Over the summer we've been looking at some of the key members of the team that the apostle Paul gathered around him. And today we're going to look at a man who, perhaps more than anyone else, when Paul needed someone who he could send into a difficult or demanding situation, and lead there, he sent this man. So, we're going to look at Titus and leading through difficulty.

Now you might think, ok, great, Titus, another man who's been dead 2000 years, why should I listen to this? Well, all of us face difficulties in life, it's just a fact of life. And you want to come through those circumstances well. But you're also going to be involved with other people who are facing difficulties in their lives. And in that situation you're always going to be a person of influence. Youth, that might be a friend at school who's failing the year, or whose parents are divorcing. Adults, it might be at work: a project, or a team is struggling, or there's an HR problem. Parents, it might be at home, and you've got 15 minutes with your kids around the breakfast table, before you send them out the door to a world that's hostile to faith. Students, it might be in your friendship group, and one of your friends is facing something and everyone else is chipping in advice - and you're sat there, thinking, what should I say? In every difficult situation, we're going to be people of influence - someone who steers this other person, your colleague, your friend, your kids, in one direction or another. And you want that influence to be good.

And Titus became a leader and an influencer for good in multiple difficult situations. And the question is, how? How did he do that?

Well, first off, let's look at some biographical stuff.

Turn to **Titus 1:4:** where Paul writes, 'To Titus, my true child in a common faith.' So, either Paul had led Titus to faith in Christ or they'd developed a significant mentoring relationship. Whichever it was, these two men, one old - Paul, one younger- Titus, share a common faith. They're singing from the same hymn sheet. Just like Paul, Titus knows that Jesus has intervened in his life in a life changing way. And he knows he died for him, and rose from the dead, and Titus trust him.

Then turn to **Galatians 2:1-3,** where Paul writes:
'Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, *taking Titus along with me*. I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. *But even Titus, who was with me,* was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.'

So, while that tells us Titus was a gentile, which is interesting, it also tells us that his career in Christian ministry begins in a setting of conflict. Paul and Barnabas, his friends and mentors, have been accused of preaching a false gospel, so when they head south to Jerusalem to check out what they preach with the apostles, they take Titus with them. Which means that his first exposure to a more public ministry was standing alongside his friends as they contended for the truth.

And it seems that set the course for the rest of his ministry. You see, in Corinth, big cosmopolitan city, the church was pretty messed up. And as a church they were dealing with one difficult issue after another. There was division and dodgy doctrine and sexual immorality and the misuse of spiritual gifts and Christians suing one another. And when Paul writes his second letter to them, 2 Corinthians, he talks about how he had sent Titus to them. And Titus went into all that mess and started leading.

But he didn't just do it at Corinth. Look at **Titus 1:5:** where Paul writes to Titus, '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.'

Now, being sent on a mission to Crete, beautiful Greek island, sounds amazing, doesn't it. I mean, just imagine, you turn up for work on a Monday morning and your boss calls you in and says, 'I personally want you to spend the next however many months on Crete, establishing a new management team, with some exceptionally talented people', you'd probably reply, 'let me just think about that for one and a half seconds.' Because Crete sounds like a great assignment, doesn't it!

But not in Titus' day. Listen to how Paul describes the Cretans: Firstly, Titus 1:10, even within the church, 'there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers' - and those are the ones supposedly on the same side as Titus! The ones he's going to develop this leadership team from. But as for Cretans as a whole, Paul writes, Titus 1:12-13, 'One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. This testimony is true.'

Strong stuff! I mean, if you were planning a trip and you read a review like that on Tripadvisor, you'd probably give Crete a miss, wouldn't you, and go to Bognor Regis instead.

And yet, it's in exactly that kind of difficult situation that Paul, when he needs a leader - and a leader who can train up and develop other leaders, asks, 'where's Titus?'

And that's not because Titus was some kind of bully boy - the kind of leader who's more unpleasant and pig-headed than those he's leading. Look at 2 Cor 7:5-6, where Paul writes, 'When we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn - fighting without and fear within. *But God,* who comforts the downcast, *comforted us by the coming of Titus.'*

So, it's not just Paul who sends Titus on difficult assignments, is it? God does. You see, there is Paul, the great apostle, in Macedonia, and he's worn out, he's facing opposition and it seems like it's beginning to get to him. He's downcast. And God sees him and knows he needs encouraging. God knows that Paul needs to know afresh that he loves him and has him in his hands. But who can help a man, like Paul, who knows all the answers already? Who can lead a leader of leaders to drink afresh from the well of the goodness and grace of God? And God says, 'Titus. Let's send Titus, he'll do it.' I mean, there are just some people who, simply by being themselves, brighten up your day, aren't there? and Titus was one of them.

So, how did he do it? What marked his leadership that meant that when he had people who were making bad choices, or being negatively influenced by their culture in destructive ways, or fighting one another, or just feeling like they were under a black cloud, could he lead and influence them for good? And do it in ways that left them feeling encouraged, not beaten up?

