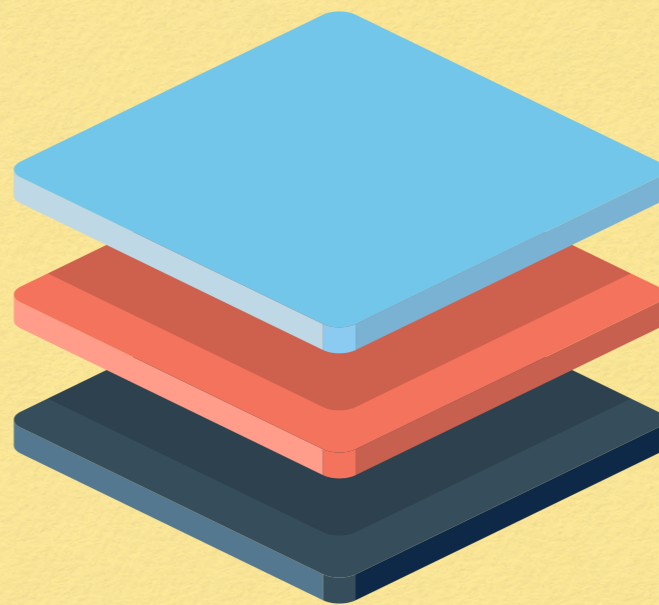


3



Layers of Leadership

LESSONS FROM PAUL'S LETTER TO TITUS

Greg Willson

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We all need good leaders.

Everybody leads somebody. Whether you're young, old, or somewhere in between, chances are someone is at least interested in your opinion or thoughts on some level. These are opportunities to lead. How can we know if we're doing that well?

There have been countless leaders over our human history who have tried to answer this question. Ancient philosophers debated over the understanding of virtue, philosopher-speak for "what it means to be good." Plato had four main areas that he focused on, Seneca narrowed it down to one, the Romans expanded the Greeks' list to 19, of which included humour and manliness. This quest continues today through our contemporary self-help gurus. A quick scan at any bookshop (the ones that are still open, that is) will reveal walls of books dedicated to virtue via productivity, meditation, overcoming fear, learning to love oneself...and the list goes on.

There have been many leaders since antiquity, coming and going, telling us what it means to be good. And with each new

philosopher telling us what is good, we get a different checklist, an amended edition, or an edited version of something that came previously. We see one leader over here only to chase after yet another leader over there before we even know it. We have scattered and distracted hearts so we jump from one leader's idea to the next, wondering if this is particular tip or trick or life hack will fix us and give us the good life.

Because we have scattered hearts, we need help to determine what makes a good leader.

On the other side are the people we care about that we lead: in the church, in our family, in our jobs and friendships. If someone depends on you or asks for your input or advice, you are a leader at some level. And if we're scattered about, struggling to find good leaders for ourselves, how can we be sure we are leading others well?

Because we have scattered hearts, we need help to determine what makes a good leader.

This ebook is for all of us. All of us are being led by someone, and pretty much all of us lead others in some way or another. That makes learning about what makes good leaders very important. As humans, we are always making disciples, the question is what kind? And of who? Everybody leads somebody. Whether you're young, old or somewhere in between, chances are someone is at least interested in your opinion or thoughts on some level. These

are opportunities to lead. We need help to determine what makes a good leader.

This is exactly what Paul addresses in his letter to Titus in verses 6-9 of chapter 1.

Titus' Situation.

Titus' situation is our situation. Titus originally accompanied Paul on a church planting journey to Crete. Eventually Paul had to leave and Titus was to remain in Crete to continue the work. Now we find Paul writing to Titus, a lone church planter with a need for leaders. The first priority for Paul in strengthening and organising the church is establishing good leaders.

Crete would not have been an easy place to find good leaders. They were prideful and believed the original Greeks and gods emerged from their own soil. They were known for being greedy, always trying to bend the world to their own ways. One ancient writer said of Crete: "Crete has no need for wild beasts, for its own inhabitants were sufficient." Later on in this very letter Paul quotes the Greek philosopher Epimenides in 1.12: "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons".

Titus' task was to identify and grow leaders from beasts. Not exactly easy.

Our Situation.

This task is also our task as church planters, pastors, and leaders in the church. Nobody lives in an easy context, every place has its worldly footholds and every act of repentance is hard. We may not be in ancient Crete, but we are all beasts in our own way. And we remain as beasts until God's grace gets into our bones and remakes us into the humans we were created to be.

The type of leaders that Paul is writing about are leaders in the church, elders. Now even though that's the primary focus, that doesn't mean there are leadership lessons we can all learn, whether we aspire to be elders or not.

