



Sermon #1 - Titus 1.1-4

Intro

There is a phrase we use in everyday language to express that we've made a big commitment to or investment in something. When we make a decision that steps us up into a real sense of permanent commitment to something or someone. When we are that committed there's a common expression we say: we are in it "for the long haul."

You ever had that moment? It's a combination of pride and a little fear right. Because usually this means you are "adulting" at a new level.

- You go from renting an apartment to buying a house and it's a huge celebration that's also a little scary because now you are in it for the long haul. Signing on that line is scary because

of the sense of permanence that comes with it. (20 years of debt. Woohoo!).

- You seniors in high school decide you are going to a certain college and there is a sense of achievement that you've got a long haul, a next phase of life in front of you.
- Wedding season is coming up. You have that great moment where you've found the one you want to spend the rest of your life with. You guys write your vows and you look deep into her eyes and say "hey girl, I'm in this for the long haul."
- You hold that newborn baby and the hospital just sends you home as a parent to take care of her all by yourself and you experience the joy & humbling and through tears you look down at that little one and from deep in your soul you say NO MATTER what, I'm in this for the long haul with you.

We get the saying from truckers who load up 18-wheelers with freight they had to HAUL a long distance across the country. They gear up for a long haul. Gotta get that truck with the bed in the cabin, gotta identify rest stops, and gotta get that 64 ounce free refill plastic mug with the bendy straw.

You don't just lightly decide on a Saturday morning to go somewhere for a long haul. That's a road trip.. Road trips are different. You don't pack much for a road trip. You just go. College - Woke up, let's go to Chicago. Great. Get a backpack. Put some cheezits in it. No clothes. No drink. Just Cheezits. Printed off our mapquest directions. Discovered White Castle. Lost 4

years off my life for eating that toxic waste. Good time, then came back. That's what Road Trips are.

Road Trips are fun experiences. Long Hauls are a life-changing decisions. Getting married: get into some pre-marital counseling to get ready for the long haul. Having a kid - you memorize that baby wise book. You spend all of high school preparing for college. Getting good grades, taking SATs, learning to study. You buy a house you gotta get a loan, gotta get it inspected, gotta prepare for the move, gotta take measurements. You know it's a long haul because of how much you prepare for it.

And a lot of times people view church and spiritual things like weekend road trips where we are going to go for a good experience and then its back home & into the way things were. In fact for many Christians that's what their entire faith is built on. A series of experiences that might leave you feeling good & with good memories, but you often find yourself right back where you were before. That's because all you actually did was take a road trip to see Jesus, you didn't move your life to him. And its not that spiritual experiences like a summer camp, a mission trip, a weekend service...none of those are bad. but building our faith on experiences isn't actually building our faith at all. It's just a road trip. And here's what happens...we come into a season of life where things are hard, or where things are busy, and we say "eh, I don't really have time for road trips anymore. That was cool back in college when I had time." Or, I'm doing some other things now, I'm not really doing the church thing anymore. As if faith in Christ was an experience.

And when we build faith on experiences we miss the life altering power of being with Jesus for the long haul. The power for victory over sin, for hope in the face of suffering, for friendship when facing loneliness, for purpose when facing despair, for strength when facing temptation, the power to care beyond ourselves and spark life change in other people's lives ...the power for all of this comes not from a spiritual high moment but from believing for the long haul.

Road trip experiences produce great memories, and also a shallow faith that misses out on the fullness of joy & power for life change that God offers you in Christ.

Over the next couple of months we are going to walk through a letter the apostle Paul wrote to a young pastor coaching him in how to help the people in his church develop a faith that would last for the long haul. We'll be looking at Paul's letter to Titus.

As we walk through this letter we are going to see Paul talk about what the heart, mind, and regular daily life looks like when you are believing for the long haul.

When belief transitions from a weekend experience to a way to flourish in life. And what if I told you the long haul isn't just your 70-80 years here on earth. What if we started looking at your belief outlasting your life? If you caught a vision for generations that would follow your leading. And beyond that, we are talking about a belief that will go on for all of eternity.

