



Sermon #2 - Titus 1.5-9

Church leadership in the age of skepticism

Last week we kicked off a series of sermons looking at the book of Titus. And the idea is that when you are really committed to something, really fully invested into it and are going to be with it for some time the everyday way we often talk about it is saying we are in it “for the long haul.” I used the example of moving to a new city versus taking a road trip there. Road trips require little preparation and you come back with some fun memories. But moving...that means you are in it for the long haul. You need to do a lot more preparation for a long haul than you do for a road trip.

And we said a lot of people treat their faith like it’s a road trip. They have great memories of some spiritual high moments like a summer camp or a men’s conference that was SO impactful but then they came back and eventually things went back to the way they were. And that’s because while road trip type faith is FUN and memorable, it doesn’t sustain your faith for the long haul. And in this letter to Titus the apostle Paul is passing on to his apprentice the things one needs to have in their lives to believe for the long haul.

And Paul said the only reason you would ever want to believe for the long haul is because of where the long haul ends. Paul looks back at the cross and empty tomb and sees that as a guarantee that one day we will be in heaven for all eternity with God.

That’s the Christian motivation for a long haul faith. Now if you are not a follower of Christ you still believe something about eternity. We mentioned last week that one of life’s most basic questions is what happens when I die. And that belief shapes how you live now. And certainly we Christians get mocked regularly for believing in God and that Jesus died for our sins and then rose again. But everyone believes something. The end of your life will come and you have some kind of belief about what happens when you die. And that belief shapes a great deal about how you function in everyday life.

And I want thank you for being open to learning what we believe and want to ask you to keep that open mind throughout this series. And diagnose your own belief system in

that process: Does what you believe about eternity give you the power, hope, and peace in the soul to flourish here and now? The gospel message got the early church through persecution, suffering, poverty, and even martyrdom. In fact these people flourished in the face of all that. So yes its perfectly ok to have a critical ear as you listen, but my challenge to you is to really assess the power of what you are currently believing. Ok lets jump in.

Titus 1.5-9. Picking up where we left off last week. Going 4 more verses. Hope ya'll have accepted the Titus challenge to read it every day. 46 verses. You could even memorize it by the time we are done with it next month!

[5] The reason I left you in Crete was to set right what was left undone and, as I directed you, to appoint elders in every town. [6] An elder must be blameless: the husband of one wife, with faithful children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion. [7] As an overseer of God's household, he must be blameless: not arrogant, not hot-tempered, not an excessive drinker, not a bully, not greedy for money, [8] but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled, [9] holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it.

Today we are looking at what God says about church leadership. Specifically about elders. Which might be a weird word for you if you are newer to the bible because we don't really use it in everyday English much. Unless lately with elderberries. Which has some kind of dark art magic that makes you feel all better the minute you touch one. But in the bible elders are the leaders of the church. The word is synonymous with pastor.

And this was one of the most convicting & challenging weeks of sermon prep ever because this is talking about the role I play in Mercy Church. And its all about character. So I sat with Courtney and had her read over this to see how I'm doing. Cause nobody knows me better or will be more candid with me.

We live in an age that is deeply skeptical of power structures. And surely for good reason. The #metoo movement is a very powerful & important example of exposing the dark side of what having power over another can turn you into. Praise God where that darkness is being exposed.

I need you to hear right now that the call to being an elder is not first a call to power and authority. It's not. It's a call to servant, sacrifice, death, and slavery.¹ Matthew 20.25-28

[25] Jesus called them over and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. [26] It must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you

¹ This response to power structures comes from Matt Chandler's sermon "What are elders" preached on 1 Timothy 3.17 on June 30, 2013 at The Village Church.

must be your servant, [27] and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave; [28] just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20.25-28

Power and Authority have nothing to do with the calling. In fact it's the opposite. Jesus is saying leaders are given authority in the church *Because* these men show love. They show a willingness and eagerness to serve everyone else. That's who makes a good elder. The type of man who is willing to sacrifice for these people. Who looks at the people of the church and say "I'm willing and ready to die for these people because I love these people!"