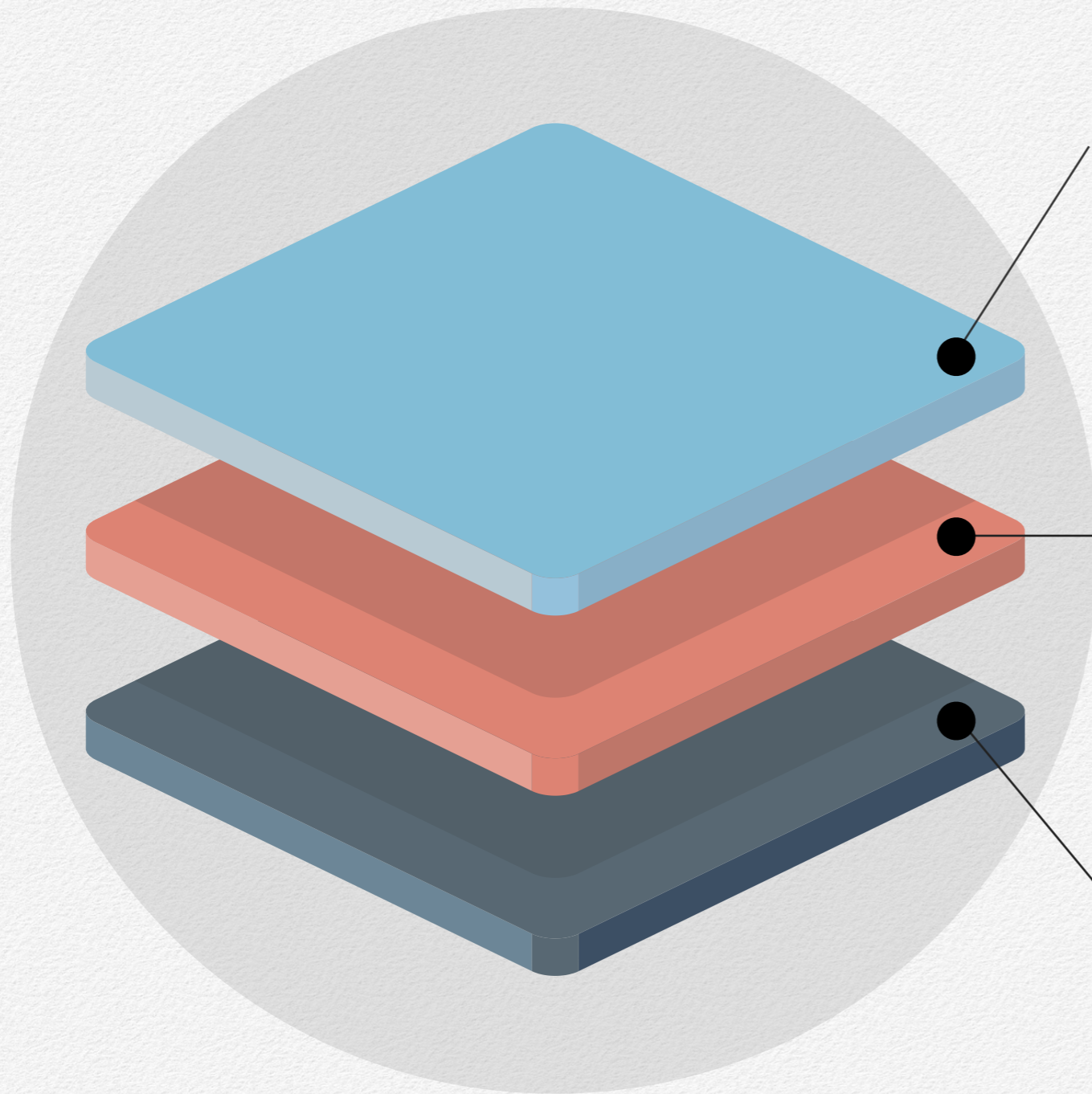
When teaching Titus about leadership, Paul focuses on three areas, or layers: family, personal and truth. The family layer is all about relationships in the home, the personal layer is all about internal vices and virtues, and the truth layer is the message of the gospel itself.

There is somewhat of a stacking process going

on here, hence the term "layers": the truth is the most fundamental building block and gives rise to the personal layer, which, in turn, gives rise to the family.

"Learn how Paul identified leaders in 3 Layers of Leadership, free from @gregoriousdubs"

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Family

Paul addresses this outermost layer first. The family layer of a good leader looks like someone who loves his wife and children well.

