

“The Gift of Leadership”

1 Timothy 3; Titus 1³⁻⁹; 1 Peter 5

Introduction

Eugene Peterson makes the claim that “There are no ‘born leaders’”. His rationale behind this claim is simple, “We all begin by *following*....We start out by following our parents, our siblings, older children in the neighbourhood. Later we follow teachers, coaches, bosses, managers, counsellors and guides. Eventually, writers and saints, preachers and prophets, some of them long dead, enter our lives as leaders and we follow.”

And then somewhere along the way, whether we intend it or not, whether we want it or not, whether we realize it or not, people start following us. We become leaders. All of us at some time and in some way become leaders. People see what we are doing and where we are going; and since it looks like we know what we are doing and where we are going, they follow. Which means that most of us become leaders before we know how to be leaders.

For some people this is exciting, like a dream come true and they take to it like ducks to water. They find that they like being in charge, like being in the lead role, like being followed, and like the way it feeds their sense of worth and significance. It looks and feels like they were born to be leaders.

For other people becoming a leader is scary, frankly it's downright terrifying.¹ (= me) People suddenly start looking to us for guidance, they have great expectations for us that we can't ever remember having said we were willing to deliver on, why even if we are willing, we haven't got a clue how! Such people wish they'd be left alone to get back to being just a follower.

But we can't, at least not all of the time, because just as God graciously puts each of us in places and relationships where we are influenced by others, so too he puts each of us in places and relationships where we influence others.

¹ E.g. Saul in 1 Sam. 10²² “*He has hidden himself among the supplies*”; cf. Moses in Ex. 4¹³ “*Please send someone else.*”

When we realize that we are inevitably all leaders in some degree or other, that ‘leader’ is not a role confined to a job description, we know that we need help—both human and divine (e.g. “so David inquired of the Lord”^{1Sam.30:8}; Nehemiah prayed, “Now strengthen my hands”^{6:9}). We need God’s wisdom & strength to carry out his will for us and those in our circles of influence.

Biblical Contact

So leadership, good leadership is a gift of God to His people. The biblical records show that it is a good and gracious gift that comes in all ages & stages (the boy Samuel, 80 year old Moses), it comes in all shapes & sizes, it comes through men and women, boys and girls. God gifts people for various kinds of leadership including leadership within the community of faith.² In Ephesians 4 we read that Christ himself gave the church ¹¹“apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip his people for works of service...” (**Cartoon –** “Grandma says *THIS* is where our religion begins—when we come out of church.”). Grandma’s right.

The biblical narrative is filled with stories of men and women and communities attempting to work out an effective model of leadership. There are many sources to turn to for inspiration and guidance, but this morning I want to focus on the counsel given by two senior New Testament leaders to their apprentices. **[SLIDE3]** One source is the apostle Paul’s counsel to his apprentices in Ephesus and Crete (Timothy and Titus). The other source is the apostle Peter’s counsel to the Christians scatter across 5 provinces.^{1Pet1:1}

It is helpful to remember that every letter in the New Testament was written *in* and *for* a specific context. **[SLIDE4]**

- “**Timothy:** *Taking Over in Ephesus*”
- “**Titus:** *Starting Out in Crete*”
- “**Peter:** *Keep Serving Through Suffering*”^{1Pet.4:19}

² “The New Testament listing of spiritual gifts and spiritually gifted persons includes those who take “leadership” ([Rom. 12:8](#)) and have “gifts of administration” ([1 Cor. 12:28](#)).” Walter Liefeld, *NIV Appl. Com.*, p.118.

Timothy is not the resident pastor of the church in Ephesus. Though he was young by ancient standards at the time of Paul's first letter to him (mid-thirties)^{Fee,Kelly}, he was not inexperienced, having worked closely with Paul as a missionary and having been sent by him to three previous church assignments.³ At Paul's request, Timothy enters into a congregational mess with the mandate to straighten it out^{1Tim.1:3-4}. **[SLIDE5]** He inherits both the legacy (left by Paul) and the problems for which others were responsible (two of which are named at the end of 1 Tim. 1). Ephesus had been a vibrant growing church^{Acts19; Rev.2:1-7}, with wonderful beginnings: a model church. But wonderful beginnings can end up in terrible catastrophes. Ephesus, the poster church, did. The church and its leaders had been led astray by goddess worship and gotten distracted by quarrelling over controversial speculations to the point where they were no longer grounded in healthy Christian teaching and Christ-like living. They were missing the mark in their God-given mission in Ephesus. Paul's solution is for Timothy to restore both by **leading** the way personally (show & tell), and by putting godly **leaders** in place who could keep them on track spiritually and missionally.

- “equipping” (*kartartismos*) = bringing to a condition of readiness (e.g. medically = resetting a bone or a dislocated limb; used of the disciples “mending” their fishing nets^{Mk1:19})

By way of contrast, **[SLIDE6]** Titus, in the newly evangelized island of Crete^{1:5}, is given the responsibility of laying the foundations for a Christian community in a culture that doesn't know much about spiritual community or apprenticeship in Christ-like living. Someone has caricatured Crete as a kind of first-century Wild West, “a rough-edged mixture of Yukon gold rusher, Texas cowboy, Saskatchewan sod-buster, and Montana militia man.”⁴ The one phrase in the letter to Titus, an unflattering one at that, that gives us a window into the context in which Titus was called to finish establishing a church is a proverb by a poet of Crete, Epimendes of Cnossus, a religious teacher of the sixth century

³ To **Thessalonica**, ca. A.D. 50 (1 Thess. 3¹⁻¹⁰); to **Corinth**, ca. A.D. 53-54; and to **Philippi**, ca. A.D. 60-62 (Php. 2¹⁹⁻²⁴) **Ephesus** A.D. 63-65 Gordon Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (NIBC), p. 2.

