

Bridgeway Main Service - Titus 1:5-9
August 16/17, 2025

We're in week two of a teaching series called God's Invitations, and we're studying the New Testament book of Titus line-by-line, with an eye towards this incredible truth that God is an inviting God. He invites us into his family, he invites us into transformation, he invites us to let him heal the broken places in our hearts, and so much more.

And as we kicked off the series last week by studying the introduction to the letter, we learned that this letter was written by Paul in the mid-60s A.D. was sent to Titus while he was living on the Greek island of Crete. We also learned that Crete was notorious for the bad behavior of its citizens. In fact, in Titus 1:12, Paul cites a Cretan poet named Epiminides who said, **"Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons."**

And we learned last week that part of the reason why the Cretans were such dishonest and disreputable people was that they revered the Greek God Zeus. A simple Google search about Zeus will reveal that he was widely known for his dishonesty, treachery, and manipulation. Because the Cretans admired Zeus, they sought to live like him, often with catastrophic results.

It's into that environment that Paul writes this letter, highlighting in Titus 1:2 that while Zeus lies, the true God never lies, and while following Zeus leads to chaos and destruction, following the true God leads to the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.

*And at the end of last week's message, I highlighted a simple truth about human nature: **We become like the stories we believe and the objects of our worship.***

So, for example, if we believe people like you are always under threat, you will become reactive, overly vigilant, and suspicious of those who aren't like us.

If we believe we are loved by a good God and made with purpose, we will live lives of joyful generosity and service where we are free from much of the fear and anxiety of the present age.

So in the letter to Titus, Paul is urging his young protege to introduce a better story to the island of Crete, a better story we continue to need today.

And then I closed with two questions, **"What is forming you? And what is the result?"** I asked you to consider what stories you're believing and what you're truly worshiping. I hope you had a chance to explore those questions this week; because I'll repeat what I said last week: You and I have nothing to lose and everything to gain from carefully examining the forces shaping our lives, and making adjustments where needed.

Today we're going to turn our attention to the body of the letter, where Paul will immediately begin talking about leadership.

I remember several years ago, I read a book called Creativity, Inc., written by Ed Catmull, who is the co-founder of a little movie studio you may have heard of called Pixar. Pixar, of course, is the creative force behind classics like *Toy Story*, *The Incredibles*, *Cars*, and my personal favorite,

Inside Out. And I remember in the book Catmull was talking about their process for making movies, and one of their guiding principles was so simple, but it's so easy to overlook. For them, what was more important than having amazing visuals or special effects or character was this: they had to tell a great story. If they didn't have a great story then it didn't matter how great any other aspect of the production was, they knew they didn't have a great movie.

And that story makes me think about what makes for good leadership. It's hardly a hot take to say that for a family, a church, a nonprofit, a business, a city, a state, or a nation to be healthy, it requires healthy leadership. And while leadership is complicated, I believe that in the same way you must have a great story if you're going to make a great movie, there is a bedrock requirement for leadership, and if it's lacking, the leader, and the people under their care are not going to be healthy.

And we can find that bedrock principle when we look to what the Scripture have to teach us about the qualifications for leadership. Because when the Bible talks about qualifications for leaders, especially leaders in the church, it doesn't start with competency and talent. Yes, competency is absolutely critical. But it's not the most critical. God knows something that we in our heart of hearts know as well, and that is that high competency with low character leads to disaster. And so over and over again in the Scriptures we see this, and it's your fill-in-the-blank: **Leadership requires character.**

Leadership simply cannot be healthy in the long-term if leaders lack character.

The fact is history is full of examples of leaders who gained influence through the force of their personality, or by appealing to insecurity, or by uniting people against a common enemy, only to ultimately cause tremendous harm because they simply didn't have the heart and the character to lead well for the long-term.

That movie has been played out too many times in human history, and the end is always the same. To this day, so much human suffering in the world is due to poor leadership.

Even in church, there are too many stories of leaders protecting abusers instead of standing up for victims, and too many stories who abused their spiritual authority to enrich themselves, or live double-lives, or otherwise harm people.

And that's why God, who loves us and wants us to be healthy, repeatedly shows us in the Scriptures that leadership requires character.

And as we turn our attention to our teaching text for this weekend, we are going to see what God requires for those who would seek to lead his church at the highest levels.