Personal

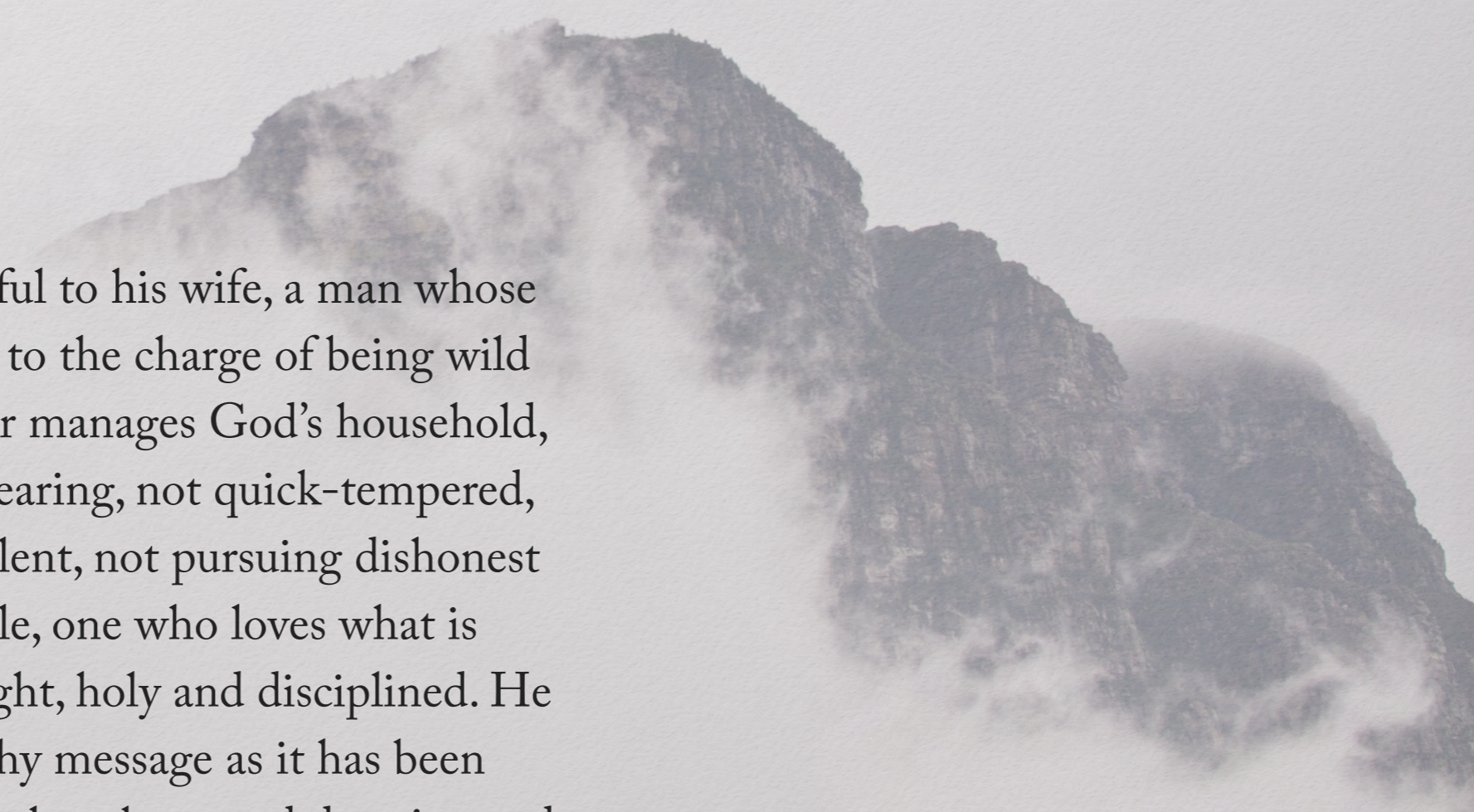
The middle layer is all about the leader's personal life: rejecting the culture's vices and embracing the Bible's virtues.

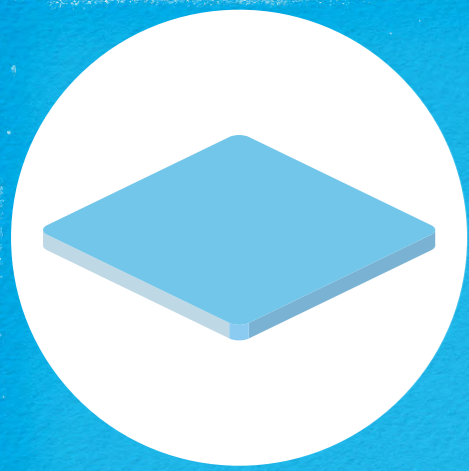
Truth

The deepest layer is truth itself, the story of the gospel. The only way to prop up the weight of the other layers is with this as our foundation.

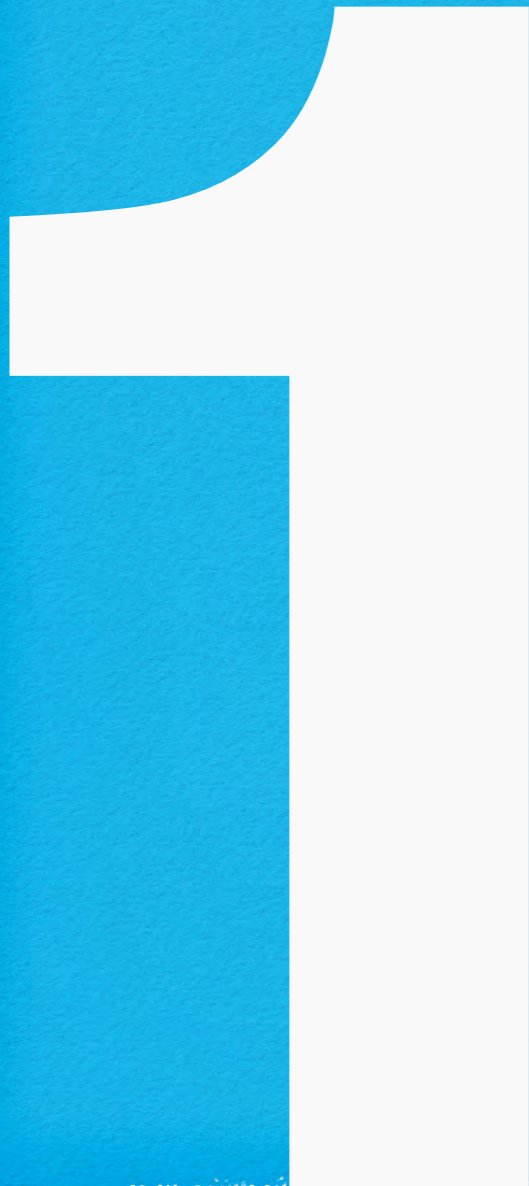
Titus 1.6-9

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.