Well, firstly, Titus did that, and you and I can do that, when you lead from an unshakeable
Commitment to Truth
You see, when Paul writes to Titus on Crete, he keeps on mentioning this issue of truth. Titus 1:1, 'Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their *knowledge of the truth*.'

Now, I don't know if you saw it in the news, but the staff at one of the UK's leading cathedrals have installed a helter-skelter, a fair-ground ride, inside the cathedral in the hope of attracting people inside. And another has installed a mini golf-course.

But in Paul, Titus has seen a model of leadership and influence of others that's just a bit different from that. And it's not about entertaining or amusing them. It's a leadership that cares about their faith and knowledge of truth.

And in v2 Paul describes God as the God 'who never lies.' And in v3 he writes how God has revealed his truth 'in his word.' And when Titus picks elders, Paul tells him in v9 that he's got to pick men who 'hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught' so that they in turn can teach 'sound doctrine.' And in 2:1 Paul says that's exactly what Titus should give himself to: 'teach what accords with sound doctrine.' So when Titus sought to lead or influence others he did so from his own bedrock of truth - of who God is, of who we are, and of what Jesus has done for us.

The problem is that today, it's not exactly fashionable to talk about truth, is it? Because if something is *true* it implies other things are false; and if something is *right* it implies that other things might be *wrong*, like our behaviour, or your friend's lifestyle or how someone spends their time, or money, or talents. And if you suggest that what someone else believes or says or does might be wrong then they might get offended. And you can't do that. There is no such thing as absolute moral truth.

But of course, just saying that everyone's choices are just as valid as everyone else's provided they don't hurt anyone, is itself a claim to an absolute truth. And saying that you mustn't offend people, and that you can't say there's right and wrong, is itself saying that there is, after all, a right way to think and speak and live. That they're right and you're wrong.

So everyone is seeking to influence others from what they think the truth is. And you will too. The way you see the world, what you think is most valuable in life, what life's priorities should be, will inevitably influence the way you influence others. So what is that for you? What's the bedrock you're standing on? For Titus, that truth was Christ - the one who said, I am the way, the truth and the life.

And you and I need to lead from that same truth for three reasons:

Firstly, for you own stability. I don't know how many of you have been camping over the summer, but when the wind starts picking up, and you know bad weather's coming, what do you do? Maybe you pack up and go home and vow never to camp again! Or, you go round tightening the guy ropes, because that's what keeps your tent pinned to the ground. And truth does the same for your life when difficulties come - the truth about God, and his power and his sovereignty, that he's a refuge and a fortress; the truth about what Jesus says about you, that, whatever your circumstances say, he loves you and has you.

Secondly, you need to lead from truth if you're to be a person of integrity - the kind of person people will listen to when they're in difficulty. The truth about God, and about yourself, has got to grip you in ways that shape your character, if others are to trust you when everything else in their lives is up in the air.

You see, when Titus was in Corinth, he had to deal with the issue of money, because Paul and his team were raising a significant collection of money for the church back in Jerusalem who were suffering, with the intention of taking it back to Jerusalem. And in 2 Corinthians 8:6, Paul writes, 'We urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace.'

Now, at the best of times, money can be a tricky subject, can't it? But Corinth wasn't the best of times. And to encourage people in a church with multiple divisions and moral problems to give to people they've never met, from right motives, *and* to hand that money over to you, takes some doing. But Titus did it. Because he was trustworthy. Because he was known as a man of integrity. Because he'd been shaped by truth.

And if your friend at school, or your colleagues at the water cooler, or your kids around the breakfast table, are to hear you, and listen to you, if they're to entrust their lives to you in some way, they need to know you're not one thing in public and something totally different in private. They need to know you're a person of integrity, that even if they couldn't explain it like this - that your character has been moulded by the truth of Christ.

But thirdly, you need to lead from a commitment to truth because you need a pole star, a magnetic north, that sets the compass for the direction you're going, or you'll just lead people round in circles. It's why Paul reminds Titus, in Titus 3:3-7, of what our lives used to be like, and of how God's loving kindness broke in in Christ, and of the reality of the Spirit's work in our lives and the new birth, and salvation by grace and the hope of eternal life, and then says, Titus 3:8, 'Insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.' In other words, Titus, there is such a thing as truth, so stand on that truth for yourself, and point others to that truth so that their lives are transformed as a result.

So, to think about: as you influence others, how's your personal commitment to the truth of God in Christ? Is it strong, or do you need to take steps to strengthen it so you can better lead others?

But… there's a problem with this truth thing, isn't there? Because it's possible to lead or seek to influence others from a commitment to truth, but in the process you just become abrasive… a Sister Sandpaper or Brother Rasp. So how does Titus *not* do that?

Second point, to lead in difficulty, we need to see
Leadership as Service
Look how Paul describes Titus in 2 Cor 8:23, 'As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker *for your benefit*.'

