

## Organizing the Mission "The Most Pressing Need" Titus 1:5-9

### Introduction

- [Slide #1] I hesitate to put it like this. I hesitate to say that anything is the most pressing need we face as a church. But I really believe what we're going to look at this morning from **Titus 1** is the single biggest, most pressing need we have. [Slide #2]

### Big Idea

- **The lack of godly men to give oversight to the ministries here at Grace is hindering our growth and development as a church.**
- It's not a chicken and egg thing. Which comes first? More elders or growth? Growth or more elders? It's cut and dry. Without oversight this ministry can't grow, won't grow. The lack of elder leadership is the finger in the dike holding back the flood of what God wants to do and accomplish through us. We need more elders. Period.
- By way of review from last week. This whole letter is about order and organization. Not because Paul is a control freak and Titus is his lackey.
- Homer, the guy who wrote *The Odyssey*, in the ninth century B.C. he referred to the island as "Crete of the hundred cities." Crete was heavily populated. Lots of little cities and towns with a church presence, a gospel presence in many of them. But even though there were these churches, probably meeting in homes, they weren't ordered. They were a disorderly mess. Paul wants order in the churches there because orderliness brings freedom and allows the Holy Spirit the freedom to do his work.
- Paul left Titus on the island with the specific task of bringing order to the churches. **Titus 1:5** *The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished.* Or a slightly different and maybe better translation of **verse 5**. "Put in order the things that still need doing." And the specific way Titus was to do that was by, the rest of **verse 5**, by *appointing elders in every town, as I directed you.* In other words, in Paul's mind there was a connection between order in God's church and godly leadership, godly oversight. Or as one commentator put it, "A church lacking duly constituted leaders would be defective."<sup>1</sup>
- And the same is true for us. Not that we're disordered or disorderly or defective as a church. On the whole we're not. At least we have some elders. The question of us needing more elders, more overseers is not

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<sup>1</sup> Oden, p. 145.

necessarily for the purpose of *straightening out what's crooked* but about growing even more the good things that are already happening. The more elders, overseers there are the more the ministry can be furthered.

- Think about it like this. You run a small business. The business grows. And if the leadership of the business doesn't grow too, what happens to the growth? It stops. Why? The lack of leadership eventually produces disorder, chaos in the business. For example, if there isn't enough oversight things begin slipping through the cracks. Customer service erodes; orders aren't shipped on time, accounts payable slip through the cracks. That disorder, that chaos, undermines growth.
- Same is true of a church. The church is not a business. Nor are we to pattern ourselves and the way we operate after the business world. Fortunately, churches are getting away from the whole church as business and organization and getting back to the church as organism. However, that being said, there is some crossover.
- Without oversight this ministry can't grow, won't grow. We have two elders serving right now at Grace. Two. That's not enough. We are in need of more people to oversee what's happening otherwise we won't be able to continue growing. In fact, because we only have two elders, I think you could even say that we've, on occasion, pushed up against that disorder, chaos threshold a number of times this past year. The most pressing need we have right now as a church is the need for more oversight, more godly men to help order and grow what God wants to do here.
- So when Paul says to Titus *appoint elders*, he has in mind those officials who lead the Christian congregation.<sup>2</sup> Not necessarily the guy who preaches. The preacher may be an elder but Paul has in mind something different than "the preacher" when he uses the term elder. And notice too Paul says *appoint elders*, plural. The whole ministry resting on the shoulders a single, solitary charismatic individual is an unbiblical model of ministry.
- [John Stott](#) puts it like this. "God intended each church to have a team of overseers...This might mean a single elder in each house-church, assuming that there were several such churches in every town. But it could mean that there were several presbyters in each church." [By the way, those three terms, presbyter, elder, overseer, they're all synonymous—they're used interchangeably in the New Testament and I'll use them interchangeably this morning.] Stott says, "Within fifteen years of the resurrection there was already a plurality of elders in the Jerusalem church. So the one-person pastorate is not a New Testament model of the local church."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Knight, *NIGTC*, p. 288.