Family



The Family Layer

This is where it all begins for Paul. Good leaders first are good leaders in their home.

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.

Titus 1.6

Leaders are to be “blameless” in their family life. Lest you think yourself automatically disqualified, it’s not a requirement for perfection. It means someone who is above an accusation, one who has a respectable reputation.

Wife.

A good leader is first, a “husband of one wife”. That means faithful. Good leaders exhibit sexual integrity. Sex is obviously a powerful thing, advertises capitalise on this and we all know sex sells. But good leaders are those who aren’t controlled by its power. There’s an assumption of marriage here, but marriage itself isn’t a requirement. It’s just that being married is more common than not, especially in Titus’ time.

Being a husband of one wife rules out people with multiple partners or multiple wives. This refers to cheating on a spouse, but could also include addictions to pornography and fantasies. Multiple wives may not be as common in our culture today, but being married to a job is. We’ve all heard someone described as just that: “married to their job”. This can easily be hyperbolic, but there are definitely people who *are* married to what they do. This isn’t about people who work hard, this is about people who are obsessed with their job, addicted even. Someone who is married to a person and also married to a thing, like a job, is an immature leader. This is the polygamy of the Western World.

Children.

There’s what seems like a steep requirement here, with Paul telling Titus that the elder’s children must “believe”. Paul is saying that everyone in the household that the elder is leading must be on the same page. It can’t be a divided house.

Households were supposed to live in stark contrast to the culture of Crete. This was a requirement for the church to survive and thrive in a hard environment. They couldn’t afford to lower the bar on leadership.

The point of this section is that children ought to exhibit qualities of the faith their father clings to. That looks like children who aren’t accused of being wild or disobedient.

Remember Crete's infamous saying? "Crete has no need for wild beasts, for its own inhabitants were sufficient." If this is true, it would make sense for Paul to contrast a church leader's child with one who is wild. If one is to manage the church, how have they managed their family? Are they loving their wives and children well? And are the children responding to his leadership positively? If not, how should we expect them to lead in the church?

Having children that aren't rebelling at every instance, but are responding positively in obedience, says a lot about how a father loves his kids. That's the kind of leader we want in the church or any organisation, and that's the kind of leader we want to be. There's a loving heart behind that kind of leadership, one that deeply loves the people that depend on them, more than themselves.

A note worth mentioning: Paul is focusing on children in this passage, not adults. This is applying to elders who have children under their care. If they grow up and decide to chuck the faith, or say they never really were believers, though that's sad, that by itself doesn't disqualify a man from being an elder. It's about households being on the same page, living lives in conformity with the gospel.

In past churches where I've served I've known elders with wild children. One in particular temporarily stepped down from leadership. He was an apt leader in many areas. But he realised that leading his family was more important than leading his church, and his family required much more energy and time. Plus

he realised he didn't match up with the biblical qualifications to lead.

Start Small First.

To those of you who have big dreams: start small first. The principle here for everyone is to start in a smaller area of responsibility. Some of you might want to jump over and bypass the small stuff. But just because it's small doesn't mean it's not important. If you have big plans, that's great, but start small.

The first area Paul focuses in on for the most important leaders in the church is their family. It's the first stop.

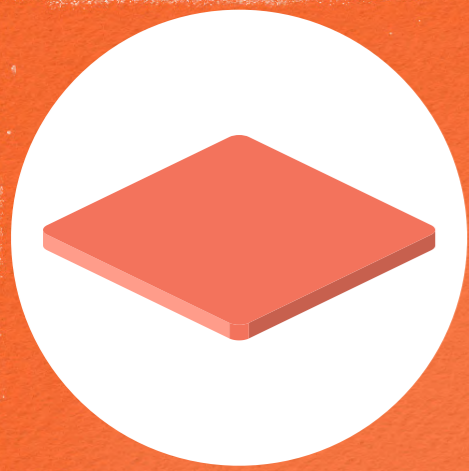
Husbands, are you loving your wives well? Do you care for her? What would she say? Maybe you could ask her, "What are some things I can do to love you better?"

Those of you who are leading well in smaller contexts, maybe it's time to think of growing your responsibility. Not everyone is in this situation, but some of you are. Now might be the time to start that thing you've been thinking about: like getting some people from your street together. Or going after a new promotion with more responsibility. Or maybe it means taking on a larger role in your church, even contemplating planting a church yourself.