I think for many of you this is going to be new, its going to be uncomfortable, and its going to be what God uses to break through the cycle of spiritual ups & downs

you've lived in and really experience the permanent life-giving power of the love of God. That's my prayer this series for you. That you will catch a GIANT way bigger than ever before vision of what God wants to do in your life and through your life. And he can do that through believing for the long haul.

So open up your bible to the book of Titus. I'm going to walk through the introduction to the letter and then give you a fly-over of the rest of the letter. And what you'll see is that the message of the introduction is the message that the rest of the letter applies to different parts of life.

[1] Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ...

Ok let me stop right here. This is pretty big and I don't want to just gloss over it like we all just know who the apostle Paul is. See Paul is now writing as a spiritual father to Titus. As perhaps the greatest church planter the world has ever known. But Paul wasn't always that guy. For those of you newer to church and newer to the bible, this guy Paul had some priors. He was a Jewish Roman Citizen and he was a secret police of sorts who was hunting down Christians and killing them. Let's just say he was far from God.

He's on his way to a town called Damascus one day and Jesus interrupts his life. Jesus appears on the road to Paul, blinds Paul, and tells Paul to stop persecuting him. Then he commissions Paul. That instead of persecuting the name of Jesus he is going to proclaim it. A few days later Paul regains his sight, spends some time with the disciples learning about this Jesus. Then he continues to

Damascus and where he was going to proclaim death to Christians he instead preaches about the LIFE you can have through Jesus.

Here's why I pause: Paul thought he was fine. In fact Paul was pretty successful and prominent in his community. He thought he measured up by religious standards of the day. Yet when he met Jesus, JESUS stopped his life. And proceeded to change everything. Everything in Paul's life was going to now line up around not what Paul wanted but what Jesus wanted for Paul.

And I want you to see that a guy who had taken innocent lives was not too far gone to be used by God. And NOT ONLY did God forgive this wretched sinner, he made him into a disciple maker. Paul eventually became a church planter and a pastor to younger pastors like Titus.

And my point in all of this is to give a word of hope to the man or woman listening today who thinks he or she is too far gone for God to help. In Paul, God redeemed a murderer and made him a pastor. And ever since he's been taking people who wrecked their lives and making them into beautiful displays of his redeeming power.

And he can do that in your life too.

Give him your life for the long haul. And watch him work. Ok in the next 1.5 verses he gives us his motivations for writing this letter.

...for the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness, This is what Paul wants to accomplish by writing to Titus. And it's what you need to know we are going to try and see every week in this series. First the two objectives

1. The letter to Titus is for building your faith

He said its for the faith of God's elect. In other words, the goal is that through this letter God's people will be built up in their faith. But that's different than knowledge. Knowledge is the next thing he says. But first it's faith. And that's important. The challenge for many of you is to separate faith and knowledge for a second. Knowledge is me saying this is a stool can hold my weight. FAITH is me trusting that knowledge enough to rest my weight on it. And Paul says the first big ticket item is that God's people will DEPEND on him enough to adjust their lives according to how he calls them to live. In fact that leads straight to his second objective...

2. The letter to Titus is for giving you God's truth that leads to godliness

What you believe to be true always shapes what you do. And the book of titus is going to say that believing **God's** truth leads to **God**-liness. Leaning the weight of our lives on what God says is true will be evident by the way we live. We will begin to mold our lives along the design God lays out. It will look God-ly. The great challenge for many of us is hearing God's truth but still ultimately decide to do what WE want to do. And we'll practice godliness but only when it aligns with self-liness. So I'll be kind to others because it benefits me or is of little cost if I don't. I'll be godly there because it lines up with being self-ly. But when God-ly doesn't line up with Self-ly then I'm going to choose my truth that leads to self-

liness. So I'm going to sleep with my boyfriend/ girlfriend, I'm going to cheat on my finals, I'm going to use people to get ahead... because that's what I want. And I ultimately submit to my self, not to God. This is why this series is going to be a challenge. Because it will be believing God's truth when it conflicts with self truth. And then living god-ly instead of self-ly. That's why you need to be in a community group so you can talk that out and work that out as you go through it.