But while these words of instructions are for those who would seek to be elders in the church, they have profound relevance for all of us. Why?

There are many reasons.

First, we will find in these words God's prescription for healthy leadership. And most of us are called to lead in some capacity, and passages like the one can help us be healthy wherever we are leading.

Second, as all of us make decisions about what kinds of leaders we are going to follow. And it is human nature to be attracted to charisma or big personalities, but we will be better off if we choose to follow leaders who live and lead by God's standards.

Third, we are suffering from an incredible crisis of character in so many areas of society today. And times of darkness create opportunities for the light to shine through. So as you and I live out these character traits, we're going to see new opportunities to show the beauty of Jesus to the world.

And fourth, here's the truth: I'm all for strategy and life hacks and optimizing systems and self-improvement in general. But at the end of the day, so much of our lives will rise and fall on our character. And so God, who loves us and desires our flourishing, shows us in his word what godly character looks like.

Last thing I'm going to say before we get into the text. I've been on staff here for over 12 years, and for the last six years I've had the honor of serving as one of your elders. Currently, Pastor Lance and I serve on our Elder Board alongside four members of the congregation. We are fortunate to be part of a church with incredible elders who love the Lord, love you, and love each other. We are actively seeking to expand the Elder Board by one or two members.

As you listen to the qualifications for eldership today, if you know someone who fits the description and would like to nominate them, please email us at elders@bridgeway.church.

Two caveats: The person you nominate cannot be you or a member of your family. And, in order to be considered for the board, an individual must have a track record of service at Bridgeway in other capacities. We take that second standard very seriously because we believe you must be able to follow before you can lead, and serving allows others to observe if you truly have the other character traits Scripture requires for elders.

So if you have a nominee, let us know, and we'd love to prayerfully consider having them start the elder candidating process.

With that, let's read our text and then we'll go through and figure out what it means:

5 This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—

6 if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

7 For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,

8 but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

9 He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Last week we talked about how Paul had sent Titus to Crete to help encourage and strengthen the fledgling churches on the island. Paul's language here highlights just how young these church communities were. He tells Titus that he needs him to "put what remains into order" and "appoint elders in every town."

There are other letters, like Galatians for example, where a church in a community is pretty well-established, and Paul has to get off their case because they've drifted off course. Crete isn't even at that point. They've got a real *Lord of the Flies* situation going on, so Paul says we need to sort out the chaos and get competent leaders in place.

And he calls these leaders 'elders.'

When Jesus was on Earth, He didn't provide a clear blueprint for church government, but we do know that church leadership started with the original disciples. As they went out and preached the gospel following Jesus' ascension, the need for more leaders became evident. By Acts 6 we hear about leaders being appointed to care for the needs of Greek-speaking Christians in Jerusalem. *In Acts 11, believers in Antioch send money for poor believers in Jerusalem and they donated this money by "sending it to the elders."* Acts 14 says that Paul appointed elders in several cities.

In Acts 20, Paul calls the elders of the church Ephesus as he's about to leave town, and he tells them in Acts 20:28, **"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."**

Elders, therefore, are meant to exercise oversight and spiritual care for the church. We are not told in Scripture how many elders a church should have, and there is clearly freedom for congregations to differ when it comes to the specifics of church government. Those who would serve as elders must recognize that they are caring for the Church that God bought with His own blood. The Church is precious to God, and thus must be precious to those who would seek to lead it. And what is precious is not the institution, but the people.

Starting in verse 6, we're going to see Paul's qualifications for elders. It would be a mistake to take this list as comprehensive of every character and behavioral standard required to lead the church, but these are basic nonnegotiables that Titus must be sure not to neglect.

if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

The first qualification is that they be above reproach, a word translated elsewhere as "without accusation." The idea here is not that an elder must be without sin, as that is impossible, but it does mean that they must be consistent.

The call here is to a lifestyle consistent with their profession of faith. That means they live in such a way that their conduct at work, or on the ball field, or in their community, or during their free time, or when they're in front of people, or when they're behind the scenes isn't going to be something that brings embarrassment to the church.

Instead, we are called to consistency. One thing I appreciate about our senior pastor is that the person you see on stage on the weekend is the same one I see when I come into the office on Monday. That's consistency. A person who is one way when the lights are on and a different way behind the scenes is not fit to lead God's church.