But the principle remains: good leaders start small first.

The first area Paul focuses in on for the most important leaders in the church is their family. It's the first stop.





Personal



The Personal Layer

How someone leads their family is an overflow of what's going on inside. And that's where Paul takes us next. For potential leaders in the church or elsewhere, good leaders manage themselves well on the personal layer.

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.

Titus 1.7-8

In these verses Paul lays out personal vices and virtues. This was a common way to write about what was respectable or honourable in his time. And though they are lists, they aren't meant to be boxes to tick off one by one. There's nuance, but also overlap. In the end, the group presents a whole image.

We also see “blameless” again. Remember, this doesn't mean perfect, it means mature and respected.

Vices.

- *not overbearing*
Not arrogant, pushing your agenda on others. This is the sin of pride. Loving yourself more than others means using others for your own ends.
- *not quick tempered*
Self-control applied to anger. Anger in itself doesn't have to be a bad thing, but anger out of control or not in check is not acceptable for a good leader.
- *doesn't get drunk*
Someone who is driven by alcohol or other drugs is not being driven by the gospel. There might be a pain, a hurt, or something else that is being dulled by drink. Drunk leaders aren't good leaders.
- *not violent*
Not a bully. Someone who is violent or a bully is a lover of power. According to John Stott:

A gift for leadership usually includes a forceful disposition. But elders who have learned their leadership style from Jesus will never ride roughshod over other people's sensitivities. They will lead by example, not by force.¹

Good leaders are servant leaders.

- *not pursuing dishonest gain*

Money, like power and sex, is a particularly strong temptation. It might seem funny for someone who is motivated by greed to aspire to become an elder or a pastor (there's not a lot of money in it!), but just because there's not a lot of money to be had doesn't mean it's not a temptation. It's ultimately not about money, it's about greed.

Those are the vices, let's look at the virtues.

Virtues.

- *hospitable*

For the early church, hospitality was one of the major features that stood out in the surrounding culture. It's a powerful thing.

I've found that hospitality is often understood in a churchy kind of way and not in a biblical kind of way. Many Christians think that hospitality is having other Christians over for dinner or drinks. That's a good thing to do, but it's not really hospitality. Hospitality is showing love for people you don't know yet: strangers, foreigners, outsiders.

The focus of hospitality is not loving your friends, but loving strangers. It's having people who are unknown to or different than you over to your home and feeding them. Having your Christian friends over is probably better defined as fellowship.

That means to be hospitable, we need to have people in our homes that identify as Muslim, gay, and atheist.

- *loves what is good*

A good leader ought to love what is good, not just what is good...for them. Or what is convenient. Loving what is good is often at our own expense.

- *self-controlled*

Self-controlled means thoughtful and wise, not having outside distractions control our thoughts and choices.

- *upright*

Upright is being seen as just and fair in the world. One can't be fair and just by themselves. This is something that requires relationships with others to be worked out, one can't be upright in a vacuum.

- *holy*

Holy means set apart. Set apart from what? From all that is not of God. To be holy means to live a life in response to how God calls us to live. That means you don't join in the gossip of a

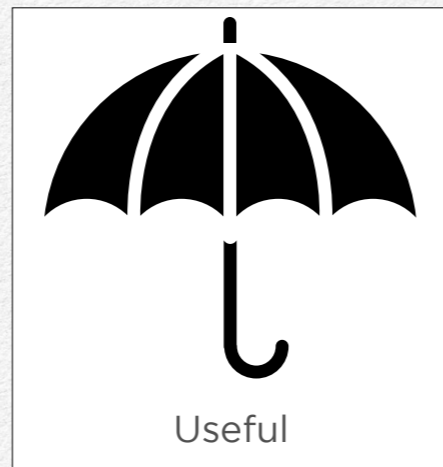
co-worker. It means you don't get drunk along with your friends. Holiness is also not an excuse to look down on someone, a holy life is actually often attractive to others. It's an outworking of your love for God.

- *disciplined*

The concept of self-discipline comes in last here to round it out. It's the general idea of having mastery over yourself. You could look at "disciplined" as the umbrella of which all of these fall under.

The image of an umbrella is a helpful one. If any part of the umbrella goes bad, it's not a good umbrella. You won't leave the house with something that blocks out 75% of the rain. Because even if only 25% of the rain gets through, you're still 100% wet.

These virtues and vices present a full picture of what a good leader's personal layer looks like. There are a few on this list we like, some we really don't like, and others we try and forget about. It would be easy enough to only focus on one thing, like "not violent", and strive to use power properly. Now that's good, but by itself isn't so good. Remember



we're striving for the whole umbrella.

I used to work as a personal trainer at a gym. And in my gym days I would run across people whose lives take place entirely in the gym. I'd leave in the morning, come back in the evening and these gym rats would still be there! Where do they eat? Where do they sleep? Are they receiving their mail here?

Some of these people really liked working out some parts of their body, but not so much other parts. It would not be uncommon to see someone with massive triceps and biceps and really small calves. They'd have a huge upper body but puny lower body because they never had a leg day. Sometimes you think they'd topple over.