Now what gives you the power to choose that? Where is your motivation? That's verse 2

2 in the hope of eternal life that God, who cannot lie, promised before time began.

This is the heartbeat of Paul's letter ok. **Everything in the whole letter builds on Chapter 1 verse 2.** Because the motivation the people in Titus' church need, the motivation that will sustain them for the long haul, is that they have a HOPE of eternal life which was promised to them by a God who cannot lie.

See what is happening is Paul is fixing his eyes on where he is going. And he is saying "I'm basing how I'm living now on where I'm going." his future destination is determining his present course of action. We do this all the time. Some of ya'll are runners. I don't understand you but I do respect you. You know that you don't just wake up on a Saturday morning and run a half-marathon. If I try that next Saturday I would actually die. "Overconfident local pastor dies at mile marker 2." No when you register months beforehand you start

practicing. You start eating right and running because some time in the future you are going to put your body through a tough run. Your Future destination sets your present course of action. When Paul says that your godliness is in the hope of eternal life, that's what he's saying.

Believing for the long haul means your eternal destination sets your present course of action.

And Paul is saying this hope of eternal life is the most SURE THING ever. Something GOD has promised. And he doesn't normally say "God who cannot lie" but he's basically making sure we catch the certainty of this promised Eternal Life! That's where the Long Haul ends. In victorious reunion with Jesus & other believers in eternity.

Listen the whole New Testament is written with this long haul mindset. That GOD LOVES US. And that God Wants Us. God desires for each one of us to spend eternity with him. Everything in this letter is based on the belief that eternity is REAL and that we were actually created for Eternity with God. That's what our soul craves and it won't be satisfied by anything less. In heaven we get what we truly crave: God himself.

I've heard eternity described as an ocean. And we are like fish that are stranded in a shallow tide pool gasping for air. The waters of life we swim in aren't deep enough for what our souls need. And the gospel is the ocean showing us the way back to itself. That you are loved by God but your sin has put you in shallow waters

away from him. God says you must let go of being in charge. You just keep gasping at things. But he will rescue you if you will entrust your life to him. All of it. Even if it means like Paul you lose everything in the process. But Paul says I count everything I have as worthless compared to knowing Christ.

3 In his own time he has revealed his word in the preaching with which I was entrusted by the command of God our Savior:

Jesus told Paul to preach it, and as he did God began to reveal it as truth in the hearts and minds of his hearers. That's how God does it. Paul never saved anybody. Paul preached and God changed people's hearts. Revealing the gospel to be true. It's always a joy to me when I hear someone come up and say "It's like you were preaching exactly to me." That's God revealing himself. Because listen the gospel is offensive. It says you are a sinner. You've rejected God and that rejection has separated you from him forever. So eternity is real from you but its eternity in hell apart from him. And the idea of Hell is offensive. And at the same time the gospel says you are so loved by God he couldn't leave you in your sin. So he sent Jesus who came to pay the debt your sin owed which was death.

So out of love for you he says I'm paying your debt so that you can have eternal life. And now you are forgiven! You are free! You can come back to the ocean! And believing for the long haul is saying the rest of my life here is a worship of the God who died for me and a pursuit of the God I'm coming home to one day.

4 To Titus, my true son in our common faith. Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. This is the end of the greeting. A greeting to his spiritual son to whom, in this letter, he is passing on the legacy of faith. What Titus and the church he leads needs to know to believe for the long haul. And over the next few weeks as we walk through this letter we will see the way long haul belief transforms every area of our lives. So I want to take the rest of our time and show you 5 things you will begin to value as you start believing for the long haul. This is your flyover for the whole letter.