One of organizational values I appreciate most here at Bridgeway is the high value we place on authenticity. What that means is we don't do fake. I don't feel any pressure whatsoever to get up here and pretend to be something I'm not, and we don't want anyone in any Bridgeway environment to feel that pressure. When we're faking who we are to meet a standard, it breeds inconsistency. Authenticity means I can be honest about my flaws and shortcomings, and I can expect acceptance, even as trusted people around me might challenge me to grow. Those sorts of environments produce leaders who are consistent.

If I act like your pastor in this room, but I'm screaming at the refs when I'm coaching my kids' basketball team, that's inconsistent.

When the people who spend the most time around me don't recognize me once I step onto this stage, that's inconsistent. Anyone who is called to lead in the church is called to consistently live a life that shows the genuineness of their faith

There is one area of my life where I really struggle with the appearance of consistency, and here is what it is. I have a horrible, incurable case of resting jerk face. That means even though I am very rarely angry, I look angry all the time. So if you've ever seen me at the gym or in the produce section, first of all, I'm very sorry. Second, I promise it's a face problem, not a heart problem.

Next, it says a prospective elder is to be the **"husband of one wife,"** and this begs the question: Does this mean that only men can serve as elders? There are people who love Jesus and believe the Bible who answer that question in very different ways. And I believe the way we answer that question is very important, and just as important is *how* we arrive at our answer. Here at Bridgeway, we teach that both men and women can be elders and pastors, and we teach this because we believe it is the most biblical view.

We do not arrive at this conclusion by ignoring or setting aside Scripture. Rather, we arrive at this conclusion by understanding what Scripture actually teaches in its context. While we respect and honor those who think differently on this issue and fully affirm they are our brothers and sisters in Christ, we wholeheartedly reject the notion that we arrive at our view by ignoring Scripture, following culture, or somehow trying to deny the difference between men and women.

A few years ago, we did a four-week biblical analysis of what the Bible says about women in leadership, and you can find all of that material on the Faith & Culture section of our website, so if what I'm saying doesn't sound right to you, I encourage you to engage that content.

Getting back to this verse, the male/female question is only one of the questions it raises. What about men or women who have never married, or those who are widowed or divorced?

The answer to all of this is actually pretty straightforward. The phrase “husband of one wife” is an idiom, or a figure of speech, essentially meaning “a one-woman man.” So the phrase is less about literally having a wife and is more about the character quality of faithfulness within marriage.

Furthermore, if we take this passage to mean that only married men can lead in the church, then that disqualifies both Paul and Jesus. It would also mean that a man would have to be removed from leadership if his wife passed away. This would also disqualify men who remarried following the death of their spouse, which would be odd considering Paul actually encourages young widows to remarry in 1 Timothy 5:14.

And then, just to briefly touch on the idea that this verse restricts leadership to men, this would be a very odd thing for Paul to prescribe, given that he personally appointed and praised women who led at a high level in the early church. Consider Phoebe and Junia in Romans 16 and Priscilla in Acts 18.

So here, even though Paul is a champion for women in leadership, he uses male language to acknowledge that in the place he was writing, most leaders were men, but he certainly isn't trying to be exclusionary.

But the big point of verse 6 actually has nothing to do with gender roles, and everything to do with the importance of potential church elders proving their capacity to lead faithfully by the manner in which they lead their families. Greco-Roman culture taught that the home was a microcosm of the city. The way a person led at home was believed to reveal their ability to lead in public. And the truth is that if my marriage is unhealthy and my kids are out of control, that says something about my capacity to lead.

There is another list of qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3, and in that list Paul says, **“if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will He care for God's church?”** And that is a fair question.

Here at Bridgeway, when it comes to our priorities for leadership, we are very clear on the order. The first priority for all of our leaders is God, the second priority is family, and the third priority is ministry. There are too many stories of Christian leaders who have sacrificed a healthy family life on the altar of ministry. Or, I have old seminary classmates who are no longer in ministry because they served at churches that made such demands on them that their families suffered incredible harm.

And I am not a perfect husband. Marriage, it turns out, is a lot of work. I think it's easy to assume pastors have perfect marriages, but that is a dangerous myth, partially because you compare your marriage to the mythical perfect marriage you imagine others have. Our marriage is loving, strong, and healthy, but in our nearly 18 years together, we've had to overcome a lot of challenges and misunderstandings. But I am a faithful and loving husband. And it is not just my Christian duty, it is my joy to sacrifice for the good of my wife.