Our big theme today is that Elders are to GO FIRST in rehearsing and living the gospel. The Gospel says God loved you and I so much he died for us. And that love is the model by which we love others and Elders GO FIRST.

See the aspiration to be an elder, Which 1 Timothy 3.1 says is a noble aspiration, is not an aspiration unto power, but an aspiration unto death. We Don't let this man be an elder unless he is willing to DIE for you. And Hebrews 13.17 says not only are they servants in this life. But they are accountable to God

[17] Obey your leaders and submit to them, since they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account...

One day I have to stand before God and give an account to God which means for the members of Mercy Church these elders are accountable before God for your soul. That is a weight man. All of this means we don't walk into this role lightly and being an elder is ANYTHING BUT a power grab.

Now here's what I'm going to do from here, I'm going to walk back through this and show you who these elders are and what they do. And if you are wondering how all this connects to your life and why this matters listen:

Believing the gospel for the long haul means traveling a road you've never traveled before. Applying the gospel to new seasons and circumstances. And God in his kindness to you has given you elders who are to go first, and then serve as guides to walk with you showing you what it looks like to flourish as a follower of Christ in a world that rejects Christ. See long haul faith is not an isolated thing. That's the beauty of God's design. He's designed the long haul to be a community project. That's what the church is. We are all believing together for the long haul. Then God in his grace gives elders to guide and oversee this community of believers.

God loves his church fiercely. Calls it his bride. Calls you a part of that if you are in christ. And out of all the ways he could have built his bride...in his holy beyond comprehending mind he found it BEST to design the church this way. So lean in here

Start in verse 5

[5] The reason I left you in Crete was to set right what was left undone and, as I directed you, to appoint **elders** in every town.

Only thing I want to say about verse 5 is that the word elder is plural. And consistent in the New Testament is always a reference to church leadership as plural. Elder**S**. Because of that we have a group of elders who oversee Mercy Church. I'm not the only elder. There are a group of us. And listen that isn't most efficient method by organizational leadership standards. Group Decision making slows things down. But God doesn't build his church for efficiency, he builds his church to reflect his beauty and glory. And because God designed it, we can be confident this way IS best. This isn't Spence the pastor and everybody else do what I say. No. I'm **AN** elder here. And as one of the elders I am a part of the mutual accountability that exists on the elder team.

And the beautiful thing here is that the only way this can work is if this group of elders has massive amounts of humility. God loves unity in the body and the only way this group can function effectively is if they humbly persevere together. Otherwise nothing would ever get done. And the beauty is that this reflects the very nature of God himself. The three persons of the Godhead regularly give honor & glory to one another and existing in perfect unity.

So we different men, all with strong opinions, insist upon unity together because God insists upon it. So ok **ELDERS**.

Ok now to verse 6. We are getting into WHO an elder is. Who is an elder
We are going to look at his character.

This is huge. It's huge for our members to know what to look for in an elder. It's huge for some of you as you will be sent from here to help plant churches. These next 10 minutes may be the most important set of notes you take. A church is only as healthy as its leaders.

[6] An elder must be blameless: the husband of one wife, with faithful children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion

Blameless²: Easy starting point right? Perfect? Not perfect. So what does this mean? They carry themselves in such a way that accusations aren't brought against them. This word summarizes everything that follows it. He's going to say blameless here in the home and then blameless in the church. This is the overarching word used to describe the character of an elder that he then goes into. Blameless, another translation is "above reproach." Why – because he is holding up the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that is a massive, massive deal. He's gotta be blameless at home and then blameless in the church.

Faithful - husband of one wife. Another way of saying that is that he's a one woman man. Listen cards on the table here we do believe the role of elder is to be held by men. And that has nothing to do with gifts and abilities. You have to hear me right here. This is not about gifting. This is

² (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6-7)

about God's design he's laid out for the church. Not gifting. So yes elders are men. And if women aren't flourishing under their leadership they are the wrong men. This has nothing to do with gift set, it has to do with design.

