



What Keeps You Going?

Editor's Note

The work of an elder is never ending and it is easy to drop back into "meeting as a board" from which decisions emanate. But, the work of being an elder requires hard-working men, men willing to invest their lives, pastoring that which God calls "the body of Christ."

Being an elder is not just one more compartment of life among many—it is a way of life and permeates all other aspects of life.

Being an "elder kind of man" in reality is a natural extension of being a godly leader and shepherd in the home (cf. 1 Tim 3:4-5). The effective elder learns to find "rest and refreshment" in the rhythms of ministry and life.

It is a struggle, nonetheless. Self-doubt can be a constant companion. The desire for "life before eldership" can creep in. What keeps you going?


Here are three perspectives to keep the negativity at bay:

1) The motivational perspective: One day the Chief Shepherd will appear and give you a crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4)

2) The practical perspective: There is great value and meaning in hard work and sacrifice. Shepherding the flock requires the Christ-like fundamentals—love and respect to all.

3) The team perspective: Mutual trust among elders is essential. We must learn to communicate well and share the responsibilities.

Enjoy this issue of ShopNotes. Our goal is in some small way to help equip you for your honorable work as an elder. As always, your comments and feedback are appreciated.

by C.R. Gianotti 

Biblical Foundations The First Work

by Jack Spender

Let's take a closer look at the first responsibility of an elder: feeding God's flock. After his resurrection, the Lord Jesus instructed His apostles to teach new disciples obedience to his commands (Matthew 28:20 KJV). The earliest record of church history shows how carefully this was observed as the believers "continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching..." (Acts 2:42).

When the gospel reached the Gentile world, this foundational aspect of the Christian faith was reinforced. Paul constantly affirmed the primacy of God's word to young churches.

We may take his parting words to the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20 as representative. Looking back, he reminds them: "I have not shunned to declare

I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.
Acts 20:27

unto you all the counsel of God" (vs. 27). Then he exhorts them to follow his example: "Take heed ... to feed the church of God" (vs. 28). Finally, after warning of dangers that will arise, he commends them to God "and to the word of his grace" (vs. 32). As then, so now, false teachers and false doctrine threaten the church.

It is the nature of the new life within that babes need the milk of the word (I Pet 2:2). They can then grow and teach others (Heb 5:12), having received the bread of life consistently and faithfully. Therefore, a healthy assembly will provide plenty of good spiritual food to build up God's people and teach them how to study the Word for themselves.

Who Does the Feeding?

When thinking of feeding the flock, we tend to think of Sunday

preaching. But what else constitutes the feeding of God's people? The list is broad, and whatever we name, something will be left out. Yet, think of all the personal and small group interactions in which elders participate regularly.

According to I Timothy 5:17, not all elders devote the same amount of effort to the study of the Scripture. In addition, nothing requires every elder to be a "platform speaker." In fact, the assembly will be better off where there is honesty about one's gifts or lack thereof (Rom 12:3). Nonetheless, every elder must be "apt" or

able to share God's truth in his own sphere of involvement (I Tim 3:2). If you listen in on a one-on-one conversation involving an elder, you'll likely hear godly principles—if not quoted

Bible verses—sprinkled into the conversation. This is part of feeding the flock.

Whether they preach and teach personally or invite those who are gifted and able to do so, the elders are ultimately responsible for the spiritual diet of the assembly. They must be sure that the believers' needs and problems do not hinder them from devoting quality time to the Scriptures, a principle laid down in Acts 6:1-7, where

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In response to that unexpected phone call, you have agreed to conduct your first Funeral Service. But where do you start? May I suggest you consider the following thoughts, with the prayer that they will help you provide a very important service for the Lord and your friend's family.

