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The Imperfect Pastor
Titus 1:5-16
May 24th, 2015, Jeff Germo

This ranks up there with one of the most awkward sermons I have ever had to preach. We are going to talk about the perfect pastor, and I am so far from perfect it's not funny. But, I've often wondered what the perfect pastor looks like so I did some Googling and found a job description for the perfect pastor. It's from Google, so it must be true.

The Perfect Pastor

"The Perfect Pastor preaches exactly 10 minutes. He condemns sin roundly, but never hurts anyone's feelings. He works from 8 a.m. until midnight, and is also the church janitor. The Perfect Pastor makes \$40 a week, wears good clothes, drives a good car, buys good books, and donates \$30 a week to the church. He is 29 years old and has 40 years' worth of experience. Above all, he is handsome.

The Perfect Pastor has a burning desire to work with teenagers, and he spends most of his time with the senior citizens. He smiles all the time with a straight face because he has a sense of humour that keeps him seriously dedicated to his church. He makes 15 home visits a day and is always in his office to be handy when needed.

The Perfect Pastor always has time for church meetings and all of its committees, never missing the meeting of any church organization. And he is always busy evangelizing the un-churched. The Perfect Pastor is always in the next town over!

If your pastor does not measure up, simply send this notice to six other churches that are tired of their pastor too. Then bundle up your pastor and send him to the church at the top of your list. If everyone cooperates, in one week you will receive 1,643 pastors. One of them should be perfect.

*Have faith in this letter. One church broke the chain and got its' old pastor back in less than three months."*¹

That, of course, was tongue-in-cheek, and I'm so glad you don't treat me like that. But, here are some true statistics from a study that was done on the well being of pastors over an 18 year period , from 1989 to 2007, by the Schaeffer Institute.

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- 90% feel they are inadequately trained to cope with the ministry demands.
- 90% of pastors said the ministry was completely different than what they thought it would be like before they entered the ministry.
- 90% of the pastors report working between 55 to 75 hours per week.
- 50% feel unable to meet the demands of the job.
- 70% do not have someone they consider a close friend.

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- 80% of seminary and Bible school graduates will leave the ministry within 5 years.
- Only 10% of pastors will actually retire as a minister in some form.
- Over 1,500 pastors leave the ministry every month.
- Over 1,300 pastors are terminated by the local church each month.
- 50% of pastors are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry if they could, but have no other way of making a living

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- 80% believe pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families.
- 80% of spouses feel the pastor is overworked.
- 80% of spouses feel left out and under-appreciated by church members.
- 90% of pastors stated they are frequently fatigued, and worn out on a weekly and even daily basis.

¹ <http://www.my-pastor.com/church-jokes.html>

- 80% of pastors feel unqualified and discouraged in their role as pastor.
- 71% of pastors are burned out (beyond normal fatigue).
- 70% of pastors constantly fight depression.
- Only 23% of pastors report being happy and content in their identity in Christ, in their church, and in their home.²

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Now, I didn't share these things with you so that you would feel sorry for me. The fact is, if my identity is so wrapped up in how I am viewed by certain members of the congregation I am not going to last long and I will be continually tormented. And trust me, I have to often remind myself that my identity is not in how anyone except God, through Christ, looks upon me. It's a constant struggle for every pastor I have talked with.

There is a problem in the pastorate. There was a problem in the first century and things haven't changed that much. Did you know that the average tenure of a pastor, depending on which study you look at, is between three and four years at a given church? I know a pastor who said that out of twenty-five men in his graduating class at seminary only two had remained in pastoral ministry. He quit a couple years after he told me that statistic. I was told by a parishioner at another church that she thought pastors *should* leave a church every four years. And she actively worked to ensure it happened. Adrian and I were at a conference a couple weeks ago and the speaker said he was in a cohort group of pastors from large churches. When he started in that group there were 42 pastors. 40 of them have since left the ministry. It is staggering.

Now, the truth of **it is that the responsibility lies on both sides, the congregation and the pastor.**

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The study I mentioned also revealed that **only 38% of pastors have a regular quiet time with the Lord** and the only time they spend in their Bibles is when they are preparing their sermons. Here in lies the problem, and I think it is key. Paul has a lot to say about what a pastor should be like and about how to choose a pastor. Let's read what he has to say to his colleague, Titus.

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Titus 1:5–16 (ESV)

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.

