Great Christian Leadership: Begin with The Who and Not The What

Reputation, family, character and sound teaching – Paul's list for leaders

SPEAKER	Geno Hildebrandt
DATE	Sunday, July 26, 2020
PASSAGES	Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:4-5; Acts 2:11; Luke 5:31; Proverbs 31
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:00:00 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Paul told Titus to set things in order on Crete by beginning with the who: appoint the right leaders. They must be above reproach inside and outside the church, faithful in marriage and family, free of arrogance, anger, drunkenness, violence and greed, marked by hospitality, goodness, self-control, uprightness, holiness and discipline, and able to teach sound doctrine and correct error. And the secret is that the list describes every follower of Jesus.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Great leaders begin with the who, not the what. With the right people, the right direction follows.
- The church must be a healthy place so that people far from God can find their way to eternal life.
- "Above reproach" is about reputation. It matters what outsiders think of a church's leaders.
- Look at a leader's home. Faithfulness to one wife, and a household that is not wasted or rebellious, are evidence of character – and imply a strong wife.
- Hospitality heads Paul's list of positives: leaders should gravitate toward the stranger and the new face.

- The one trait in all four of Paul's lists is the ability to teach: holding firm to the received word, giving healthy teaching and refuting error.
- These qualities are the ideal for every believer, not only elders.

▶ 0:50:16

Geno opened standing a little off center – "it's a metaphor," he explained, and admitted jokes are less funny when you have to explain them. The indoor congregation had doubled, from ten to twenty, with room for twenty more. Then he continued his series in Titus with a business book.

Good to great

▶ 0:51:57

Jim Collins, who taught at Stanford's graduate school of business, studied what made great business leaders successful and wrote the 2001 bestseller *Good to Great*. The most critical insight, in Geno's view: great leaders do not begin with the *what* of the business. They begin with the *who* – choosing the people they will do it with.

▶ 0:53:02

Two thousand years earlier, Paul did something very similar. After opening his letter with eternal life, he quickly zeroes in on choosing the right people to lead the church. "He began with the who." The what would come later in the letter.

The text

▶ 0:54:01

> "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 – 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."
>
> TITUS 1:5–6 ↗

> "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, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined."
>
> TITUS 1:7–8 ↗

Five negatives and six positives, plus "above reproach": twelve characteristics.

> "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."
>
> TITUS 1:9 ↗

Set things in order

▶ 0:55:28

Titus's task was twofold: put what remained in order, and appoint elders in every town. Why order? So the church could thrive as a community where people far from God find the hope of eternal life. Jesus died for sinners and left the church to represent him, so it ought to be healthy, not a place people despise. On Crete, false teachers were spreading dangerous doctrine, leadership was lax, and the letter goes on to mention rebellion, slavery to desires and gossip.

▶ 0:56:32

The Cretan church was probably planted by Jewish believers who heard Peter at Pentecost – Cretans are named among the crowd (Acts 2:11) – and went home to worship together. That Jewish root would become an issue later in the letter.

Elders and overseers

▶ 0:58:00

The word for elder, *presbyteros*, did not yet carry a technical sense; it meant an older, dignified man. In verse 7 Paul uses *episkopos*, overseer or bishop. You may hear in those words two streams of the Christian church, Geno noted, but Paul uses them interchangeably: an older, dignified person whose job is to oversee.

Above reproach

▶ 0:59:03

Paul says it twice. It means blameless, and it aims at reputation: "Oh yeah, that guy – he's a good guy." That reputation should hold inside the church and outside it. Not the town drunk; not the man who doesn't pay his bills. Some think the truly Christian attitude is "I'll do what the Lord says; it doesn't matter what other people think." That is not bad in itself, but it is the wrong way to think about church leaders. Outsiders should be able to look on and say, "He's wise. That's a good choice."

The family

▶ 1:00:26

From that umbrella, Paul zeroes in on the family. "The husband of one wife" at least means not a polygamist. Can a divorced man be an elder? Can a single person? Reasonable people disagree, Geno said – he has written a paper on the first – and he would not settle either that morning. What is certain: if a man is married, he must be married to one woman, faithful to her, and treating her right.

▶ 1:02:01

Paul says little about wives, but Geno pointed out what is implied. No man can raise healthy children into adulthood without "a stellar wife," a woman of substance who loves and supports him. Anyone who thinks the husband does everything "has never been married or lives under a rock." "Way to go, ladies" – the woman of Proverbs 31 is in play here.

