



Five Bible Stories about Leadership¹

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Titus: *Paul's Leadership Development Deputy for Crete*

Think of the Apostle Paul as a mentor of younger leaders:

What does the mentor do for the disciples?

When does the mentor need to fade away?

What does the mentor leave behind?

Where does training of the leaders occur?

Titus 1:1-13 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior.

To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless, not overbearing, not quick tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. 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. There are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception . . . they must be silenced because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." He has surely told the truth!

For Discussion:

1. Is the reputation of the Cretans similar to today's human condition?
2. What answers can Christians offer for this situation?
3. So then, what was the task for Titus? For leaders today?

Paul: *Building Common Ground Through Observation and Insight*

Acts 17:16-18:1 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and god-fearing Greeks as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is his babbling trying to say?"

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Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.” (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.”

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’”

For Discussion:

1. How was Paul using his time while waiting for Silas and Timothy?
2. Why did Paul start building relationships in the synagogue?
3. What theme did Paul use to introduce his talk to the Areopagus?
4. What do you see as the strong points of Paul’s teaching in Athens?

Timothy: Paul’s “*Adopted Son*” and *Spiritual Heir*

What does the record show about Timothy?

Acts 16:1—His home was in Lystra. Mother: Eunice; Grandmother: Lois, both already Christians. What does 1 Timothy 1:1 suggest?

1 Timothy 5:23—Timothy’s health was a concern to Paul; at least occasionally, Timothy had stomach problems. He shared Paul’s sensitive concern for culture. Perhaps Timothy was aware of his mixed cultural parentage (mother Jewish, father Greek).

Other texts to consider:

Timothy was sent by Paul to settle problems at Corinth: 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10, 11.

Timothy was a leader of the church at Ephesus: 1 Timothy 1:3.

Timothy was a participant with Paul in writing Paul’s letters: 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; Philemon 1.

Make a list of the specific recommendations that Paul gives Timothy in the six chapters of this letter. Select from each chapter the one or two of Paul’s suggestions that seem to be of greatest importance for a young Christian, or *especially for a young leader of the church*.

Chapter 1: _____

Chapter 2: _____

Chapter 3: _____

Chapter 4: _____

Chapter 5: _____

Chapter 6: _____

Select one verse from 1st or 2nd Timothy that clearly expresses Paul's concern for Timothy:

Read Philemon; Acts 20: 2-5; and Romans 15:1-16

Onesimus, Tychicus, and Urbanus: *Unique Servants*

As we meet characters within a story or a drama, we assign to each one an association with some measure of importance. In the New Testament, as a story, no one is more important than Jesus. Paul runs a close second, in authorship, in amounts of his story that we have heard, and in terms of the balances and thoroughness of his life story.

(See Philemon v. 8-21) There are some who receive little mention who come briefly into Paul's stories. Consider three who apparently have little in common, yet whose reasons for inclusion are clearly illustrative of the variety and diversity of the outreach of the Gospel. Onesimus, Tychicus, and Urbanus represent those who are made significant and important by the redeeming power of Jesus Christ. These three have only two things in common: each was a trusted friend of Paul, the traveling evangelist, and each had become a valuable servant of Jesus Christ. Beyond this, relatively little is known of these three—and that is the point! What made them important enough to be identified in the New Testament was their serving style and willing spirit. *Onesimus* is remembered and commended in the little note that Paul sent to Philemon attesting to the worth of this escaped slave. It is clear that Paul is thoroughly enthusiastic about the transformation of character that has come about in this man's life. "I appeal to you for my son, Onesimus . . . I am sending him. . . my very heart—back to you. . . no longer as a slave, but . . . as a dear brother in the Lord." Thus this man who has experienced slavery becomes a servant of our Lord.

Similarly *Tychicus*, likely a man of substantial wealth from the region that is today named Turkey, is identified among Paul's traveling companions in the eastern Mediterranean. In the simplicity of this reference, we see another who is made significant through his encounter with Christ and the leadership of the Apostle Paul.

We know even less about my favorite among these little mentioned of Paul's friends: they called him *Urbanus*. The name could have been a nickname: "the city boy." At least that is the only available detail beyond the warm greeting from Paul in the close of his letter to the Christians in Rome: "Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ" Consider the importance of truly being a co-worker in Christ! Is there anything more worthy of aspiration? How did the Apostle Paul relate to these less familiar followers? In ways that seem to reflect his understanding of the authority that Christ had commissioned him to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles (see Galatians 1:15,16), Paul encourages even these with his warmth and enthusiastic acceptance. **Suggestion:** *Scan the beginning and ending of Paul's epistles to make a list of Paul's friends who are unfamiliar to you.*

John—Disciple And Apostle: *Letters from a Theologian*

Themes: Taking John's three letters as one, several themes appear to dominate and create a flow of literature from concrete to abstract in content and emphasis. Some of these themes are identified in all three letters, some in only one or two. The purpose seems to be the setting forth of a platform that is repeatedly developed and embellished, then shortened and sharpened.