1. Long haul belief values spiritual leadership over personal isolation

The next section we are going to look at is going to talk about elders which is the bible's word for the leaders of the church. And then a couple weeks later we are going to look at people who are older in the faith training up those who are younger. And Paul is making a really big deal is that everyone should be submitted to the spiritual leadership of someone else. And ya'll giving up our individual authority to be submitted to someone else is SO FOREIGN to us even though its SO important to God. The first thing he tells Titus to do...appoint some elders. They are the shepherds. Then do the rest. But you gotta have the elders first.

Listen, if you are young this means Paul in this very short letter is going to put at least two people in a place of spiritual leadership over you. Your pastor, and older men or women in the faith. Can I just ask you for a second...how does that make you feel? On top of that

he's going to remind you to be submissive to your government authorities too.

Do you push back and say "No way...no one else tells me what to do." Can I, hopefully lovingly as a shepherd, challenge you on something: If you are that set against spiritual leadership that usually means you reject God's leadership too. So here's my challenge to you: Have you ever willingly submitted yourself to the spiritual leadership of anyone not named mom or dad? If that's a struggle for you...maybe instead of throwing out all spiritual leadership, you should work through why. Remember...I'm one of those who had a pretty bad pastor experience. The guy broke my trust. And maybe you have a similar story. But God can bring healing from that. And if I would have remained bitter and isolated I would have missed out so much on the growth and investment and joy of being pastored by some good elders over the past 15 years.

Long haul belief values faithful over flashy

The most common theme in this letter is that Paul is wanting to build faithfulness in these people. Which sounds so BORING to the microwave culture we live in. In fact this is why I grow a garden each year. So that my kids, and me, are reminded that fruit doesn't grow overnight. You gotta water & weed & tend that garden for a couple of months before you get anything. And listen a long haul belief values faithfulness to God's calling on our lives. We are in it for the long haul. We are moving there. So we've got time for God to work on us and we are willing to patiently walk with him.

I'm telling you the number one trait we look for in future ministry leaders here at Mercy: faithfulness. Is someone able to be faithful to the task God has given them? In this letter he wants them to be faithful to good works. Living *lives* that model the gospel by giving away time, money, experience, sweat...all for the benefit of others. And faithfulness to good works doesn't mean you wander into a local outreach project, snap a pic, then head out an hour later feeling good about yourself. No it means you get into the everyday messiness of people's lives in order to help them feel a little better. And Paul says near the end of chapter 2 we are to be zealous for good works.

[14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Titus 2:14

That the gospel captures our hearts so much we are transformed into people who love loving others with a love that looks like Christ's love for us.

I told you this letter isn't glamorous. Ya'll Christianity isn't glamorous. It's beautiful. But the beauty belongs to God and we experience through believing for the long haul.

Long haul belief doesn't just sustain for years, it multiplies for generations

I cannot wait until week...I think its week 4. Maybe week 3. We are going to talk about how discipleship in the church, in Paul's eyes, is not so much a program but

more like a family. Where the parents raise the kids. And this right here is probably what his letter to Titus is known for more than anything else.

So God knew people would come to believe the gospel and then they'd become a part of the church family. And a great deal of the time they would come from families where mom & dad were not going to be their spiritual parents. Not Christians or not even alive sometimes. So God says the church is a family where spiritual parents will raise the children.

Because listen road trips are fun...you take your friends and you go have a good time. You don't need a lot of life experience instructions for a road trip. Avoid White Castle...have fun.

But when I'm moving...I want my dad with me. He's moved before. And man I just feel safer when he's with me because I know its all going to be ok. And I'm telling you believing for the long haul means we need moms & dads showing us how to use the dolly & reminding us to put the heavy stuff in first & buying pizza for everyone else who helped.

Now here's the reality in our day: This VERY SELDOMLY happens in our stream of churches. In fact when I say spiritual parents you probably feel a little odd. I believe our church is more than likely filled with spiritual orphans and spiritually absentee parents. In other words: most people have NO IDEA how to raise up someone else in the faith.