Preparing for the Service

- 1. As soon as possible visit the family of the deceased and extend your sympathy.
2. Ask if the deceased had a favorite verse of scripture or hymn they would like included in the Memorial Service.
3. Ask for the details of the conversion of the deceased. This is important information.
4. Was he/she engaged in any form of service for the Lord?
5. Ask family and friends what details of their loved one's life they hope to remember. Adult children will often mention precious family experiences you may be able to use.
7. Ask the Lord for a verse(s) relating to the departed and from which you may present the gospel or challenges to Christians to live for Christ in light of their appointment with God.
8. Tell the truth about the person. Mourners should not be left wondering if you are talking about the individual that they knew.
9. When preparing and presenting the message, begin with interesting anecdotes about the deceased and weave the message theme between each one. This helps you to make your points and keeps the interest of your audience.
10. As the message draws to a close, comfort the believers with thoughts of the Rapture, God's love and God's faithfulness. Lovingly stress the simple truths of the gospel to the unsaved present. Encourage the non-Christians to seriously consider where

they will spend eternity when their life is over. Remember Hebrews 9:27 is still in the Book.

11. Funeral services are God-given opportunities to personally and warmly tell the gathered company of the Savior's love for them and the fact they, too, must go out into eternity .

Brothers, we do not want you to...grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 1 Thessalonians 4:13

12. In the event the service is for an unsaved person, deliver an appropriate eulogy and lovingly present the Gospel.

13. Pray the audience will feel the genuineness of your Spirit-delivered message.

14. The length of the message should be approximately 20 to 25 minutes, unless the family directs otherwise.

Prior to the Service

- 1. Make yourself familiar with the building where the funeral will take place.
2. Discuss with the Funeral Director local customs that may apply regarding the entry of the casket and yourself into the building, the seating arrangements for the family, etc.
3. Stand behind the lectern and get a feel for the room.
4. Discuss with the funeral director the cue you will give him that the service is coming to a close (e.g. prayer, etc.).
4. Ask if you should ask the congregation to rise as the staff is coming up the aisle to prepare the casket for removal to the hearse.
5. Normally, you should precede the casket as it leaves the chapel and family members and friends will follow it.
6. Go to your assigned car.

Graveside Service

- 1. The Funeral Director will likely ask you to lead the procession to the grave.
2. Take your place at the head of the grave, speak so as to be heard by all.
3. Conduct a brief committal service. It is suggested you group together a number of appropriate scripture verses, which will present a clear and powerful message. You may close your meditation with a verse or two of a meaningful poem or hymn. The length should be 5-15 minutes in length.

4. A warm prayer should conclude the service as you commit the body to the grave until the Day of Resurrection. Remember to tenderly pray for the Lord's blessing on the grieving family.

5. Some Funeral Directors may ask if you wish the use of sand with which to make the sign of the cross.

6. When your final prayer has been offered, again express sympathy to the family and then leave the graveside.

Note: Customs and terminology differ from place to place (i.e. memorial, funeral, "wake", etc.) These have to do with whether or not the body is present during the service and the location of the service. Wishes of the family and local custom should be respected.



RECOMMENDED READING

When Men Think Private Thoughts, by Gordon MacDonald (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996).

This provocative book will challenge you to get below the surface as a man. Most of us are conditioned since birth to be "strong" on the outside, yet deny fears and insecurities on the inside. As elders we don't want to let on we sometimes struggle for fear we will lose our influence. After all, "no one wants to follow a weak leader."

But where does a leader turn to for help when he is weak or fearful? MacDonald's book may be the help you need. He himself has gone through fairly significant failure, but has rebounded in the grace of our Lord. You can still be a man and strong leader, and at the same time acknowledge the private thoughts you have.



ARE YOU A LEADER WITH "PULL"

Dwight D. Eisenhower used to demonstrate the art of leadership in a simple but forceful way. He would place a single piece of string on a table and say, "Pull it and it follows wherever you want it to go; but push it, and it goes nowhere."

We may alter the conduct of believers to some degree by preaching "at" them, by "pushing" them along. But unless they accept the truth inwardly, their actions will not reflect genuine Christian character. To lead means to be "out front"—not pushing from behind, but leading, "pulling" by example. In doing this, people will see the truth in action and how it works out in your life. As they become convinced of the truth in their lives, they in turn will look to you for leadership.