▶ 1:03:32

"His children are believers" implies an older family, with children old enough to choose. If a man cannot persuade those who watch him most closely, by how he lives and treats them and their mother, how will he influence others – unless he is a hypocrite? Paul makes the same point elsewhere:

> "He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?"
>
> 1 TIMOTHY 3:4–5 ↗

▶ 1:05:30

Then the two "terrible words": debauchery – the Greek suggests someone wasted, unsaved or unsavable, like a young addict – and insubordination, a rebel. Hard words, Geno said, but full of hard-won wisdom, and the church does wrong to put people in leadership who do not manage their homes

well. Don't children have free will? Yes, and a parent may not be accountable for a child who chooses not to follow Christ – but can be for children who are wasted and rebellious. Then he came back to the text: it does say the children are believers, and he thinks it does a family a disservice to put a man in leadership before his children are grown and their faith is known.

Five negatives

▶ 1:08:21

Not arrogant – proud, disregarding others to please oneself, like the narcissist who does not even know you are in the room. **Not quick-tempered. Not a drunkard** – literally "lying beside wine." **Not violent**, always ready to fight with fists or words. **Not greedy for gain**, which also means pursuing money to the neglect of the church. Leaders must say, "I could make more if I put in more hours, but I'm going to give my time to the church."

▶ 1:09:32

It is a high standard and the right one, Geno said – and those who lead at Hope are sacrificing a great deal, turning down things to have time for their families and the church. "They are to be honored and blessed and encouraged."

Six positives

▶ 1:10:37

Hospitable heads the list, and Geno loved that. It means loving the stranger, the one on the margin, the newcomer – literally opening one's home. If leaders seem to gravitate toward new faces, that is why, though it does not mean they ignore those already there. **A lover of good:** follow your leaders around and look at the music, books, movies and culture they take in; it should have integrity and substance.

▶ 1:11:42

Self-controlled, in mind and emotion, acting rationally and discreetly under pressure. **Upright**, conforming to right standards. **Holy** – best understood as unpolluted, with no admixture of loves: "I love God, and everything else is after that." **Disciplined** – not a monster in the gym, but able to say no to what we ought to say no to, with appetites held in check.

▶ 1:13:03

"Here's a secret: this list of traits is not just for church leaders. It's for everybody that belongs to Jesus." No one gets to say, "I don't need to be disciplined or holy – that's for the elders." If every believer fit this description, there would be leaders everywhere. He quoted a professor: these characteristics are not

unique to elders but describe "the ideal character of all Christian men and women," a morally well-rounded person who will not disgrace the Lord and his church.

Holding firm to sound doctrine

▶ 1:14:38

The one trait found in all four of Paul's lists of qualifications is the ability to teach. Leaders at every level – small groups, children, teenagers, the whole church – must grasp the word and help those going astray come back. "The trustworthy word as taught" means what was handed down: not "I've found a new doctrine between the lines," but "What do the lines teach?"

▶ 1:16:25

"Sound" doctrine means healthy doctrine that gives health. It is the same word Jesus used when he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." Leaders should know the church's fundamental teachings well enough to pass them on and to spot quickly where someone has twisted them – and to rebuke those who contradict it, removing error from the community. Geno's summary: "Christian leaders should be persons of high moral character and good reputation who can build up the saints and confront false teachers."

How Hope is led

▶ 1:18:38

Hope Chapel is led by a board whose majority are elders, who have wisely chosen to have others they see as leaders serve alongside them – at present all women – each with an equal voice. Geno and Matt sit on the board ex officio, without a vote, as consultants, visionaries and its executive arm. He named the current elders and leading women in alphabetical order – "nobody is more important than anybody else" – noted the board was looking for a third woman, honored two retired elders, and described Steve Hawthorne as a teaching elder, one of the best students of Scripture he has known.

▶ 1:21:40

In the local church, the who matters far more than the what. Not every community is called to the same work, but people of good character who seek Christ will find God's purpose for theirs. Serving in leadership is honorable, hard and prayerful work, so we should bless and honor those who serve this way. Hope, Geno said, has been led well for more than forty years. He thanked God for that legacy, beginning with Dan Davis and those who served with him, and asked for God's favor in raising up another generation of men and women of high moral fiber to lead the church into the future.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Titus 1:5–6
- Titus 1:7–8
- Titus 1:9
- Acts 2:11
- Proverbs 31:10–31
- 1 Timothy 3:4–5
- Luke 5:31

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Why do you think Paul begins with the who rather than the what? Where have you seen that principle at work, for good or ill?
2. Geno said it matters what outsiders think of church leaders. How do you hold that together with not living for people's approval?
3. Paul looks at a leader's home. What does your own household reveal about your character right now?
4. Of the five negatives and six positives, which one is most needed in your life this season?
5. Geno called the list "for everybody that belongs to Jesus." What would it look like for you to grow in being able to teach and pass on the faith?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Geno Hildebrandt is Hope Chapel's senior pastor and sits on its board ex officio, alongside Matt Ryniker. He leads a weekly Tuesday-night Bible chat on Zoom and, in the summer of 2020, was preaching through the letter to Titus as the church met outdoors, indoors and online.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbewAm4IA-c&t=0s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.