⁴ Eugene Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor*, p. 187.

B.C, and it confirms this Wild West reputation: **[SLIDE7]** “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.”^{1:12} Commentator J.N.D. Kelly, points out that this reputation was so prevalent that the verb ‘to Cretize’ was a slang word for lying or cheating.⁵

Crete & Cretans provide the conditions for a certain flavour of pastoral work, a certain kind of leadership among a people who know nothing about the Bible or Jesus or good manners or an ethical life. Ephesus and the Ephesians, by contrast, were home to a sophisticated culture and people well-learned in all manner of religion. Titus was called to establish a Christian community and leadership team in Crete. Timothy was called to reform and re-establish a healthy Christian community and leadership team in Ephesus.

I have a hunch that the leadership qualities Titus and Timothy were each looking for in their particular setting had similarities, and differences. And Paul’s letters to each bear this out **[SLIDE8]** (yellow = identical; green = similar; etc.). In general the needs of one congregation will be similar to one another given that basic human nature is the same across cultures and across the ages. So most of the qualities Paul mentioned in his letter to Timothy working in Ephesus, match those in his letter to Titus working in Crete. Many writers and commentators have also noted that Paul’s list’s also overlap significantly with the character sketches for discerning leaders that we find in other ancient Greek & Roman writers.

An often cited example is Diogenes Laertius’ sketch of the stoic’s concept of a good man: “He must be married...without pride...temperate...combine prudence of mind with excellence of outward behaviour.” Odosander, another Greek of antiquity, outlines the character of the ideal commander: “He must be prudent, self-controlled, sober, frugal, enduring in toil, intelligent, without love of money, neither young nor old, if possible the father of a family, able to speak competently, and of good reputation.”⁶

⁵ J.N.D. Kelly, A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, p.235.

⁶ Both cited by Lynn Anderson, pp.130-131.

So it is clear that when Paul used the literary form of character sketches, he did not intend to provide a complete and absolute list of qualifications. He would probably be shocked to see his material used as a checklist (as he would of his spiritual gifts list which also vary from letter to letter in the NT). What Paul does is simply broadstroke two character sketches (similar & different). Similar focus = good character and reputation in marriage, family, business, community & good teacher (good ability, good grasp of the truth, good demeanor).

The list in Titus pictures the sort of people who would make good shepherds and leaders on the island of Crete, and the other in 1 Timothy sketches the sort of people who would make good shepherds and leaders in the city of Ephesus. And Peter's words to leaders in general is: **[SLIDE9]** keep focused on being "shepherds of God's flock that is under your care..." (1 Pet. 5²⁻⁴)

Today, as then, no two churches are exactly alike. Each faces its own challenges and opportunities. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses. Appropriately, then, in addition to the leadership qualities sketched in Scripture, a local congregation like ourselves, or a strategic ministry team, might compile their own list of qualities important for leaders in a particular context. Actually, most congregations, businesses, and ministries do this either consciously or unconsciously, written or unwritten. **[BLANK10]**

- The need to be multi-cultural (in Coquitlam vs. Elm Creek), multi-lingual (Montreal Canadian's head coach), multi-age ("elder" = age? See 1 Tim. 4¹²), multi-gender (1Tim.3¹¹; widow's qualities in 5⁹⁻¹⁰; Romans 16 = mixed leadership team including Jews & Gentiles, men & women)
- The need for a diversity of abilities and interests & skill sets
- Discerning what is needed most *in this season* of our church's life, in our community's life...Compare/Contrast Moses with Joshua...Paul with Barnabas...Miriam with Deborah

- E.g. 1 Chr. 12³² “*from Issachar, men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.*”)

Two Examples – One Rural & One Urban

- a) Lynn Anderson’s example...His friend Dr. Carrol Osburn, grew up in rural Arkansas and said that “an elder in the Black River bottoms of Arkansas would not likely command much respect unless he owned high-class coon dogs. If a man didn’t have enough sense to know good dogs, how could he possibly have enough sense to lead a church?”
- b) Lynn Anderson’s father had only a sixth-grade education and spent very little of his time in the city—even less around business leaders. “He understood virtually nothing of the complexities posed by urban racism...pluralism, or runaway materialism. Yet he served for years, unusually effectively, as a shepherd of a small church in western Canada. Dad, in turn, was mentored by Russel Elford, a rural man, who in his whole lifetime, never once lived in a city or even a small town. Dad and “Brother Elford”—both of whom I consider spiritual giants and very suited as spiritual leaders in their native settings—would hardly be equipped to shepherd an urban church of college-educated professionals, entrepreneurs, and CEOs like my current church family in the Park Cities of Dallas. This takes shepherds with [the same good character but a different] set of skills.”⁷

Conclusion

- A call to embrace this “noble task”^{kalos ergon}... **1 Tim. 3^{13, 15}** (cf. 1 Pet. 5²)
- A call to make leaders work a blessing, not a burden (Heb. 13¹⁷...Pray for us.)
- A call to put the emphasis of discerning leaders on qualities and congregational needs, **not** on gender or position or power.
- Remember that ultimately Christian leadership is about **following Jesus**

⁷ Lynn Anderson, They Smell Like Sheep, p. 133.