



Help For the Busy Elder

Editor's Note

Welcome to the first edition of Elders' ShopNotes, a publication for the busy elder who is secularly employed. If you are one of these brothers, we praise God because we know you are trying to faithfully lead God's people. You also shoulder responsibility as a family man and conscientious worker or professional in the secular field. That's a lot to handle!

Why a new publication when bookstores, internet and conferences overflow with resources on leadership? Even in one book the amount of material can be overwhelming. That's where we come in.

"ShopNotes" is a woodworking term (appropriate for followers of "The Carpenter") referring to handy pointers for tool sharpening, jig making, carpentry techniques— things that help a woodworker do his job well.

In the same way, we would like to provide you with "bite-size" helps in

sharpening your understanding as well as practice of biblical eldership.

You will find each article crisp and concise so that you can read each in a few minutes. And we will publish it bi-monthly to give you time to reflect, digest and even implement some of the ideas at a reasonable pace.

Some columns will provide scriptural teaching to help you understand your functioning as an elder. Others will focus on your personal life. Still others will contain practical pointers. There is even something for your wives in *Wives Corner*. Most of the columns will continue from issue to issue following the same general themes.

If you find this first issue of value, please write or e-mail to request a free subscription and let others know about it also.

May the Lord cause your ministry to result in praise and glory to our Lord Jesus Christ. *Chuck Gianotti, editor.*

Biblical Foundations

Appointment of Elders

by Jack Spender

Leadership in the Christian assembly of the first century was provided by the more mature men in the congregation called elders or overseers. In the New Testament, this fact is never presented as one of several options, but is clearly the

norm. The origin of elder rule can be traced back to the wisdom and experience of the elders of Israel and to the elders of the synagogue in our Lord's time.

By design, the whole idea was to spread the work load, bring different gifts to the table, provide safety in numbers (to protect against the concentration of power in one man), to ensure a smooth transition within leadership, and most of all to reflect the truth that those in authority are also accountable, not only to God but among themselves.

Questions

But where do elders come from? How do they emerge?

Most would answer that they are called by God and recognized by the people—in principle that is true. But whether one is laboring in an

added to an already established and functioning leadership. Clearly, we must seek out the principles for obtaining qualified leaders in a congregation and try to understand what help can be rendered by those who already have some responsibility among God's people.

A General Pattern

A quick reading of the book of Acts will yield three observations. First, a transition in the leadership of the church took place from apostles at the beginning, to

(Continued on page 4)

And when they had appointed elders in every church.... Acts 14:23

established assembly, or planting in a new field, the question as to how elders are actually obtained is central to providing quality care for God's people and thus for the success of the work.

We will search the NT in vain for a simple list of steps. There are no examples given in which an elder is

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Elder's Personal Life

What Comes First?

By Ross McIntee

What comes first? "There's so much to do, so much to be done, I'm overloaded, too much on my plate, a full slate. If only there were more to share the work." On and on it goes until we may even finally conclude in a blaze of self-pity: "I'd sooner burn out than rust out, anyway!"

Is this true of you? Areas of service, duties to perform are endless? Maybe we would sooner not ask ourselves: "What comes first?"

But why? The answer could possibly reveal an undesirable and unexpected vacuum in our lives—one that we really don't care to expose. It's rather humbling. But, perhaps we need to address this question.

What really comes first in our lives as elders? Is it the pressing personal problem, visiting the devoted dying saint, arranging the next missions conference, attending the

regular elders meetings or even preparing for ministering to the believers. What comes first? What is the elder's highest priority?

How thankful we are that early in the history of the infant Church the answer is given. The precedent is established for future elders of all times in Acts 6:2,4. Faced with growing pressures in the fledgling assembly of God's people, "the twelve [i.e. Apostles] called the multitude unto them and said ... we will give ourselves continually to prayer ..." That's it. Amazingly simple and clear! PRAYER. More important than planning, preaching, peace making, pasturing or message preparation. Nothing is more necessary or valuable in the life of an elder than prayer.

But why? Is it not by prayer that he responds to the invitation of Hebrews 4:12? It

is by prayer alone that he can "Come boldly unto the throne of grace." What else can transport him from his earthly location on his knees, in his den or office or by his bedside to that most Holy and sacred place to meet with His Lord. Where else can he "obtain mercy and find grace to help in every time of need?"

And truly, the elder has little choice. He must be a man of prayer. The very qualities that identified him as an elder are the very qualities for which he needs to ask for "grace to help." Read them afresh in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

O God, give us help! We haven't even begun to mention the multitudinous duties, responsibilities, concerns and cares that all we elders have. But, what comes first? "Lord, teach us to pray." Luke 11:1



Leadership Principles

Accountable to God, Responsive to Followers

by Ron Hughes

The apostle Paul was doubtless the greatest spiritual leader in the early church. There are a number of things that we can learn from him as we observe his relationships revealed in his correspondence.