The gym is a good way to think of these vices and virtues. All of this is like daily exercise. It takes discipline to work on the virtues and discipline to avoid the vices. You don't come out of the womb with these in place. Good leaders aren't born, they are made over time and in community.

Where on this list can you grow? Maybe there's something you avoid? Maybe there's something you realise you haven't thought of. The best way to know is to ask someone else. Find someone that you trust and whose feedback would be helpful.

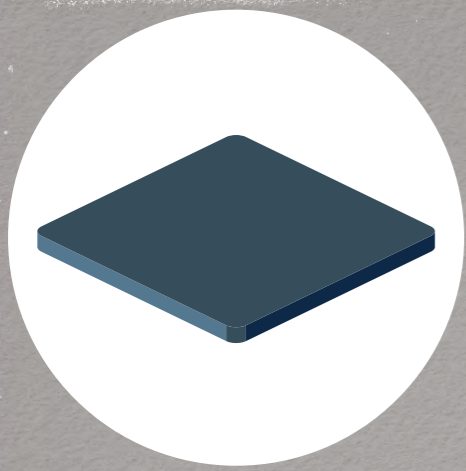
Never forget that our God is a forgiving God. We will never match up perfectly on this list, only Jesus did that. We don't need to become Jesus, we are called to follow Him. That means we will fall. And fall often. But we have a loving Father who always picks us up.

Vices

not overbearing
not quick tempered
doesn't get drunk
not violent

Virtues

hospitable
loves what is good
self-controlled
upright
holy
disciplined



Truth

3

The Truth Layer

The fundamental layer for all good leaders. It's where the personal and family layers are borne out of.

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.

Titus 1.9

The trustworthy message is the truth. This is a message worthy of trust, something that is true, can hold its own weight, and stands up to arguments.

The trustworthy message is the story where God, in His kindness, saw us in our scattered state with our hearts and passions strewn all over the place. He saw how lost we were in all of this. Out of His compassion He saved us through the renewal of the Spirit. God Himself washed us clean through the work of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

In Titus 2.14 Paul tells his church planter that Jesus gave Himself for us to “purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” This is something that Jesus did on our behalf when we couldn't do anything about it. What an amazing message we get to live in and out of as followers of Jesus.

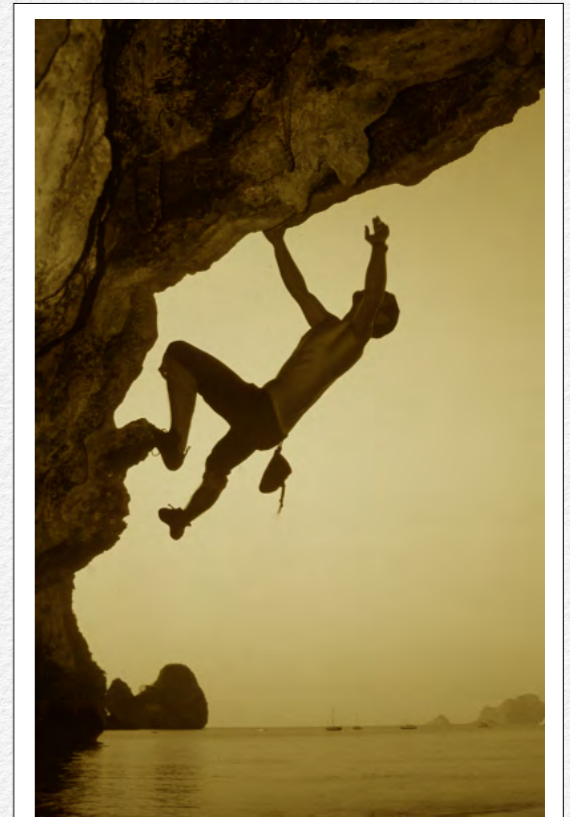
To “hold firmly to the trustworthy message” is holding on to *this* message, the gospel. The gospel is the story of what Jesus did for us. This is the truth good leaders, elders and Christians hold firmly to.

Holding firmly.

This is a deep and personal thing. A firm hold is not some cold fish handshake. It's something that requires both your hands, interdigitating even. This kind of grip is singular, you can't be holding firmly to the gospel and anything else.

The problem with scattered hearts is they want to hold on to everything all the time. Money, entertainment, partners, sex, schooling, careers—we grab one and a different one slips through our fingers.

Having a firm hold on the truth puts the gospel in top priority over everything. That doesn't necessarily mean you stop doing what you're already doing, though it might with some things. Having the gospel in top priority means everything else is put into perspective.



A Firm Hold

It defines questions like: how do we spend our free time? And who do we spend our free time with? How do we grow in our career, or in our studies?

This message is central, everything else flows from it. Holding firmly to the truth frees us from our scattered hearts, and allows us to be devoted. There are two bi-products of this kind of living. First, we will stir others to do the same (“encourage others”) and second, we will correct and convince those who don’t have a firm hold of the truth (“refute those who oppose it”).

Encouraging Others.

If the leader holds firmly, others are stirred to do the same. This incredibly deep and personal thing is meant to flow outward. Only if a leader is holding firmly to the truth can we expect others to grow in that truth. As the saying goes, you can’t lead others where you haven’t been.