- It's ludicrous to say women aren't good teachers. It's ludicrous to say they aren't good leaders. In fact for our church to grow well women have got to lead in our church. There is no way women are inferior to men. That's not what this is.
- I know several Godly women who are gifted by God and are ferocious teachers of the scriptures and are just far smarter than I am. They have a major role in the church. In fact in a couple weeks I'm going to hit on that role of teaching and disciple making specifically when we get to Titus 2.

Leader of a well ordered home – See what's happening is the bible is saying the home is a proving ground for ministry. Because nothing puts you at war against your flesh like being a husband and father. That's not a knock on single people ok listen its just a reality that the conflict you experience with your roommates you live with now, you experience on a whole nother level in marriage and in parenting. Your selfishness comes out. A man leading a home realizes that he goes about his workday and then when he gets home, that's the end of first shift.

- Everyday when I pull in my driveway at 5:30 if CLT traffic is nice to me I pray "God give me strength for the most important hours of my day." And man sometimes I'm still sitting in the car and my kids are banging on the windows. Like I'm a Rock Star. And we go hard. Playing in the yard, eating dinner, bathing four kids, family devotionals, bed time reading, prayer.
- And when they go down its not my time...then its THIRD SHIFT. That's taking care of mama. Encouraging her, giving her time to rest, talking with her. I've been talking to adults all day and now I gotta zero in care for her soul.
- When is your time? You don't get time. If you want it, its 5am. Before anyone else is up.
- You don't like it? Stay Single. That's why we bring the wife in on the elder process. How is this guy in his home?

A man can't control the conversion of his kids but he can lead them in a dignified, gracious way. You should be watching my kids. They will be sinners but they should be responsive to the loving leadership of their father.

with faithful children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion. Essentially, Paul calls for elders to be faithful leaders and shepherds of their own households if they are to be considered to be leaders and shepherds for the household of God³

Ok next in verse 7 we get this word blameless applied to overseeing the church. And there are things he must not be and things he must be. First we get what he must not be...

[7] As an overseer of God's household, he must be blameless: not arrogant, not hot-tempered, not an excessive drinker, not a bully, not greedy for money

³ (1 Tim. 3:5).

All of these are signs of sin running unchecked in this man's heart. Really all of them reveal this man is not controlled by God's spirit but by his own desires. They reveal that sin, not the gospel, is driving him.

He must not be **arrogant**. – An arrogant leader thinks HE is worthy to be praised. But the gospel says we are wretched sinners and God saved us out of mercy. An elder can't be arrogant because he must lead his people in awareness of humility sin brings. He must lead us to worship JESUS' name not his. Let me say something right here that isn't in the list but is true. Since an elder isn't Jesus, the one thing he must do that Christ did not do: Is be repentant where he sins. An elder is not so consumed by pride that he refuses to confess his sin.

He must not be **hot-tempered** – The gospel is a message of the patient loving kindness of the Lord. The Lord is patient...not hot tempered. In his patience he waited on you to turn from your sin. Elders model that gospel patience by loving strong-willed people. He's not eager to fight. Guys who love conflict are bad elders. Good elders don't like conflict but they aren't afraid of it either. They are shepherds. You gotta guard against wolves and when wolves attack elders go first & often get injured in the process. But better him than the sheep.

He must not be **an excessive drinker** – He's not controlled by drink, he doesn't escape to drink. He's controlled by the spirit and escapes into the spirit. In doing so he models the gospel to be a better escape, a better place to run to, than any substance the earth can offer.

He must not be **a bully** – The Lord has power. But the gospel says he laid aside power and came not to be served but to serve. An elder must model servant love. If he manipulates people & situations he's getting them to do his will, not the Lord's will. This is a wolf not a shepherd.