And I have a teenager and a preteen, which obviously means both of my kids believe I am a perfect parent. They accept my correction with deep appreciation and obey my directions without question or complaint. That, obviously, is a joke. The truth is I make a lot of mistakes. I

apologize to my kids on a fairly regular basis. But I'm present in their lives, I prioritize their activities on my schedule, I invest in them spiritually, I tell them I love them, and make it clear how important they are to me.

And if I can just be honest with you, I am a first-generation Christian parent. I am learning as I go as I seek to lead my family and raise my kids to follow Jesus. And I'm surely making more mistakes than I realize now, but one thing I'm very clear on is that as much as I love you all and as much as I work very hard at my job, my children come before all of you. You all can find another pastor, but my kids can't find another dad.

Stories of pastors' kids who are bitter at the church because their parents had time for everyone but them are all too common. I want my children to love the church, and part of doing that is prioritizing coaching their basketball teams, watching their baseball games, beating them at ping pong, or losing to them at video games.

Paul says look for people whose children aren't out of control, and people who have demonstrated faithful leadership in their investment in their children. This isn't meant to say we're responsible for every little thing our kids do, or that if our adult children step away from the Lord, that leaders are automatically disqualified. But it is to say we've been faithful to our calling in the home before we've sought to lead outside the home.

There's another aspect to this that is really important. Public leadership is, by its very definition, public. When we lead in public, we open ourselves up to brutal criticism, but we also get quite a bit of praise and admiration. And it's easy to get addicted to that.

And too often leaders neglect their families because there isn't a big crowd cheering you on as you patiently listen to your preteen's recollection of the day's activities or as you and your wife go to counseling to work on your issues. But if we can't lead when no one is watching, we're probably not fit to lead when everyone is. And I don't know about you, but I want to follow leaders who lead well when no one is watching.

By the way, I can talk about what kind of husband and father I am, but you probably shouldn't believe me. And I can talk about how I meet these qualifications, but you probably shouldn't believe me about that either. If you want to know if I, one of your elders, meet the qualifications the Scriptures give us, you should probably talk to the people who spend the most time around me. Talk to my family, talk to our other elders, talk to our staff. JOKE ABOUT PEOPLE I PAY TO SAY NICE THINGS.

Verse 7:

For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach (same word as before). He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,

In verses 7-8 we get a list of five things potential elders must not be, and then six things they must be.

But first, those who seek to lead must recognize that we lead under authority. We are stewards of God's church. God is ultimately in charge. The senior pastor of every church is Jesus. No

human being is the ultimate authority in any church. I said last week that Christian authority to lead comes from submission to Jesus Christ. Every leader is a servant first.

And as such, leaders must not be arrogant. A leader who is full of themselves is a leader who will cause harm. That's true in the home, that's true in business, that's certainly true in the Church. And those who lead effectively must be especially careful to guard against arrogance, because there is nothing like success to make us believe we are geniuses who don't have to listen anymore.

If you were to walk into my office and look on my bookshelf, in the exact center of the shelf at eye level is a book called Humility. I've never actually read it, because I've already mastered humility. The reason it's there is that the person who wrote it eventually had to resign from their ministry position for being an arrogant jerk. It's a constant reminder to me to pay attention to my own heart, and to be ruthless about pulling out the weeds of arrogance whenever they start to sprout.

Leaders must not be quick-tempered. So much of our world today is reactive. For some reason, we platform leaders and personalities who traffic in inflammatory rage-baiting instead of calm wisdom. Leaders in God's church need to have the maturity to respond to the challenges of leadership with calm wisdom, not defensiveness and anger.

James 1:20 warns that, **"Human anger does not produce the righteousness of God."**

Or Proverbs 29:22, **"A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression."**

The bottom line is that a person who cannot control his or her temper is going to hurt the people they lead. A person who makes a room awkward due to their emotional outbursts will hamstring the effectiveness of any team or organization.

So, when I'm looking at potential leaders, before I'm interested in their leadership competency I want to know how they react when they don't get their way. I want to look at how they seek to persuade others. Can they do so calmly, using solid reasoning and listening to concerns, or are they inflammatory and dismissive? Perhaps most importantly, can they handle being challenged without getting defensive?