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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.

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¹⁰ For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. ¹¹ They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. ¹² One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."

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¹³ This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, ¹⁴ not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. ¹⁵ To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. ¹⁶ They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

² <http://ruralitybytes.wordpress.com/2012/10/17/startling-statistics-about-pastors/>

There is a word or a phrase from this passage that jumps out at me when I read it, and it makes me feel very inadequate as a pastor.

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The phrase is, “**above reproach**”. Some of your bibles might say, “**blameless**”. An elder must be blameless and above reproach. Wow! Paul actually says this twice, once in verse 6 and once in verse 7.

Now, people look at this and what do they conclude? That the pastor should be above reproach, blameless – without fault. That’s what it says, right? But, is that what it means?

Have you noticed how imperfect the people God called in the Bible were? Just think about it for a minute. **Abraham**, a liar, someone who continually disbelieved God and several times took matters into his own hands instead of trusting God. **Isaac** learned lying from his father. **Jacob** was even worse, and his name actually means deceiver. And he lived up to his moniker. **Moses**, a murderer, and an insecure man with a speech impediment. **David**, a murderer and adulterer. **The disciples of Jesus**, insecure, self-serving, quick tempered. **Paul**, overbearing at times, and accused of not being a very good preacher, and before he met Christ he persecuted Christians. I could go on and on.

So, very obviously, when Paul says in Titus that elders are to be blameless or above reproach, he can’t mean that they are supposed to be perfect.

If it did, as those of you who know me well can attest to, I would be disqualified, as would every other pastor in the world, past, present and future. As a matter of fact, all through the Bible it tells us that there is no one who is above reproach. We are all sinners, and 1 John says that anyone who claims to be without sin is a liar. So, perfection is not what one looks for in a pastor. And for those who think they have found a perfect pastor somewhere, he will soon fall off that pedestal and you will be sorely disappointed.

Let’s move on. We are going to take a closer look at this in a couple minutes.

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There are two terms in this passage that are synonymous, elder (*presbyteros*), and overseer (*episkopos*). Another synonym, found in some other passages, is pastor (*poimen*), which literally means shepherd. So, what we are looking at here in Titus, when he refers to elders, are the qualifications of a pastor.

Let’s walk through the passage.

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Titus 1:5–16 (ESV)

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—

So, as I said last week, Titus had joined Paul on some of his missionary journeys and on one of them, he left Titus on the Isle of Crete to finish the work that was started. Several churches they planted were left without pastors, so Paul gave Titus the task of appointing pastors in each of the churches.

There is no record of this missionary journey in the book of Acts. Normally, you can sort of match the situations that Paul refers to in his letters to the corresponding account in Acts, but there is no such missionary journey recorded, which is not really a problem. It simply means that Luke didn’t record everything Paul did.

Paul goes on to tell Titus what to look for when choosing a pastor.

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⁶ if anyone is above reproach,

What does it mean to be “above reproach?” I think it means that the elder must not bring shame upon the name of Jesus. He must be on the growing edge, leading the way in the process of becoming a mature follower of Jesus. He owns up to his depravity, shortcomings, and brokenness. Nobody is worthy of being an elder or pastor if they think they have it all together.

We've already talked about this. Pastors, although far from perfect, must be living on the growing edge. They must be the first to recognize that they are broken and in need of a Saviour, and actively cooperating with the Holy Spirit to become more like Jesus. I have never met a pastor who is not broken. He's just like you.

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the husband of one wife,

Now, some scholars and interpreters suggest that Paul is saying here that a pastor cannot have been divorced. But, I think that is reading into the text something it doesn't say. It seems obvious the clearest reading is that he is saying pastors should only have one wife – at a time. Paul does not say anything about divorce in this passage. In other passages he does, specifically in 1 Corinthians 7, but in this passage he is simply ruling out polygamy, or having a mistress on the side. Pastors are to be sexually pure and faithful to their wives. He's a one woman man.

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and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

Before we talk about this verse, let me just say one thing. Paul is not implying here that an elder can't be single, or that he has to have children if he's married, or that he can't have been divorced on biblical grounds. Paul was speaking into a normal situation. The norm for that time, was that men would be married and they would have children. There are those who suggest that because Paul refers to how an elder's children should behave and that he must only have one wife, that he is prohibiting single men, or widowed men from being pastors. That is preposterous. He is simply saying, if they happen to be married with children this is how it should look.