Godly leaders cultivate leaders. They are people who are encouraging to be around, so people naturally want to be around them. Godly leaders love seeing others get a firmer hold on the truth.

Refuting Others.

Refuting means doing two things: correcting others that aren’t holding firmly to this truth and convincing them to change. This is a learned skill.

It’s one thing to point out where someone’s wrong. Some people are really good at this, maybe too good. This part is somewhat easy to do. But can you point out where someone is wrong in a way that they want to hear it? That they even invite it?

We want leaders who will correct you when you’re wrong, but with humility. Good leaders do this in such a way that will make you actually want to be better. This is also the kind of leader we want to be for the people who look up to us: correcting, but in a winsome way that convinces that someone to change.

Other Messages.

It's important that we hold firmly to the trustworthy truth, because there are so many other untrustworthy messages out there masquerading as truth. Just think of the millions of adverts that get beamed into our eyeballs each year. Marketing people understand the power of vices and virtues for their own products. Every advertising campaign is trying to make disciples, people who hold firmly to the message of:

You’ve got to look good and buy these clothes feel good about yourself and attract others.

If you’re lonely, you just need to buy this beer and you will have many friends and sexual partners.

If you don’t buy this new electronic gadget the world will pass you by and you’ll be left out.

This type of advertising has been around forever because it works.

I remember one advert on television for some kind of food or grocery store. There was a family sitting down at a meal, the last meal before their oldest son was going off to university. The mother and father had these wonderful thoughts about their son that the audience could hear, how much they loved him, how happy they were that he was growing up and also the sadness of seeing him go, but they didn't verbalise any of it. The message of the advert eventually was: create this meal and you don't have to say anything else.

Is that not attempting to teach how to parent and how to relate to each other? These messages can easily become our truths and these products become our leaders.

We are always making disciples.

We actually are leading each other all the time, we are always making disciples, the question is of what? And of who?

Encouraging each other in sound doctrine sounds great, but what does that actually mean? In Titus, it's not primarily about studying heavy theology (though that's a good thing!). It's primarily about the basics of how we live our lives. Encouraging others in the message of the gospel can be a very basic and profound activity. It can look like praying with other Christians. It

can look like talking about the Bible verses we've been reading (assuming we've actually been reading the Bible). It can look like asking your friends, "How do you need to be encouraged?" It can look like asking the Spirit to encourage people who aren't believers yet in the truth of the gospel.

This doesn't mean we turn into weirdo zombies who only speak Christianese and are not that interested in having a laugh. But it does mean that as we hang out and laugh with each other, we should encourage each other on deeper levels of truth.

Having a firm hold on the truth
puts the gospel in top priority
over everything.



Jesus

4

The Ultimate Good Leader

Paul's instructions on leadership is a derivative leadership. It is only by looking to Christ as our example and hope that we can demonstrate good leadership towards others.

A Derivative Leadership.

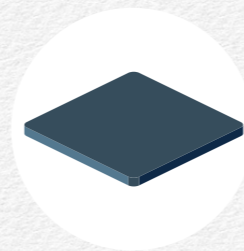
“Holding firmly to the trustworthy message” is holding on to the gospel. The gospel is the story of what Jesus did for us. That means the leadership that Paul is talking about here, good leadership, is derivative of Him and His character. So if Christ is the leader to follow, is this just one more option among many? What makes Him so special that we would give Him prominence? Jesus is different from all who came before Him because He was the only one—ever—to teach perfect truth and perfectly live out that truth.

Paul Johnson wrote a book in 1988 called *Intellectuals* where he outlined the thoughts of many modern philosophers then

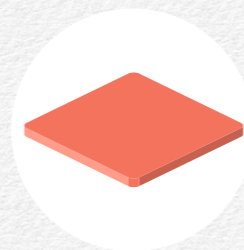
Jesus is different from all who came before Him because He was the only one—ever—to teach perfect truth and perfectly live out that truth.

compared their actual lives to their own writings. What he found was that there wasn't a consistent one in the bunch! And if we all lived like one of these philosophers the world would not be a better place. But surely we don't need to read a book to understand this. This evidence is clear in all of our lives. Nobody, no matter how well meaning, is ever consistent. We're all

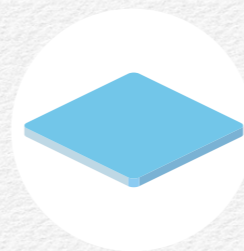
hypocrites to one degree or another and nobody is perfect. Jesus is different from everyone else because He is the only one—ever—to teach truth and perfectly live out that truth in all three layers.