<sup>3</sup> Stott, p. 174.

- What this means for us is quite simple. We need a larger team of elders overseeing all the LifeGroups. And when I say LifeGroups think house churches in all those little towns on Crete. Fortunately, we have elder quality people already serving. So it's not a matter of turning stone into bread.
- At a minimum, I think, we need one elder, one overseer per LifeGroup. Ideally, more. And together those elders meet, they pray, they teach, they wait on the Spirit, they plan, they strategize, they dream. And they say to the entire body, "we think this is where God is leading us." And the congregation, all of you, the body either says, "yes we agree. Let's go there, we're behind you." Or "no, we don't see God saying that, go back and pray some more."
- The single biggest, most pressing need we have as a church is the lack of godly men giving oversight to the ministries here at Grace. It is absolutely, without a doubt, hindering our growth and development as a church.
- Before we delve into the detailed description of who can or who should serve as an elder let me add this. It is the body's responsibility, the congregation's responsibility, your responsibility to set aside elders. Paul says to Titus, *appoint elders* because this the gospel had just come to the island. All the believers are first generation Christians. There weren't churches before all these evil brutes and liars and lazy gluttons came to Christ. So Titus is to appoint elders, establish some order and, presumably, after that happens, Titus moves on. So what happens years later? In 15 years? In 20 years? Years later, elders age, they die. Think of the day when Titus is dead. Paul is long gone. Who does the appointing then? The congregation.
- But even in this first generation setting where Titus is told to appoint elders, it's still a joint task between Titus and the churches. Titus is not appointing by himself. Paul had given Titus the basic job description. But it would be absolutely impossible for Titus to know in every town and in every church the men qualified to serve in that capacity. Only the body, only the congregation would have known that information. Again, [Stott](#) puts it like this. "The selection of elders was a corporate responsibility. [The fact that Titus is to look for those who have a] blameless reputation indicates the congregation will have a say in the process."<sup>4</sup> Only the congregation knows who is blameless and worthy of appointment and who is not.
- And so the picture you get is of this appointing is a team effort, of Titus going to every city in which there is a house church, meeting with the believers there, showing them Paul's letter, and asking them who fits the bill. And the people respond, as they read and pray and look at what Paul wrote, yeah, "that's Tom." Or, "that's Joe. They're elders." And then Titus appoints them. "Joe, you're an elder."

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<sup>4</sup> Stott, p. 174.

- If I were sitting where you are sitting this morning, what I would do is I'd be prepared to take copious notes on the detail of [verses 5-9](#). Since this is your responsibility, you need to know what to look for. And then, following this morning's service, you need to schedule a time to meet as the body. Maybe first off just to pray about this. "Lord, who do we set aside to serve as elder?" But after that the congregation needs to meet corporately in the next month, in the next two months, to appoint some elders. Bruce and I already have an idea. We've been praying about this already for months and months and months. Now's the time for you to act. We have qualified people. So, you should appoint them.
- See, the weight, the force of what Paul says for Titus to do is basically this. If in these towns you come across any such person who meets these qualifications, Titus, you elect such a person as an elder.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the risk of doing church without elder leadership is too great. Chaos and disorder will prevail if you don't, Titus. If you come across someone who meets these qualifications, appoint them. They must serve.
- Now this doesn't preclude Paul's admonition in [1 Timothy 3:1](#) that an elder must also desire the noble task of serving. They better desire to serve. Serving as an overseer is a weighty responsibility. But for that person who's wavering, for that person who meets the qualifications, who's qualified, the risk of what happens to the body, the chaos, the disorder that prevails when you don't serve should weigh so heavily that you should want to serve. So when the body calls, you're there. You're in. You're ready to go.
- Alright, let's transition to the text. [Titus 1:5-9](#). Who should serve? The fact that we need more elders doesn't mean that anyone can or should serve as an overseer.
- Who should serve? Mentioned twice. [Verse 6](#) and [verse 7](#). Those who are *blameless*. That word, *blameless*, also translated *above reproach*, is the governing word to describe the character of an overseer. *Blameless* doesn't mean someone who is free from every fault, someone who's perfect. Paul's not telling Titus to look for perfection. We shouldn't look for perfection. Rather, Paul's telling Titus to look out for someone whose authority hasn't been undermined by some disgraceful action. Look for an unblemished reputation.<sup>6</sup> Look for the person whose life hasn't been marred by disgrace.<sup>7</sup> Look for the person whose life, instead, is marked by each named characteristics in [verses 6-9](#)—even if those character traits are barely perceptible.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Knight, p. 288