The ESV says that his children should be believers. That's one translation, but it's not actually the best in this case. A better translation is "faithful". They should be faithfully obedient to their parents. The parents have no real control over whether or not their children believe. They can do the best they can to help them come to a saving knowledge of the truth, but the fact is that children need to make this choice for themselves.

Paul's first letter to Timothy speaks to this as well.

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1 Timothy 3:4-5 (ESV)

⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church.

So, Paul is not saying that parents must force their kids to believe, but that they should love, nurture, and teach them to behave well. Mismanagement in one area points to mismanagement in another.

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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.

Paul, again, reiterates the above "reproachedness" (to coin a word) of a pastor. Remember, pastor, overseer, and elder are synonymous. He says, as "God's steward," or the one God has chosen to take care of the church he must lead the way in how to walk with God in integrity.

Here's what Peter wrote in his first epistle.

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1 Peter 5:1-5 (ESV)

¹ So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

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³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the

elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

The pastor is to put others ahead of himself. The church is not about him and his pursuits. He is to shepherd, lead, guide, be an example, to oversee, but not dominate. Notice Peter mentions the chief Shepherd. Who is that? The pastor is the undershepherd taking orders from Jesus, the Chief Shepherd. The church is not the pastor's project. The church is not to be governed by his agenda. He is not to use it for his own personal gain. God has entrusted the pastor to be a faithful steward leading the church on to the mission of Jesus.

Paul continues, saying a pastor should be ***hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.***

He's not going to be perfect at any of these things, but he should be on the growing edge, and leading the way in the spiritual disciplines, and coming clean when the Holy Spirit shows him areas in his life he needs to work on.

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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. ¹⁰ For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. ¹¹ They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

A pastor must have a working knowledge of the Bible. That should be a given. He must believe that it is inspired by God, and that it is the authority for all life and godliness. He must be able to teach it, and put an end to teaching that is contrary to sound doctrine and biblical truth.

Many years ago, Ruthie had a job at a church for a short time. She was the program coordinator. And the pastor was so afraid of offending the congregation that he actually didn't preach from the Bible. He taught things like, "How to live well so your heart is healthy." If he was speaking of our spiritual hearts that would have been great, but he wasn't. He talked about how to eat right, and get enough exercise and things like that, which are good things to do because we should be good stewards of our bodies. But, the problem was he did not teach from the bible for fear that someone might be offended. In the biblical definition of a pastor, he was not one.

Here is what Paul wrote to one of his young protege pastors.

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2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

As much as possible, the pastor must be diligent to search out the full meaning of the text from which he's preaching. Let me tell you what my study regimen looks like.

The first thing I do when I prepare to preach through a book of the Bible is I prayerfully read it over and over again, several times so I am saturated with it. I ask God to speak to me as I read. I read the text in several different translations. While I'm doing this, I ask the Spirit of Jesus to bring to my mind other passages of Scripture that would speak into the text, and I ask myself, "Does this interpretation line up with the greater context of the Bible?" I narrow it down by looking at Greek or Hebrew lexicons. I study any words that seem to be important to make sure I have a correct understanding.

I then read dictionaries and commentaries to see what Bible scholars have to say about the passage. After doing all of that I sit down, usually on Monday, and I write my manuscript, asking God to help me to bring the text alive for us in the twenty-first century.

That's what Paul meant when he said that the pastor is to ***"rightly handle the word of truth."*** God's Word is truth. It's so important what we believe. There have been so many pastors and teachers throughout history who have said they have heard from God and then led their congregations astray with devastating results. Some of them started off well and seemingly had good intentions.

Jim Jones is, to me, the most obvious example. He led his congregation in 1978 to drink a poison concoction of cyanide. 914 people perished, 303 of them were children. He got his start as a student pastor in a Methodist church. Do a Google search on him and read his story. There are many similar stories like this. That's why it is so important that we rightly handle God's Word, and one of my roles as your pastor is to make sure that falsehood is not taught here. Paul is very strong in his words here. He says that pastors not only must be able to teach sound biblical truth, but they should also have the courage to rebuke those who contradict it. He said, speaking of the legalists, **"They must be silenced."**

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¹² One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." ¹³ This testimony is true.