He must not be **greedy for money** – The gospel is a message of the radical generosity of God. God gave his son for us! Elders must go first in demonstrating that generosity through their own generosity.

Then Paul turns around and says here is what they must look like. Because here is what the love of God looks like in action. And God has called the elders to go first in displaying, in being tangible expressions of the gospel. And here they are:

[8] but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled,

He must be **hospitable** – Jesus describes God's love as a father welcoming his lost son home again. It's loving people. Hospitality is a genuine concern for your soul. Not whether or not your decorations is seasonal. Elders go first here. The idea that this is only for women is an abdication of duty. And a church where elders are hospitable will be known as a welcoming church.

He must **love what is good** – The gospel creates a people who are a light in a dark world. The elder loves obeying God because he has experienced the goodness & joy of obedience. And in doing so he makes the gospel attractive to those around him.

He must be **sensible** – There is not a massive gap between how he sees himself and how the world sees himself. Heard one guy say “He isn’t one of the audition episodes of American Idol. Where he thinks he can sing and the rest of the world is like NO!” Knowing his limits and using reason shows the gospel to be reasonable.

He must be **righteous** – The Gospel is the news that righteousness will win out over evil one day. That yes there is injustice and oppression in this world but that’s not the way it should be and one day God will right all wrongs. And in the meantime Elders serve as models of the righteousness in their own lives and fighting for justice for everyone.

He must be **holy** – The gospel is the announcement of a holy God reconciling sinners to himself. Making sinners holy again. And elders are to model that holiness for the church. You should look at your elders and say I want to that kind of holiness. I want that.

He must be **self-controlled** – This is the positive expression of the can’t be excessive drinker. He’s got to show what it looks like to submit human desires to God’s desires and then show how that life is better. This doesn’t mean he’s stoic. It means he holds his tongue & his email rants. Like Jesus he submits his desires to God’s desires. And because of that you are able to trust him which will point you to trusting in Christ.

Ok that’s who an elder is. Look at this passage again and what you see is that Paul’s overwhelming concern is not ability but Character. Verse 9 tells us the ONE ability he has to have but what he goes through first is character. This is why becoming an elder is not a fast process here at Mercy. We accept nominations from you for men you consider worthy. We talk with him, interview he and his wife, talk to those who know his character, & assess his theology. Then we present him before the whole church and give the church some time to pray & speak up. We assess has he gone first in modeling Christ in the home and in the church? The big thing here is...is this guy the kind of man where the more you see him the more you see Christ THROUGH him.

Now let me tell you what this elder does. What an elder does

[9] holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it.

An elder teaches the gospel faithfully. That’s his job. To grip the faithful message...and to encourage people with it. See the gospel is a life giving message and elders are to come to the brothers and sisters of the church and remind them once again today that GOD LOVES YOU. And God wants you. To remind you that whatever brought you in

here today, whatever weight you are carrying...you can set it down at Christ's feet. Whatever sin you are hiding, you can find forgiveness in him. Whatever suffering you are going through, he can carry you through it.

My job is to point you to Christ. And I have to be faithful to the message.

- It says you are created by God...to know God like a child knows his/her father. He loves you, and he wants to know you.
- You have sinned. I CANNOT leave that out and just tell you that you should live your best life now. I can't. the gospel message is profoundly clear that your sin has separated you from God. You are lost and you need saving. I know that is offensive but at least you can respect that if we believe eternity is at stake we love you enough to tell you and not hide this from you.
- And because you can't save yourself, God sent Jesus to die for your sin. You deserved to die for it. Yet God wouldn't let you. You were guilty, and Jesus stepped in and paid for your sin so that you could be forgiven. And after he died he rose again meaning sin & death no longer have a claim on your life. It means you can be saved from your sin and live for eternity with God.
- But you have to receive it. You aren't born into it. You must receive it.

That's the elders job. Keep that message in front of you and help the people of the church apply the gospel into their lives. We need more.