<sup>6</sup> Calvin, p. 182.

<sup>7</sup> Stott, p. 175.

<sup>8</sup> Knight, p. 288.

- By the way, I was talking to [Floyd Hacker](#) this week about the high standard of what's written here; this high standard that has scared off some really good, qualified men. Floyd said this. "The standard is there to strive for not to arrive at. Just like the law—we can't keep the law." Floyd's right. Nobody meets these qualifications. Only Jesus does. I certainly fail and struggle with this list at a number of points. It's been an incredibly humbling experience to look and study and meditate on this passage this week. The bar is set high, incredibly high. And yet strengthened by grace, some must serve. We've got to get beyond being scared. Do these character traits mark your life? Even if those graces are barely perceptible? If so, God may be setting you apart to serve as an elder. "The standard is there to strive for not to arrive at."
- God will you call, by your grace, even now, this morning, as we look at these qualifications, will you call a cadre of godly men to lead your body. **Titus 1:5-9**. Listen.
- *The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. 6 An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. 7 Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. 8 Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. 9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.*

### Transition

This section on who should serve as elders is broken down into two sections...[Slide #3]

### Organizational Sentence

- **Two areas of life in which an overseer must demonstrate blamelessness**
- [Verses 6-8](#), blamelessness in personal conduct—especially in the home. And [Verse 9](#), blamelessness in doctrinal orthodoxy. Or you could state it like this. An elder has an ordered home and ordered doctrine. And flowing out of that, flowing out of who the overseer is, God's church is then ordered.

### Transition

[First](#), the area of personal conduct.

### Main Points

- Paul gives a litany of things to look for in [verses 6-8](#). Some must traits must characterize an overseer. Some must not. Let me quickly paint a picture of what these terms mean.
- The first group of terms, specifically [verse 6](#), focus on the elder's life at home. "Home is the training ground for Christian leaders."<sup>9</sup> I think the thought is, it's easy to put up a façade in public. It's easy to mask who you really are. You see who a person really is when they're with their family. How do they treat their spouse? Their kids? If they are *blameless* in their conduct at home, if there is order in the home, then if called upon to lead God's family, the church, their leadership will produce order in the church. Family is the most crucial proving ground for who should serve as an elder.
- First, an elder is *the husband of but one wife*. Not that elders can't be single. Too many good, qualified single men have been precluded from serving by churches because of this verse. In Paul's day, most every man was married. It went without saying. Rather, the opposite was happening. Polygamy was rampant. This qualification isn't meant to keep single people from serving it's meant to prohibit polygamy and establish marital and sexual fidelity as the qualification. The elder is not a polygamous philanderer.
- His children, if they are still at home and under his authority, his children *believe*. That word probably doesn't mean believe as in, they're Christians. Rather, they are believers—they believe their father. An elder's children are *faithful* in obeying their father, the head of the house. Which is why Titus specifies this general belief by saying, they, the children, *aren't open to the charge of being wild and disobedient*. "What must not characterize the children of an elder is immorality and undisciplined rebelliousness."<sup>10</sup>
- [1 Timothy 3:4](#) puts it like this. *He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect*. What is so interesting is that Paul is not asking here, of elders, any more than is expected of every Christian father and his children.
- Moving on. [Verse 7](#). *Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless* [there's our word again]. As God's steward, as one who manages and oversees God's house an elder must *not be overbearing*. A different way to say this would be self-willed, obstinate in one's own opinion, arrogant, refusing to listen to others. An elder isn't self-willed, self-pleasing. In other words, he doesn't insist on having his own way. The opposite character trait would be graciousness—an elder gives grace instead of forcing his will.
- An elder isn't *quick-tempered* meaning quick to get angry, hot-headed, contentious. The guy looking for a good argument, the chronic arguer

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<sup>9</sup> Stott, p. 175 quoting Guthrie.