Paul's writings remind us that the apostle was always sensitive to the fact that he was accountable to God (1 Cor. 9:1-9, 2 Cor 5:9-11). He was not afraid to run contrary to the trends around him especially when the world's values and methods started to creep into the churches. His letters are full of warnings and advice to faithful followers who might lean toward answering to the crowd rather than to God. He was not afraid of confrontation, whether it be an entire assembly or fellow apostles (Gal 2:11), when he saw them slipping from the way of Christ.

In our culture, Christian leaders are pressured to be accountable to human hierarchies, within and without the local church. While accountability to the Lord may involve human agents (i.e. elders, colleagues in the work), we do well to remember that our accountability is first and foremost to God.

Sometimes, powerful individuals, who have significant influence among the Lord's people, would like us to be accountable to them personally. They are folk who feel that a majority opinion should shape what

we do and how we do it. Like Paul we need to be constantly aware that we answer to God (Rom. 14:12). Leaders who fall into the trap of being men-pleasers, will have a sad account to give to the One they call "Lord."

Yet, exclusive consideration of Paul's accountability to God alone would create a caricature of the man. For while Paul was

Am I now trying to win the approval of men or of God? Galatians 1:10a

careful not to put himself under the authority of men, he was also continually aware that being a servant of God involved serving, nurturing and caring for the people of God (Rom 15:25, 2 Cor. 11:28). Indeed, he enjoined all believers to "serve one another" (Gal. 5:13). It is this that brings balance to the apostle's approach to ministry. He was ready to pour himself out for men and women loved of God, in order to benefit them and present them mature in Christ (2 Cor. 11).

Christian leaders today would do well to aspire to this mindset. It is a distinctly Christlike attitude (Phil. 2:5-8). In our effort to be answerable only to God, we may become unresponsive to the needs of those around us. But at the same time, in our desire to proclaim only the pure truth of God,

we may weaken our message because we fail to make it accessible to those who so desperately need to hear it. In other words, avoiding the pitfall of pleasing men, we tumble headlong into insensitivity.

Depending on how our personalities have been molded, we can easily assume one of two positions. 1) We may act as if we alone are God's messenger and others with their ideas must be ignored. 2) Or we may try hard to please people all of the time, thereby losing our effectiveness and preaching the message of man instead of the message of God.

Paul illustrates the desirable balance of being accountable to God, yet responsive to people all at the same time—a good ideal for Christian leaders today.



RECOMMENDED READING

"Biblical Eldership", by Alexander Strauch (Lewis and Roth Publishers: Littleton, Colorado).

A very good treatment of the subject, especially when used with accompanying work book. Useful when used as one-on-one mentoring of prospective or new elders. Also can be studied in a group situation.

Practical Ministry

Shepherding the Flock

by Chuck Gianotti

As shepherds of God's flock we take our example from Christ himself: "I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me." We need to "know" the folks in our assembly.

Visitation provides an opportunity to demonstrate that the elders are aware and that they care—that each person in the local body of Christ is valuable. Of the most common types is hospital visitation. With careful consideration and a few pointers, this can become an effective ministry for shepherding the flock of God.

When to visit

- Visit during visiting hours unless given permission by nursing staff and patient.
- Visit in the afternoons and evenings. Mornings are usually busy with breakfast, getting presentable, testing, therapy, etc.
- Honor all requests for NO visitors, unless specifically given permission by the patient or family members.
- It may be helpful to let the patient know you are coming or ask permission from a close relative to visit (some patients are very conscious about their appearance).
- Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays are lonelier days for the patient—people don't visit as much then. So visit on these days if possible.

Etiquette Do's

- Stand in a place that is easy for the patient to see you. Be close enough to

make talking and listening easier.

- Be cheerful, optimistic.
- ASK how many visitors have been in today already. If you are number 18, stay only 2 minutes AT MOST!
- Make visits brief unless invited to stay longer; 10-15 minutes may be enough. Long visits can be exhausting to someone who is ill.
- Talk about newsy items, happenings at

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder . . . Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care . . . 1 Peter 5:1-2a

the assembly.

- Be ready to perform any service consistent with propriety and hospital rules (for example, writing a letter, making a call).


Etiquette Don'ts

- Don't sit on the bed or do anything that might disturb or upset the patient.
- Don't bring up *your* troubles or trials. Don't be negative (about the patient's appearance, nursing staff, etc.).
- **Never** break a confidence. If his/her condition is sensitive or something he/she is embarrassed about, ask how specific you should be when sharing this prayer concern with others.
- Some medical experts believe comatose patients can sometimes hear what is be-

ing said, even if they cannot communicate. Be careful what you say. But, you can still talk to, read and pray out loud for the patient.

Scripture

- Ask if anyone has read Scripture or prayed with him/her today.
- Select an appropriate passage ahead of time or read one the patient requests. Keep it short—resist the urge to preach!
 - When praying, you might show warmth and comfort by holding the patient's hand or "laying on hands." However, exercise caution when doing this so that the touching is not inappropriate.
 - Pray for God's strength, encouragement and cheer.
- **IF** God has given you a strong burden or sense of faith, pray for healing. Be careful of "claiming" God's healing, as we have no such "claims" on God! But, we do have a God who hears prayer and may be pleased to heal.
- While you are praying for the patient, you might also pray for the other patients in the room. Often they will hear you and thank you afterwards, which may lead to further opportunity for you to be used of God.