Years ago a friend who had just become a Christian, was involved in a road racing club. They would meet every week and go on races (keeping to the speed limit, of course) following cryptic instructions. Great camaraderie for those who loved exotic cars.

Due to some difficulties in his life he hadn't been out to any of the gatherings for a few months. During that time, not one person called to see what was up and why he hadn't been there. His disillusionment at this superficial camaraderie led him to abandon the group.

How deep is the fellowship in your local church? What can be done to enrich it beyond the greetings of Sunday morning or a prayer meeting.

Elders should take the lead on this. Sounds good, but, where do you start?

Who should we visit and why?

- Widows and orphans in distress—to look after them (James 1:27)
- The afflicted—to listen (Ps 10:17)
- The faintheart (timid)—to encourage to them be strong (1 Thess 5:14)
- Those doing well—to encourage them to continue (Acts 11:23, Romans 1:12)

- Other leaders—encourage to be them strong (Deut 1:38, 3:28)
Nothing replaces one-on-one time with individuals to be of encouragement to them.
Don't just visit people when there is a problem. When you call to set up an appointment, you will sometimes get the response, "Is there something wrong?" I often respond, "No, I just want to stop by for a

I am the good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.
John 10:14

friendly visit—the elders are trying to see everyone in the assembly. When would be a good time we could get together?" As people learn that you genuinely care, they will begin to look forward to your visits.

Where?

The location may vary: in the home, in a restaurant over a cup of coffee—and it can be any time of the day convenient to you and the person. Set this up a few days in advance—it is generally not a good idea to just drop by as you might be interrupting something.

What do you say?

Depending on how well you know the person(s) you may want to just get to know them, their jobs, family (for example, ask about the people whose pictures are on their walls or mantle). The fact that you took the time to visit speaks volumes. At some point I usually ask one of two questions that help get below the surface:

- 1) How can I pray for you?
- 2) What concerns do you want the elders to be aware of?

You will find people beginning to open up about their real spiritual issues and concerns. Be prepared, though. They may say some things that are uncomfortable for you.

Gently, but confidently you can begin to minister to them at their real level of need. This is where real heart to heart shepherding takes place. It is at this level, that people will begin to know that you care.

If each elder set a goal for 1-2 visits per month ... three elders could visit 36 individuals/families in one year! That doesn't seem so hard now does it?



Wives' Corner

A Woman of Trustworthiness

by Mary Gianotti

With tears in her eyes the young woman begins telling her story. She has been meeting you for many months now at a small café. Initial awkwardness has gradually given way to a comfortable relationship.

She was a new Christian and you, an elders wife sensing a need, wanted to see her grow in the Lord and become strong in her Christian walk. Despite a busy life, she thought this important enough to carve out an hour after work before she rushes home to feed her family.

Often you meet in the car and pray together sharing the joys and sorrows of life. You enjoy a cup of coffee as you open your Bibles and study guides. She usually comes prepared having spent time in God's word on her own. It is thrilling to hear her personal discoveries. Your faith is strengthened as she grows. Your meetings are only an hour a week but what a difference it has made in both of your lives.

Today is different. She hugs her coffee cup and stares into it. Slowly she begins to tell you her story--it has not been told before, one of hurts and betrayals. Your heart

is heavy, tears are shared. Why is she allowing you into this private and very dark corner of her life? The answer is simply: She trusts you.

In past issues of ShopNotes, we have discussed the characteristics of an elder's wife found in 1 Timothy 3:11: "In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers, but temperate and trustworthy in everything." In particular, trustworthiness is an essential trait for a woman married to an elder.

It is a sacred moment when someone invites you to enter the private corners of her life. That person's trust for us will grow when we remember James' words to be quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19). Listening is a lost art, but it is essential to earning trust. But, how can we develop this ability to listen well?

We must listen with a heart of love for the person. Ask God for wisdom to understand what they are saying. Resist the urge to give a pat answer.