Jesus taught the truth. The Gospels are full of the best teaching the world has ever seen. He taught the truth of what the world is like, who we are as humans, and what God is like. There is nothing like it. Not only did He teach the truth, He is the Truth.²



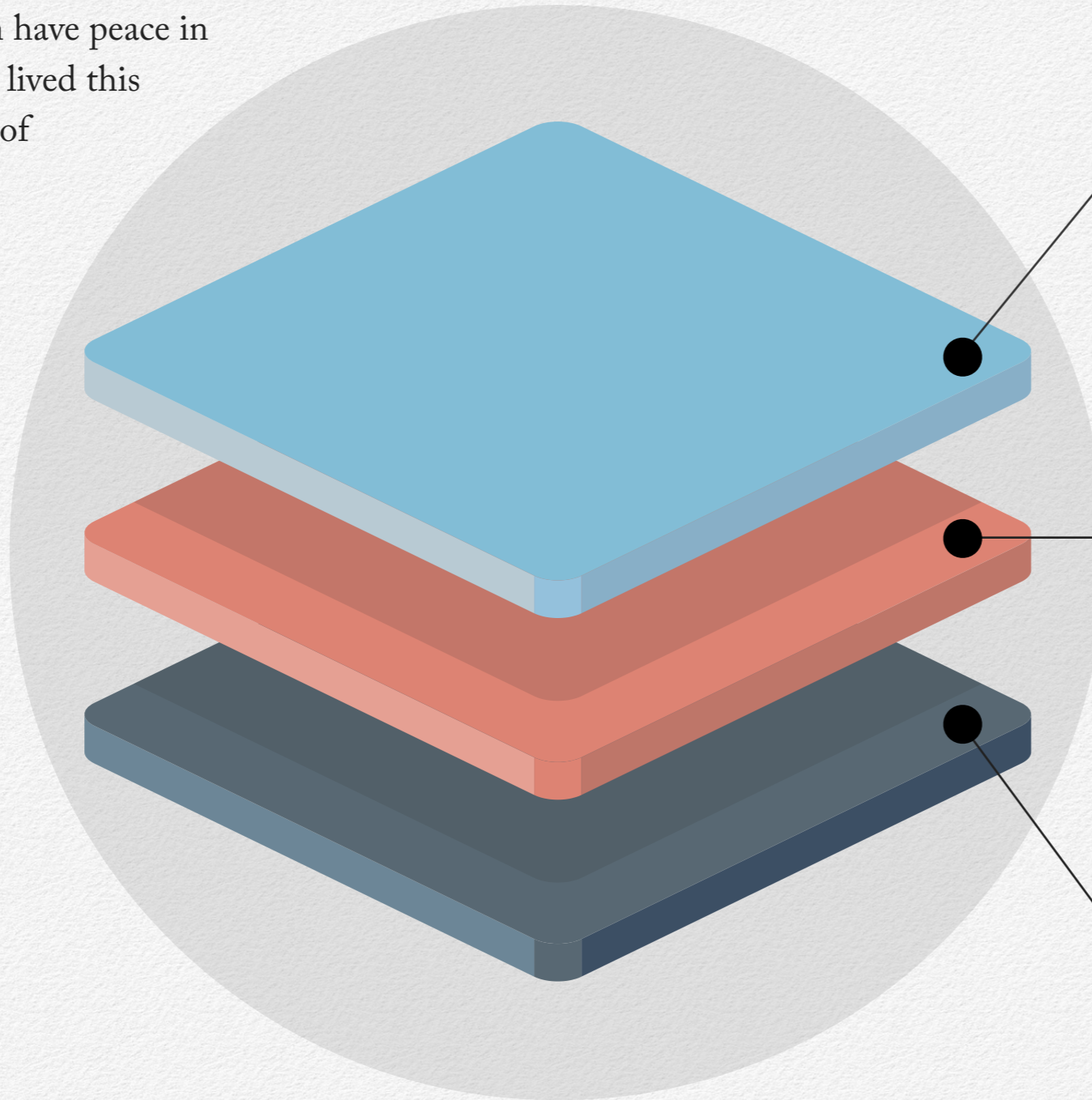
Jesus lived the truth. He never sinned and always led his people in love. Even though He was God, He humbled Himself to serve others. And when these same people He came to save turned against Him, He humbled Himself and submitted to public humiliation, torture, and death.



Jesus brings others into the truth. Jesus didn't stay dead, He defeated death and rose again. Through His death and resurrection, He created a family for Himself, a family that is focused on constantly bringing others into the truth.

Only Jesus draws us into His family. We are saved from our dysfunctional, disordered hearts, saved to a truth we can know and to which we can hold firmly. No longer do we have to search after

some new thing or lean on what we think is best. Only Jesus lived the truth that He taught and because of that we can have peace in our restless hearts. He lived this truth out to the point of death; now we can be forgiven when we fall and empowered to follow Him. We can have peace in our restless hearts. Only through Jesus are we freed from untrustworthy messages and given the power to live as better humans in the glorious truth of the gospel.



Family

Because Jesus bring us into His family, we can have hope in leading our families well.

Personal

Because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection we are forgiven when we embrace vices and reject virtues. This love overflows into our lives through obedience.

Truth

Because Jesus is the truth, we can believe that He is trustworthy, over and against the false messages we are plagued with.

Footnotes

1. John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), Kindle edition, Location 3214.

2. A claim made by Jesus Himself, John 14.6: Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Greg Willson is an American planting a church in Manchester, England. In addition to writing, he creates music and enjoys photography. You can read, hear and see more at gregwillson.com.

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