

Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Unqualified, Not Unworthy

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9; James 3:1

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“Unqualified.”

That was John MacArthur’s one-word assessment of Steven Furtick during a [Q&A session at the 2012 Shepherds’ Conference](#).

It’s also the title of Furtick’s latest book. Furtick credits that brief appraisal of his ministry as the inspiration for writing this:

“Unqualified.” . . . *Unqualified?*

That word started the wheels spinning in my head. . . . Yes, I struggle with my temper, with my focus, with my motives, with my eating habits, with my prayer life, with my state of mind. And that list doesn’t even scratch the surface.

I know my weaknesses and faults better than anyone. I don’t need to listen to an online interview to feel disqualified. Hardly a day goes by that I’m not seized by the sensation that I have no business doing what I’m doing. That I’m in over my head. That I don’t deserve any of my blessings or opportunities.

Am I unqualified? This book is the answer to that question. [1]Steven Furtick, *Unqualified: How God Uses Broken People to Do Big Things* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2016) 2.

Furtick’s certainly asking the right question. But the answer doesn’t lie in chronicling one’s own journey of self-discovery and self-evaluation. Pastoral qualifications aren’t a mystery—they’ve been clearly and definitively spelled out in Scripture.

I was in the room during the aforementioned Q&A session. For me and the thousands of pastors, church leaders, and seminary students in attendance, John MacArthur’s answer was an obvious reference to the qualifications for “overseers” detailed in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9.

In those passages Paul describes the clear line of distinction between those who are qualified to be Bible teachers, and those who aren’t:

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity . . . and not a new convert. . . . And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church. (1 Timothy 3:2–7)

A more detailed discussion of those requirements can be found [here](#).

But such detailed analysis isn't necessary when it comes to *Unqualified*. Furtick proves MacArthur's point by not addressing or even referring to those biblical requirements. It is frankly astounding that in a book ostensibly defending Furtick's qualifications that Timothy and Titus are nowhere to be found!

This oversight is glaring—either Furtick doesn't know or doesn't care what it means to be *biblically* qualified.

Instead he chooses to go down the road of subjectivity: "When I started the journey that lies behind this book, I wanted to finally figure out how to respond to that question *within myself*" (emphasis added). [2]*Unqualified*, 3. And true to that assertion, Furtick almost exclusively relies on his own opinions and experience to argue his case in *Unqualified*.

He describes a church leader as primarily "a decision maker, a risktaker [*sic*]." [3]*Unqualified*, 3. But that baseless definition is as far as Furtick goes in discussing qualifications specific to church leaders. The rest of the book has a much broader application:

At one point or another, you've probably felt unqualified. . . . I think we all secretly fight feelings of inadequacy, insufficiency, and incompetence. We wonder whether we really measure up. We fear we are not "enough"—whatever that means in our particular situations. [4]*Unqualified*, 3.

That quote captures *Unqualified's* utter failure to answer the questions regarding Furtick's qualification—in that sense, he sidesteps his own purpose statement.

Moreover, in that one paragraph, Furtick encapsulates the three major problems that permeate his entire book. First, subjective feelings replace Scripture as the true test of qualification ("felt," "feelings," "wonder," "fear"). Second, biblical qualifications are narrowly applied to pastors and elders. But Furtick dilutes that critical point by broadening the target audience to *everyone* ("you've," "we all," "we"). And third, Furtick confuses the state of being unqualified with the feeling of unworthiness ("feelings of inadequacy, insufficiency, and incompetence").

The fact is, all of us are unworthy. No true Christian is going to argue against that point. Our unworthiness isn't revealed by our feelings—it's spelled out in the pages of Scripture. The Bible concludes that all men are sinners (Romans 3:23) and worthy of God's wrath (Ephesians 2:3). Our unworthiness actually magnifies God's love (Romans 5:8) and makes His grace amazing. After all, grace is unmerited favor—if we were worthy of God's favor then grace wouldn't be grace at all.

Instead, Furtick seems intent on eradicating those feelings of unworthiness. He also departs from the biblical remedy of repentance and faith in favor of self-esteem therapy. When discussing God's revelation of Himself to Moses as "I Am," Furtick somehow finds a way to make it about *us*:

Perhaps God was sending Moses—and each of us—a message: don't skip over the *I am*. Don't flippantly fill in the blank of who you are. . . .

How would you complete the sentence "I am _____"? How would you fill in that blank? How would you describe yourself? It's not as easy as it sounds.

When you go to church, usually you're given a lot of handles on who God is. You'll hear about his love, holiness, justice, and goodness. . . . Of course, this is of supreme importance.

But often we don't know who we are. . . . See, it's one thing to know who *God* is to you, but who are you to you? Maybe you can describe and define God, but does that sync up with how you describe and define yourself? [5]*Unqualified*, 20–22.

I won't even try to exegete that psychobabble. But it is worth noting that rather than focusing on the character and nature of God, Furtick makes those glorious truths merely the backdrop for his man-centered emphasis.

The answer to our lack of qualification, according to *Unqualified*, is to fill in that blank with the right "third word"—I am _____. In fact Furtick's third words form the central theme of his book.

He even devotes several pages to an "I am" self-evaluation, complete with twelve categories of who we are. The confessional options he suggests for describing sexuality are particularly disturbing: "I am straight. I am gay. I am lesbian. I am bisexual. I am unsure . . ." [6]*Unqualified*, 46. Furtick just leaves the possibilities of sexual identity hanging without any explanation or evaluation.

But what he does make clear is that negative perceptions of ourselves are dangerous. They can hinder our discovery of the self-esteem God desires for us. And that's where Furtick's journey of self-discovery also doubles as a message of gospel inversion.

"An intolerance of your weakness will make it hard to be content with the real you." [7]*Unqualified*, 53. Third words like "sinful" and "unworthy" are equated with "[giving] up on yourself." [8]*Unqualified*, 77. Readers are encouraged "to figure out who you really are and to value the real you as much as God does." [9]*Unqualified*, 145. And if Furtick is to be believed, God values us a lot: "God believes in you" and desires to say "I love everything there is to know about you." [10]*Unqualified*, 40.

Big problem. All of those quotes should be red flags for anyone with a basic understanding of the gospel. And because Furtick continually fails to distinguish between believers and unbelievers (the terms he uses to identify one's spirituality don't clarify anything: "I am Catholic. I am an atheist. I am agnostic. I am Christian . . ." [11]*Unqualified*, 46.), he offers dangerous comfort to people who are bound for hell. Moreover, by never advocating confession and repentance of sin, he points those who are under conviction of sin away from the only path to forgiveness (Luke 13:1–5; Acts 17:30; 1 John 1:9).

Throughout *Unqualified* there is no sense of sin's eternal penalty, man's depravity, or the true source of man's value in God's eyes. We're not all special snowflakes, inherently precious and valuable. Instead, our true value as God's people lies only in the immense price Christ paid to purchase redemption for unworthy sinners: "Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life . . . but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18–19; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:23).

So not only does Furtick completely miss the point of John MacArthur's critique, he is also tone deaf to the clear instruction of Scripture. In fact, his handling of Scripture in *Unqualified* only serves to

further prove John's point.

A pastor must be "able to teach" God's Word (1 Timothy 3:2), laboring "in the word and doctrine" (1 Timothy 5:17 KJV), and "a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

On that point alone, Steven Furtick supplies us with ample proof that he is unqualified to stand in a pulpit and has no business shepherding the flock of God.

"Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment" (James 3:1).

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