Now, this has to be one of the wackiest things Paul wrote. It sounds like his i racially profiling Cretans. But, he's not. It's important to look at the context. Paul very wisely quoted one of their own to criticize the society of Crete. The man many scholars suggest he quoted was a Cretan poet named *Epimenides*. This quote from Paul is sometimes called the *Epimenides* Paradox. If all Cretans are liars, and *Epimenides* is a Cretan, how can you believe him when he says they are all liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons?

Anyway, Paul was using hyperbole, making the point that Cretan society had "gone to the dogs." They had a very bad reputation for being out of control and immoral, and there was danger of it creeping into the church.

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Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, ¹⁴ not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. ¹⁵ To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.

Paul is saying that it is crucial that we don't "sugar coat" sin. Sin is ugly. I'm not sure how bad it was in Crete at that time, but I do know how it is in Canada. The moral standards of the world can easily creep into the church if we are not careful. We can become numb to things the Bible says are absolutely wrong.

Think about the difference in our society now to what it was one hundred years ago. Back then, there were no TVs, no internet, Twitter or Facebook. Where did kids get most of their input and influence? The family. The family lived together, worked together, played together, and learned together. Today it's much different.

How are kids influenced most now? Internet, TV, media of all kinds, and their peers who are influenced by the same things. How do you think this is going to impact the family and society?

You can't watch a TV show or a movie anymore that doesn't include sex outside of marriage and portray those who want to remain sexually pure for their marriage partner as weird. If we have a steady diet of that kind of media what do you think is going to happen? We will become numb to what the Bible says is right. There are Christian organizations that call themselves liberated Christians who teach that sex outside of marriage is not only ok, but also that it is preferable. There are Christian social media sites set up to hook up married Christians to other married Christians for the purpose of having sex. Are we as bad as the Cretans? I have no idea. But, if we don't stand for what is right and good as is taught in God's Word we will only get worse. Paul said to rebuke that way of life sharply, not in those outside the church, but in those inside the church. It's not our responsibility to change culture outside the church. It is our responsibility to create new culture inside the church that will influence culture outside the church.

¹⁶ They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

Real faith leads to godly fruit. That is Paul's main point here. The pastor must lead the way in growth, which means he must humble himself in the sight of God and his congregation.

But here's the deal. It's easy to look at this passage and say these are standards pastors are supposed to live up to, but the fact of the matter is, they are standards every Christ-follower should aspire to. We are all leaders in some way. There are people who look to you and follow your example. What did Jesus say to his disciples?

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Matthew 5:48 (ESV)

⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

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We should all be on the growing edge. There is nothing Paul says here that should not be applied to each one of us.

I am a long way from being the perfect pastor, or the perfect anything. I am just as broken as anyone here. I stumble along trying to unload the excess baggage I carry from my past. I'm awkward at loving. I don't always respond to people the way I would like, especially if I feel threatened. But, you know what? I know it. And a year from now I want to look more like Jesus.

Will you follow me as we struggle together as a community to become more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled? The fact is, we can't do it alone. We need the power of the Holy Spirit, of course, and we also need each other. There are no lone wolves in the kingdom of God.



From the Head to the Heart to the Hands:
The Imperfect Pastor
Titus 1:5-16
Week of May 24th, 2015

Objective of this study: To understand, we all, in some way lead, and are responsible to live on the growing edge and lead with integrity.

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Spend five minutes in silent prayer asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
2. After the five minutes of silence have someone interrupt the silence and read Psalm 84 meditatively to the group. Then pause for about a minute and let it sink in.
3. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Welcome (5 – 10 minutes)

Aside from Jesus, or other biblical characters, who do you think was the greatest leader in history, and why?

Word (20-30 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read Titus 5:1-16
3. Read Galatians 5:16-26. Find and point out as many similarities between the two passages as you can.
4. Think of as many Biblical leaders as you can. What did they do well? What were some of their shortcomings? How did God use them?
5. What's the difference between integrity and perfection?

Work (30-40 minutes)

Sermon Quote: [A pastor] **"as God's steward, or the one God has chosen to take care of the church he must lead the way in how to walk in integrity."... "God has entrusted the pastor to be a faithful steward leading the church on to the mission of Jesus."..."We should all be on the growing edge. There is nothing Paul says here that should not be applied to each one of us."**

6. We are all leaders in some way. Who is looking up to you? What impact do you want to have on them?
7. Are there ways God is prompting you to walk more in integrity?