<sup>10</sup> Knight, p. 290.

probably shouldn't serve as an elder. The opposite would mean the elder is peaceable, not argumentative or contentious.

- He's not *given to drunkenness* meaning not addicted to wine. It doesn't say you can't drink.
- He's not *violent* meaning he's not a bully, quick to strike a person. That one pretty much speaks for itself.
- He's not into *pursuing dishonest gain* meaning he's not greedy for money, he doesn't use the ministry for personal profit. He's free from the love of money.
- An elder must be blameless, not controlled by any one of these, in order to serve as an elder. Additionally, Paul says certain things definitely must characterize an elder's life. God's grace should have produced in the elder the list starting in [verse 8](#); even if what's there is small. It has to be there.
- An elder must be *hospitable*, meaning he loves people, especially strangers. Emphasis being on the stranger part. That's a good thing when all that exists are house churches.
- An elder must *love what is good*. He must be *upright*, meaning just, fair, equitable. He must be *holy* and *disciplined* or self-controlled.

And finally, [verse 9](#). Verse 9 contains the [second area](#) where an elder must be blameless.

### Transition

Look at [verse 9](#).

- Paul tells Titus that an elder *must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught*. In other words, "the grip on God's word must be so strong that it must never be taken from them."<sup>11</sup>
- So an elder not only has a good grasp of scripture and is committed to the truth and holds fast to God's word; more than that, he understands the *trustworthy message as it has been taught*. In other words an elder understands the message of God's word; he understands and can explain the story of the Bible, who Christ is, the story of God's radical love for us, his amazing grace. He has a firm grasp on all those things so that...
- And this is crucial, because the task of an elder which is spelled out in [verse 9](#), depends upon an elder having grasped all these things.
- An elder has to have a grasp on the *trustworthy message* of the Bible because the chief function of an elder is teaching. *So that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it*. That's

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<sup>11</sup> Calvin, p. 184.

the ministry of teaching. Positively, encourage others by sound doctrine. Negatively, refute error. Teaching. All the other qualifications are character based. This one, teaching is the only function. This shows you how incredibly important teaching is.

- The chief way elders shepherd God's flock is by teaching. Teaching, moving people toward sound doctrine, encouraging them with the Scriptures that is shepherding. It could be teaching to large groups, small groups, even on an individual basis. Whatever, the elder has to be able to encourage others toward sound doctrine and refute errors that conflict with sound doctrine. An elder needs to be able to explain from scripture why certain things are wrong and build others up with sound doctrine, with what is right.
- I like how John Calvin summarized how this grasp on God's word gets, on the *trustworthy message*, gets put into practice. Calvin said an elder “needs two voices, one for gathering the sheep and the other for driving away wolves and thieves.”<sup>12</sup>
- **Two areas of life in which an overseer must demonstrate blamelessness.** [Verses 6-8](#), blamelessness in personal conduct—especially in the home. And [Verse 9](#), blamelessness in doctrinal orthodoxy. An elder has an ordered home and ordered doctrine and when they lead God's family, the church, it leads to an ordered church.

## Conclusion

- The single biggest need, the most pressing need we have as a church right now is the lack of men serving in this capacity. They're here. We need to recognize them. Encourage them. Equip them. And release them to do what God has gifted them to do. You should be clamoring, in a loving way, clamoring for more elders because you know the good it'll bring to you, to all of us. Two are insufficient. That's not enough. I should have titled this message “eight is enough.” May God answer this prayer for more leadership.

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<sup>12</sup> Calvin, p. 184.