And listen if you are not in it for the long haul then that's no problem. You just get your spiritual fix and go back to life. But if you really want the power of God to change your life, you need a guide. So in that week we

are going to talk about what it looks like to be in that kind of relationship. And that will be a challenge to every single person here.

Question for the car ride: Who are your spiritual parents and who are your spiritual children?

Also let me say one other thing that I love about this notion. I was sitting with an older believer a while ago whose family comes here. And he told me his prayers over time has changed from God, don't give me a wife unless she's a believer. To God, don't give me children unless they will become Christians. To God: Never let anyone be born into my bloodline unless they will come to know & believe the gospel. This guy has a VISION for multiplying the gospel for generations! And coolest thing last Sunday he got to see his great grandson get baptized.

Here's my point: When you believe for the long haul, you'll start looking beyond yourself and you'll start asking God for bigger things for his glory and increasingly you'll get caught up in his plan and not your own. Most of you are just trying to get by when God wants to use you to change generations to come for his glory!

Long haul belief values gospel unity over personal preference

In Chapter three he's going to dig in on unity in the body. For most: It's not that we quarrel. That's the churches our grandparents were in. I was around one. I still get a twitch when I hear the words "Church Business Meeting" cause I believe that was the devil's

playground. "Carpet has to be red like the blood of Jesus!" "No it must be green so you feel compelled to GO down the aisle." That was them.

And we laugh at that some but we are worse because instead of practicing unity We just vanish. Which is far worse than quarreling. We say "I don't like that SO I'M LEAVING." Let's just be real honest. Any counselor will tell you it's healthier for a family to argue than to fear abandonment. Road Trip faith says I'll just bail when I don't like it or I'll fight hard for preferences. Long Haul faith says I'll choose unity with others in the family even, especially, when it means sacrificing my preferences. That's hard work. That requires gospel rehearsal.

[2] to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. [3] For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. [4] But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, [5] he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, [6] whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, [7] so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:2-7

We were once...but then Jesus changed all that...so now we are different. We lay down preferences like he laid

down his life. We argue from time to time but we grieve it because we desire to protect the family unity God has given us. In fact a couple verses later Paul says if a person proceeds a few times to stir up disunity, kick them out. That's how much God loves his church. And the rich depth of community that we will build by giving ourselves to that long haul faith is gonna be awesome.

Long haul belief values God's name over my name

There is a thread that runs throughout the letter that Paul is very concerned that everything he is calling this church to will help exalt God as highly as he can be by this group of people.

[7] For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach... Titus 1.7

[5] ...that the word of God may not be reviled. Titus 2.5

[10] ... so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. Titus 2:10

All of chapter 3 is Paul saying live in a new way. A different way than you used to live. Because you value a different name than you used to value. We live in a world where we are conditioned to value our own name. We want to get to first name status. Tiger. Steph. Hilary. Trump. Cardi. Man when I arrive at first name status. Then I'll have made it. And Paul is saying if you are going to believe for the long haul you will be doing so for GOD's glory not your own

In 1715 King Louis XIV of France died after a reign of 72 years. He had called himself "the Great," and was the monarch who made the famous statement, "I am the state!" His court was the most magnificent in Europe, and his funeral was equally spectacular. As his body lay in state in a golden coffin, orders were given that the cathedral should be very dimly lit with only a special candle set above his coffin, to dramatize his greatness. At the memorial, thousands waited in hushed silence. Then Bishop Massillon began to speak; slowly reaching down, he snuffed out the candle and said, "Only God is great." ¹

Brothers and sisters only one name can be great in your life. Any other name being great in your life, including your own, will always take from you. If your career title is the great name in your life it will take your time, your relationships, and all your best energy for years. You'll have fleeting moments of happiness followed by that name consuming more and more of you. But if you make Jesus' name great, it will do the opposite. His name will actually give to you. The more you exalt him the more loved you will feel. The more joy & energy you

¹ *Today in the Word*, April, 1989, p. 24

will have for others. That's because Jesus doesn't need you like any other name does. He's God. So he can give freely to you and promises to always fill you with his presence and his love. Do you know this love?