Comments such as, "Well that was a long time ago, you'll get over it," or "You shouldn't feel that way," or "That has never

happened to me," or "Now you are a Christian; things will work out," – these kind of insensitive comments only slam the door on further conversation. Responses like these communicate that you think her struggle is superficial and her heart wounds are minor.

Jesus didn't minimize our infirmities and sorrow—he took them and carried them upon himself (Isaiah 53:4). We must deal gently with others' hurts. The high priest in the Old Testament was able to deal gently with those who were ignorant and going astray, since he himself was subject to weakness (Heb 5:2). We would do well to remember our own sinfulness and short comings when others entrust us with theirs.

Hebrew 5:14-16 tells us that Jesus sympathizes with our weaknesses and he offers us "every day" grace to help us in our times of need. There is not a moment in the day when we do not depend on the saving grace and help of our Lord. Let's extend this love and compassion to those who entrust us with the fragments of their lives and be women "trustworthy in everything".





The First Work *(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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assistants [deacons] were chosen to keep priorities right.

How Broad is this Work?

The work is as wide as the needs of people! Opportunities for visiting, counseling, comforting, equipping, defending are limitless. Only a book that is “living,” “powerful,” “sharp,” and “able” (Heb 4:12) can accomplish all this.

Elders must spend time in prayer to discern what is needed. For the one who teaches publicly, messages should be prepared carefully and delivered with sincerity. The task is to be both faithful to the word and relevant to our times. The teacher must build a bridge from Bible days to the present so his hearers can learn to live what is preached.

Many have benefited from consecutive, systematic, expository ministry which exposes the believer to the whole counsel of God, not just certain “favorite themes.” Feeding is giving out what one has received from the Head. We do not preach our own words or ideas; we must

be convinced that only the word of God brings life and spiritual vitality to the saints.

And here is one point of real difference with many denominational approaches, like that of Roman Catholicism, that sees authority residing in the church itself. True spiritual authority in teaching comes not from the Church, but from the Word itself. The church receives its instruction from the Head (that is, Christ) through the gifted men He supplies.

Reaping the Benefits

When, through the labors of godly elders, believers are equipped for service, strengthened against sin in spiritual warfare, and blessed in Spirit empowered worship that is based on truth, they will be encouraged to witness for Christ in their world. This provides a supply of new converts coming into the assembly and thus, the Word of God builds the church (Acts 6:7; 9:30). The old saying is true: “If you want more sheep, feed the ones you have.”



adapted from an anonymous essay

Leadership

Love—for the people. Don’t lose the human dimension—servant leadership. The Greatest command: Love God. 2nd command: love your neighbor. Greatest is love. End of the law is love, etc. Get the picture?

Enthusiasm—if you act with enthusiasm, you will be more convincing in what you say. People aren’t going to be convinced by someone who seems bored with the truth.

Adaptability—if some practices are not specifically determined in the scripture, then rigidity puts us in bed with the Pharisees.

Dedication—Never give up, never, never, never give up (as Sir Winston Churchill used to say). Even if it means great sacrifice! There are all kinds of justifications for giving up. But, there is one reason to keep on—dedication.

Experience—learn from mistakes. You can have 10 years of experience or 1 year of experience 10 times over. It all depends on whether you

are learning from your experience and growing.

Realism—about yourselves, your limitations and those of others. But, more so, realism of what God can do through broken, clay vessels.

Strength—of conviction, character and communication. No one will follow or respect a weak leader.

Humor—learn to laugh and enjoy life. Elders often take themselves far too seriously. Laughter is good for the soul!

Integrity—Be the real thing. It’s OK to admit you made a mistake. People can spot the superficial. Hypocrisy is an attempt to convince people we are perfect. Counter this with frequent admissions to someone that you made a mistake (surely you have been wrong more than once a week!).

Persuasiveness—in the gospel and in appeals for holiness. The best persuasion is a life lived with true godliness and love.

