Tom’s family relationships, but his house is in order.

(1 Tim 3:2–5) “An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, {3} not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. {4} *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity {5} (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),”

Paul wrote about the various character requirements. I have known Tom for over fifteen years. I have been in Bible studies with him, have used him as a tax accountant, and have come to know him as a true brother in the Lord. More than that, Tom has become a close friend, a part of our family. Tom is a man of integrity. He runs his business with integrity. He runs the affairs of the church with integrity. I know that Tom is going to do what is right in God’s eyes, and when someone lives that way, you can trust the person. I trust Tom. I trust Tom with finances, and more importantly, I trust Tom with the true riches, God’s people.

One of the requirements is that an overseer must be apt or able to teach. Tom has been through two different preaching classes. He is able to take a passage, study it, and teach it. He has preached through 2 Peter for our church, and has regularly taught other things.

Another requirement is that an overseer must not be a new convert. The term elder implies a spiritual maturity. Tom is not a new convert. He received Christ into his life while serving in the Air Force. Maturity is a process, and over the years he has become a mature man of God. He has

a close relationship with Christ, and consistently spends time in God’s word, in prayer, and journaling. He has had an ambitious reading program, and is well grounded in God’s word. Tom is a spiritually mature man, and an elder in every sense of the word.

(1 Tim 3:6) “*and* not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.”

When we decided to move back to Georgia, Tom surprised me and said he was going to move here with us. He wanted to help plant the Connection Church of Rome. Tom has been a board member and has been serving in the capacity of an overseer. He has overseen the finances for us. He has also helped with the legal requirements. We formed a New Mexico non-profit corporation, then operated as a foreign corporation in Georgia, and then formed a Georgia non-profit corporation. Tom has been part of everything that we have done, and has been doing the work of an overseer. He has been a part of every major decision that our church has made. Today, we are really recognizing the call on Tom’s life, and confirming his call as an overseer.

3. Charges to Tom

Before we lay hands on Tom, I want to give two charges to him. The first charge comes from his life verse, which comes out of Deuteronomy 6. God told Moses and Israel, “The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” In the New Testament, Jesus said that this is the greatest and foremost commandment. You are being set in the office of overseer, but your ministry must always come after and out of your passion for God. I charge you to stay passionate for God.

(Dt 6:4–5) “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! {5} “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

(Matt 22:37–38) “And He said to him, ““You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ {38} “This is the great and foremost commandment.”

If we want to bear fruit, we must abide in Christ. When we abide in Him like a vine, we will bear fruit. I charge you today to keep your love for God above everything else. God tells elders not to lord over the flock, but prove to be examples. The best thing that you can ever do for the flock is to be an example of someone who passionately loves God with his whole heart. Don’t allow other things to choke out your love and passion for God. Spend time in His word and in prayer. Spend time worshiping the Lord. Prioritize and protect your relationship with Christ.

(Jn 15:4–5) “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. {5} “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

(1 Pe 5:1–3) “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, {2} shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of* God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; {3} nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.”

The second charge that I give you today is to keep your wineskin fresh so that God can keep pouring new wine into your life and ministry. Old wineskins get hard, rigid, inflexible, intolerant, unbending, unyielding, and set in the way things were. They have a certain shape and they have become hardened in that shape. They are not open to new ideas, or new ways of doing things. They are stubbornly resistant to change. New wine can't be poured into that old, hard, rigid, container. New wine will burst that old rigid container, and the wine and the wineskin will both be ruined, so wine must be put in fresh wineskins.

(Matt 9:17) “Nor do *people* put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.”

Old wineskins were not thrown away; they were reconditioned and made fresh again. When Jesus spoke this, He was speaking about a new covenant coming. The Pharisees were like old wineskins. They were hard, inflexible, and not accepting of the new things that God wanted to do. They had to be made new so that they could receive the new covenant of grace. But all of our wineskins can get hard, rigid, and inflexible, especially as we get older. God wants to keep pouring new wine into us, so we have to keep our wineskins flexible.

In the natural, they would boil the wineskins in water. This sterilized and softened the wineskin. Second, they would fill the wineskin with olive oil and let it soak into it. The oil conditioned and softened the oil. Afterwards, the oil was poured out and it was ready for use. It was not a new wineskin, but was a fresh wineskin.

I charge you today to meditate in the water of the word. Let God's word simmer in your mind. and to continually get refilled with the Holy Spirit. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you. Spend time in worship and prayer and be continually filled with the Holy Spirit. God's word and the Holy Spirit will keep your wineskin fresh if you will make a point to keep your wineskin fresh.

(Col 3:16) “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

(Eph 5:18–20) And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, {19} speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; {20} always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;”

Introduction (Pr 13:12, 1 Tim 3:1)

1. Preparation and Process (Lk 6:12–13, Ac 14:23, 1 Tim 5:22)

2. Tom’s Qualifications (1 Tim 3:1-7, Tit 1:5-9)

3. Charges to Tom (Dt 6:4–5, Matt 22:37–38, Jn 15:4–5, 1 Pe 5:1–3, Mt 9:17, Col 3:16, Eph 5:18-20)