Now, it's possible, isn't it, to see leadership, or the influence you have over others, as about yourself, and what you get out of it. You like to be the one out front, or directing things, or doing the talking in a relationship. But that wasn't Titus. Firstly, he's not a one-man band, he's a partner Paul says. But secondly, he's not leading there in Corinth to get himself a platform, or to puff up his ego, he was doing it, Paul says, for *your benefit*.

And in 2 Cor 4:5 Paul says, 'For what we [Titus, myself, the team] proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.'

Now, whether it's at work, or in sport, or at church, you can meet someone who's incredibly charismatic, or gifted, and it's obvious they're a leader and you hear them and watch them and think, man they're good. But after a while you begin to realise that this is about them. And everyone else is really just being used.

But, when Titus thought about leadership he didn't think, 'Hey, this is great, I'm the boss, this is about me.' He thinks, 'this is about Christ, the ultimate servant leader, and I'm his servant. This is about others and I'm their servant.'

And if we really want to influence for good in difficulty, we need to decide ahead of time, this is not about me - I'm Christ's servant for others' good. And that means I'm not going to say something or avoid saying something, to a friend or colleague just so I can feel better about myself; I'm not going to lead my family in ways that make me feel powerful, but just beat them up. I'm going to speak and lead in ways that serve them for their good.

And that frees you to speak the truth when it's hard to speak, because Christ is your Lord, not others' opinion of you. And it will also free you to sacrificially serve them, because you're doing it for Christ, not yourself.

But thirdly, if you're to lead in difficulty you need to see
Leadership as Gift

Look at 2 Cor 8:16, where Paul writes, *'Thanks be to God who put into the heart of Titus* the same earnest care I have for you.'

Now, in Titus's day, the church in Ephesus was the regional megachurch, and the church at Thessalonica was famous for its spiritual depth. And either of those would have been much easier, more comfortable, less difficult churches for Titus to help lead. But Titus doesn't go there. He goes to messed up Corinth. And he does so without anyone needing to twist his arm. Why? Because God has put an earnest care for this struggling church into his heart. Because he knew that any leadership gift or skill he had was God's gift to him. That it was something God had entrusted to him.

And you can help others when they're going through difficulty, when you know 'God has put me here. I know it's messy - round the breakfast table, or in that meeting, and I know it's anything but easy or simple, but this is God's calling on my life at this moment.'

And knowing that helps you not quit. Look what Paul writes in 2 Cor 4:1, 'Therefore, having this ministry *by the mercy of God*, we do not lose heart.'

Now, we've just come back from a great week kayaking. And at the end of the day, as you get back to the beach, you've got to deflate the kayak, pack it down, put it in the bag and then carry it on your back up the rocks and cliff to the car. And by the end, you can't wait to get it off your back - because it weighs a ton.

But Paul, and Titus with him, didn't see leadership and leading others through difficulty as an unwanted burden they wanted off their backs as soon as possible. They didn't see it as an imposition. They saw the leadership God had given them as a mercy. As an underserved gift.

And if you're to lead in the midst of difficulty you need to know, like Titus, that the opportunity God has given you to do it is a mercy because, sometimes, when you're sat with your friend, or colleague, or around the breakfast table with your kids, and the missiles start raining in, and you start getting attacked, you can begin to think, 'God I don't want this, I didn't ask for this, I don't deserve this' and you start looking for the exits. And Paul says, no, you're right, none of us deserve the mercy of being God's servants, of being given the opportunity to influence people for him. It's a huge, undeserved mercy. And when you know that, Paul says, you won't lose heart.

But fourthly and finally, you can lead in difficulty when, like Titus, you have a crystal clear vision of what lies ahead.

Leading with Hope:
Look again at how Paul writes to Titus: 'Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ… in hope of eternal life.' (Titus 1:1-2). Now you've probably experienced people who have this uncanny ability to suck the joy out of you or the team. And that's bad enough in the good times, but in the worst of times it can be seriously sapping. Instead, to lead in difficulty you need to lead with hope.

And by *hope*, I don't mean what we really wish would come true, and we're crossing our fingers for, but don't really believe will happen, like England winning the rugby world cup. But the way the Bible uses the word *hope*. Because in the Bible *hope* conveys a certainty, a confidence, a conviction that this is going to happen and we're already living in the good of it.

And Paul says that he, and Titus with him, leads and serves *in hope*. In hope of eternal life. And to lead and influence others in difficulty you need that hope. The hope that though things seem bad now for you, or your friend, or your kids, or your team, God is making everything new in Christ. The hope that though life seems a mess now, we're only looking at the underside of the tapestry God is weaving of our lives. The hope that one day all wrongs will be made right. The hope that no matter what anyone else says about you, the day is coming when your heavenly Father will say, 'well done, good and faithful servant.'

And Titus could lead in Crete and in Corinth - because he had that kind of hope. The hope of the resurrection of Christ. The hope that says Jesus has a better future for your friend than the world has. The hope that can get you through another breakfast with the kids and pray for them as you send them out the door. The hope that can give you peace and poise when the rest of the team are stressed, because you know God has this covered.