Next, it says an elder must not be a drunkard. Ephesians 5:18 counsels all of us, **"Do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit."** There is no specific command in Scripture that would require total abstinence from alcohol. There are many good reasons to avoid alcohol, but Scripture does not require it. What Scripture does require of all of us is that we avoid drunkenness. And there are many reasons why drunkenness is problematic, and that is highlighted by Ephesians 5:18. When we consume alcohol to the point of drunkenness, we are not giving ourselves to the Holy Spirit for His use; we are placing ourselves under the control of a substance.

Potential elders have the freedom to drink alcohol in moderation if they choose to do so and if they do so in a manner that doesn't cause harm to others, but they cannot lead God's church if they are given to drunkenness.

Prospective elders also must not **be violent or greedy for gain.**

These are self-control issues much like drunkenness. A leader who is drunk, who is violent, or who just wants more for him or herself simply cannot serve others like Jesus. Jesus taught us to lead not by force, but by humble service, and that is our call.

Elders play a huge role in stewarding a church's money, money that comes from people like us, who give as an act of worship. A task like that simply cannot be entrusted to a person who is greedy for gain, or by a person who is willing to give special treatment to top givers, or a person who has been otherwise corrupted by the love of money.

8 but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

Hospitable- In the Greco-Roman world, hospitality wasn't just about having friends over for dinner, but it was about caring for travelers passing through town. The idea is here that leaders must have an outward orientation, seeking to extend blessing to those who need it.

A lover of good- People much smarter than me have done great work showing that our loves are defined by what we love. To lead well, we need to be people who love what is good. Instead of filling our minds with the negativity, salaciousness, and divisiveness that fill our world, we must, as the Scriptures says, **"set our minds on things above, not on earthly things."** To lead well we simply cannot love the darkness of our world but must instead love what makes for goodness.

Self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined- There is a reason why self-control is a fruit of the Spirit.

A self-controlled person cares about how other people are experiencing them, and wants to make sure they aren't causing harm. An out-of-control person does not.

That word for upright literally means justice, so an upright person cares about what is just, not what is going to please the powerful. An upright person is fair, refusing to give preferential treatment to their friends or people who think like they do.

An out-of-control person does none of that.

A holy person isn't someone who does nothing by singing hymns and quoting Scripture, but it is someone who seeks to build up, not tear down, and someone who recognizes God's calling to live set apart for the glory of God. An out-of-control person doesn't do that.

And a disciplined person knows what they're life is about and is steady and consistent. An out-of-control person is not.

You could summarize verse 8 by saying a potential elder must be a person of character.

And then finally

9 He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

An elder in God's church must be able to teach what is true and recognize and oppose what is false. That doesn't mean you need to be able to preach like Lance Hahn, but it does mean you must be grounded in the truths of our faith. We talked last week about how Titus 1:2 calls us all of us to a knowledge of the truth. Potential elders must understand that sound doctrine matters, and must be able when called upon to instruct others in the beautiful truths of our faith.

One of my favorite authors is David Brooks, an adult convert to Christianity whose writing always makes me think. His book *How to Know A Person* is easily in my top five most important books I've read this decade. But in an earlier work of his called *The Road to Character* he draws a distinction between what he calls resumé virtues and eulogy virtues. The difference between the two is probably obvious, but he makes the case that we are taught to overvalue resumé virtues, or professional accomplishments, but undervalue eulogy virtues, the sorts of things we would hope loved ones would say about us at the end of our lives.

And there is nothing wrong with an impressive resumé, but as I've reflected on this passage for the last few weeks, it's amazing to me how much more concerned God is with eulogy virtues. The beauty of the gospel is that it frees us up from giving all of our attention to resumé virtues because we have nothing to prove, and it frees us to pursue eulogy virtues like the ones from our passage today.

He wants to save us from the misery of being one person when the lights are on and a different person behind the scenes.

He wants to save us from being ruled by our anger, by substances, or by greed.

He instead invites us to be people who live consistently, who lead humbly, who love what is good, and who lead and serve with joy. And just imagine, what if we got this right to such a degree that a watching world said, "You want to find leaders who lead with integrity? Look at the church. You want to find leaders who care about justice? Look at the church. You want to find people who live by eulogy virtues and live integrated, consistent lives that are full of joy and authenticity? Look at the church.

The good news for us is that you and I have the Holy Spirit living inside of us, and with His help we can be part of making that happen. Let's pray.