Empirical Evidence: (Cf. John 1:14) John's voice, beginning in his "doctrinal Gospel" and continuing through his letters and the Revelation of Patmos, is commonly heard asserting an empirical, concrete, practical, and applied image of the great abstractions of religious principles and ideals. John is the NT author whose persistent reference to things that can be heard, seen, touched, and proclaimed (*testified to*), distinguishes him as a scientist as well as a theologian.

Light (Walking in the Light): The emphasis on light, illuminating even the obscure and dimly outlined matters of theology, accompanies John's awareness of the basic truth of Jesus Christ (cf. John 3:19). John asserts that light is available and that those who reject it do so as a matter of choice and misplaced fondness for darkness.

Antichrist: Nowhere other than 1 John and 2 John does the term *antichrist* appear. Thus it surely is not a matter to be taken as a litmus test of Christian faith. Some assert that antichrist refers broadly to all the consequences of apostasy within Christianity. Others take it more specifically as a reference to an unholy person or aggregate of persons who actively work against the truth of the Gospel. Either way, it can be associated with the *man of sin* (2 Thessalonians 2), and the promised latter day manifestation of the *beast* (Rev. 13).

Elect Lady: Again, two images are suggested. The "elect lady" may refer to a given person, perhaps a notable church leader or even a widely known and outstanding congregation (consider the feminine word, *lady*, as a fitting reference to "the church as the bride of Christ." Or, in other interpretations, *elect lady* indicates an actual devout woman who was sponsoring a notable "house church" in her own home. Some interpreters suggest that the designation might be a euphemism for John's own wife. In any case, this person or assembly is represented affirmatively and with honor.

False Teachers (False Prophets): These men seem to be best described in the first letter, chapter 2, verses 18-29. Without doubt, these represent the unsettled trouble-makers whose major motive seems to have been to mislead, pervert, and weaken the new churches. A major purpose of this letter was to warn the "elect lady" against these subversives and to remind the faithful of the

importance of carrying out the remedial work in an appropriate manner befitting the Gospel. Here is one of the classic exhortations to *love* (2 John 5 and 6) in obedience to the godly command. But there are limits: showing hospitality to the unfaithful is identified as going too far!

Truth: One of the strongest themes of John's letters is *truth*. God is the God of truth, and the grace of God revealed in the Gospel should never provide an excuse for untruthfulness. In this age of pragmatism, we must be especially careful to hold ourselves faithful to the truth. Remember, it was this same John who transmitted to us Jesus self-description: I am the *way*, and the *truth*, and the *life*.

"Helpers" And Diotrephes: Gaius and Diotrephes were pastors of churches near Ephesus—perhaps two pastors of the same church; but Diotrephes was on a collision course with John. John's references to "helpers" reflects his approach to developing pastors from within the churches. He had formed this practice among his clusters of converts ("helpers") in the various churches he had "planted." This pattern was likely the standard practice of the early churches—at least among the churches influenced by the Apostle John.

The Probable Assassin Turned Esteemed Convert: John had adopted the practice of deputizing his leaders to periodically circulate among the churches to encourage, to teach, to clear up dissensions, and to exhort toward faithfulness. On one occasion, some of his "evangelists" were not received by the church pastored by Diotrephes. When they returned to Ephesus they reported this event in John's home church. It is not hard to imagine the hurt and embarrassment. Gaius, pastor of another church in John's cluster of churches, along with Demetrius, rose to the occasion and provided hospitality for the rejected team.

Interesting possibility: many believe that this Christian leader was the same Demetrius, then the silversmith of Artemis (Diana), who was the mob leader who had plotted to kill Paul years before when he first visited Ephesus (Act 19:24).

The Hazard Of "Things": The church has always faced the problem of wealth. The Christlike life rarely is transformed into a life of ease and comfort. Thus faithfulness to Christ often calls for sacrifice. We discover sooner or later that the pursuit of wealth works against devotion to Christ and can undermine our commitment to live for him, first and foremost. John seems to appreciate the good things of life, but he keeps his priorities under close discipline. The prayer in 3 John is beautiful and delicately balanced. Note his first line: I pray that you, Gaius, may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.

John contrasts Diotrephes and Demetrius, as we can understand from these letters. But his appreciation of Demetrius is remarkable: "Demetrius is well spoken of by every one—and even by the truth itself." Pray that the same might be said of each of us!

A personal note from this churchman, a helper and guide for the Budapest event:

Although I am originally a "small town boy" from the American southland, most of my career has been in urban centers in Michigan and Illinois. I would be absolutely thrilled if the Apostle Paul could some day remember me as "The City Boy, our co-worker in Christ." And it is my prayer that the same would be said of each of you, my colleagues.