Hospital visitation can be an effective way to "know" the people God has entrusted to your care. In the next issue we will look at various Biblical passages that are helpful in visitation (1 Peter 5:3). 

Wives' Corner

Supporting Your Husband

by Mary Gianotti

I'm an elder's wife. Some times I love it, some times I don't. At times I feel privileged to work along side of my husband and other times I wish we could both disappear and magically end up on a deserted south sea island with no responsibilities and no people. Well maybe a few people who would serve us cold lemonade while we basked in the tropical sun.

We all experience these feelings at times. What keeps us going in the work of the Lord?

I have just been reading 1 Timothy 3 and 1 Thessalonians 5, the two chapters that describe the qualifications for elders. I am amazed at the kind of man God wants for

this important work of shepherding his sheep. It is a high calling. The Holy Spirit has laid this burden on our husbands (Acts 20:28) and the Lord commends them for desiring a good work (1 Timothy 3:1).

How do I as a wife of an elder fit into this picture? The book of Genesis provides a foundation in 2:18 that I just love: "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" God saw a need—Adam was incomplete and lacked a helper.

The root word for helper is found 88 times in the Old Testament, mostly used for one who is a military assistant (*from Dr. Alan Ross, unpublished notes, Dallas Theological Seminary*). The commander of an

army would have a trusted right hand man who would assist him in planning and executing a battle plan. The word is also used in the Bible to describe God as our helper (see Psalms 46:1, 121:1-2). God is the "helper" *par excellence*.

Clearly, our role as elders' wives is not that of an "assistant elder." However, if the first man created by a holy, perfect God and placed in a flawless environment was incomplete and needed help, then our husbands need help as well.

How, then, can I be a helper to my husband who is an elder? In the same way that our husbands are to exemplify godly manhood, we should strive to exemplify the biblical standard of godly womanhood. We



Appointment of Elders *(continued from page 1)*

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers ...”
1 Peter 5:2a

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apostles and elders in the middle of the book, to elders alone in the newer works, as required by the growth of the church and the passing of the apostles.

Second, there is both a divine work in this process “...the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers...” (Acts 20:28) and a human side “And when they had appointed elders in every church...” (Acts 14:23).

Third, in agreement with the general tenor of all Scripture, God works first and man responds in obedience to what God is doing. Thus there is more to the expression “the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers” than simply saying that God ratifies man’s choice. Rather, God initiates the process in accord with His purposes and promises to meet the needs of His people.

Details

In 1 Tim. 3:1- 7 we find two important criteria for men who would serve as elders: there must be a desire for the work (vs. 1) and certain character and family qualifications must be met (vss. 2-7). Putting these together with Acts 20:28 we have the following progression:

- God works in the heart
- Desire to serve grows in the individual
- The desire manifests itself in the life both in character and in work.

But what about the response of the congregation to all of this? From Paul’s charge in 1 Thess. 5:12 “...know them who labor among you and are over you in

the Lord...” we understand that the congregation has a responsibility to “know” (i. e. to observe, learn about, recognize) their leaders. But how does this work out practically?

Acts 14:23 is a help. Paul and Barnabas were on a return visit to new assemblies. The elapsed time would have allowed the saints to note the spiritual work of some in their number.

One can picture Paul pointing with his hand to indicate those who clearly were functioning as shepherds in the flock. The word in Greek means “to appoint by lifting the hand.” Considered in context, this cannot support either an elaborate ordination

...the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers . . . Acts 20:28

ceremony or a congregational vote, as the reference is clearly to Paul and Barnabas. As Wm Hoste observes; “There is something grotesque in the idea of Paul and Barnabas electing by a show of hands.” (Bishops, Priests and Deacons p. 48).

Conclusions

Our teaching must be clear that God works first and then His people respond. This is true not only for those who are being prepared to lead—in desire, in qualifications, and in seeking to do the work—but also as we help the saints through the eyes of experience to recognize the ones God is fitting for service. The exact method through which such pointing out takes place is not the point. That practical help is provided surely is.



Supporting Your Husband *(continued from page 3)*

have homes to manage, children to teach, younger women to disciple, widows or orphans to care for. Also there is the mission’s work, notes of encouragement, the next potluck to organize—list goes on and on. I believe God desires us to give special attention to our original calling, to be a “helper” to our husbands.

Each marriage is unique--not every elder’s wife will help her husband in the same way. To be sure, our husbands will often deal with matters that are confidential in nature, things which they cannot share with us. But, as I look again at the character qualities that an elder is to have, it seems to me that we could assist our

husbands in each one of these areas.

For example, an elder must be “above reproach” (1 Timothy 3:2). This is paralleled with the qualification for the wives of spiritual leaders that they be “women worthy of respect” (1 Timothy 3:11). Does my life style and character support my husband being “above reproach”? Do I speak with respect about him in public? Does my character reflect well on him?

In future columns we will look at practical ways we can help our husbands in this demanding ministry. As elders’ wives, God has given us a high calling—let’s rise up to that challenge and, in so doing, glorify our Lord and Savior