



Editor's Note

This issue marks the beginning of our 10th year of publication! What began as a simple follow-up to a series of elder training sessions has grown into an international publication going out in English and Spanish to about 800 subscribers both in North American and around the world. Many tell us they print down multiple copies and circulate them.

We've revamped our web-site, so take a look. We carry all the back issues there and an index of articles (www.bible-equip.org).

For our e-mail subscribers, we are now

sending only the link version, an e-mail with a link directly to the current issue—no more attachments. The link should bring you the issue just as easily as an attachment. This greatly simplifies things this end and will reduce the size of the e-mail to your inbox. As always, you can subscribe or unsubscribe to the e-mail version on-line. All postal-mail subscribers will continue receiving ESN as usual. Changes in these subscriptions must be done by e-mail or postal-mail.

Thanks to all who financially support this ministry. You are a blessing to many people by helping make ESN possible. Thank you.

Leadership Principles The Shepherd's Heart

by Jack Spender

Over the years in ESN, we have considered many of the responsibilities and labors of church elders. Providing leadership among the people of God is certainly a noble theme and exhaustless in its breadth. But on occasion we need to contemplate the unseen part of what it means to be an elder, specifically, what kind of heart motivates the elder?

Simply put, elders are men in whom God has been developing the heart of a shepherd, a love and sympathy for people, especially God's people in all their frailty and need. When the disciples gazed at the city of Jerusalem, they were awed by the magnificent buildings (Mk 13:1); when the Lord Jesus beheld the city, He wept over it (Lk 19:41), knowing that the people "were as sheep not having a shepherd" (Mk 6:34).

The shepherd/sheep theme runs right through the Bible. Isaiah gives a good summary, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6 KJV). In the New Testament, angels announced the Savior's birth to shepherds (Luke 2:8). God was sending His Shepherd into the world, so it was fitting to notify other shepherds. And yet He was coming as a lamb, God's lamb (John 1:29).

Throughout His ministry, the Lord gave many illustrations about sheep, and described Himself as the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep (John 10:11). In the epistles, this analogy is continued as He is called the Great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20) and the Chief Shepherd (I Peter 5:4).

As believers, elders are themselves sheep in need of a Shepherd. They, too, are being conformed to the image of Christ. Yet in a special sense, elders become God's "under

shepherds" caring for His flock in their own local area. They can appreciate the words of the Lord Jesus to Peter making a strong correlation between love for the Lord and taking care of His sheep (John 21:15).

A Matter of the Heart

But a shepherd heart doesn't just happen. It is the grateful response of one who has himself been a sheep for some time. This puts the whole work on the solid ground of love. There can be no other motivation. Shepherd work must not spring from external pressures or the desire for gain. The elder works directly under the Chief Shepherd and can always say, "The Lord is my Shepherd..."

Now it is true that the noun "shepherd" or "pastor" is never applied directly to elders as a title. Yet, as seen in Jesus' instruction to Peter, they are instructed to feed, nourish and tend the flock of God (John 21:15-17). And they are told to shepherd the flock of God among them (1 Peter 5:1-2). These are tender and intimate labors that spring from a heart of compassion rather than the calculated decisions of a business executive. Always, the elder ponders the shepherd ministry of the Lord Jesus, seeking to understand His heart and follow in His steps.

Without attempting an exhaustive study, let's think about some of the marks of a shepherd's heart. "Love" will not be listed as a separate item since it is the basis of all. Without love, there can be no true shepherd work.

Care

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul likens the small flock of the elder's own family to the larger flock of God's church. He uses the word *care*, "...how shall he take care of the church of God?" (3:5). Later, in describing this same young man, Paul explains that he has no other helper like Timothy who will

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Leadership Principles

How To Choose A Church

by Chuck Gianotti

Last issue we wrote about how to leave a church. Now we want to address helping Christians find a church. For some this is a no-brainer, just find the nearest church of their denomination or movement. For a more thoughtful approach, here is some advice from a pamphlet one church provides its departing members and also new visitors.

One of the most important decisions you will make as a Christian is your choice of a home church to attend. This will determine what you learn about God and will determine the people with whom you will spend most of your time worshipping, serving, learning and growing. So it is important for you to make a smart, Spirit-led, Biblical decision.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FINDING AND BECOMING INVOLVED IN A GOOD CHURCH

There are six good reasons to become part of a church family:

- 1) God wants you to be an active part of a local body of believers.
- 2) You will gain a spiritual family to support and encourage you.
- 3) You will come under the protection and guidance of godly leaders.
- 4) You will find accountability as you grow in your spiritual life.
- 5) You will have a sense of belonging.
- 6) You will be encouraged to learn about and use your spiritual gifts.

OK, you understand the need to find a new church home. But how do you know which to choose? There's a smorgasbord of church types, beliefs systems and worship styles out there. Do you look for something that suits your tastes, like shopping for a new car? Do you go where your friends go? Here are some spiritual and mental crowbars to help you evaluate potential churches.

BIBLICAL CRITERIA

Is the church you are considering committed to the four pillars of the early church?

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship,

to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles (Acts 2:42-43 NIV emphasis added).

Based on the model of the first church, you should first look for the four key elements of a God-honoring church.

1. Is the teaching biblical?

Paul underscored the importance of Biblical teaching: "...devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" (1 Tim 4:13).

He also warned, "*For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around*

A Christian's choice of church is more than just finding one of the same denomination, movement or style.

them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear." (2 Tim 4:3)

Therefore, check out the church's doctrinal statement and read it carefully. Determine what makes their teaching the same as or different from other churches. Ask lots of questions of the leadership.

2. Is there genuine fellowship?

Fellowship is as important as doctrine. John, whom Jesus loved, passionately wrote: "*We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ*" (1 John 1:3).

Fellowship is more than just having meals together. Do the people enjoy being together and talking about spiritual things even when the meetings are over? Do they minister to one another during times of need or hardship?

3. Is the church committed to "Breaking of Bread"?

Jesus Himself made this clear, "*He said to them, 'With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer'*" (Lk 22:15 NKJV)

The apostles took this quite seriously, as we see in Paul who conveyed the command of the Lord, "... do this in remembrance of Me" (1 Cor 11:24).

Is there the same level of "devotedness" to the Breaking of Bread (i.e. the Lord's Supper) as to the other three foundational elements of the church (teaching, fellowship and prayer)? How often and when is it done—this may indicate the level of emphasis given to it? Does the Lord's Supper seem to be just a ritual without life or does it reflect a vibrant sense of remembrance and worship of the living Christ?

4. Do they pray seriously?

"... he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying" (Acts 12:12).

Is there sincere prayer taking place by individuals, small groups or the whole church? Is there evidence that the church really is dependent upon God, or is prayer more of a dull, duty?

A few other elements also make for a God honoring Church:

5. Are they committed to reaching out?

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:14).

Does this go beyond the talking and into the doing? What is actually being done to reach the lost? Are people coming to Christ? What kind of outreaches have taken place in the last 12 months? Does the church support and encourage missionary involvement?

Is the church committed to discipling and equipping believers?

Jesus said, "...go and make disciples" (Mt 28:19). You can't get any more direct than that!

Paul adds, "*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*" (Eph 4:11-12)

What kind of discipling is taking place? Is it intentional?

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Carefully I drove through the snow-covered streets mulling a few things over in my mind. I needed to write an article for ESN. Before I went to my favorite coffee shop to do this I had one quick stop to make. My day was packed and my to-do list long. I hurriedly parked in front of the post office and rushed to the front door.

Out of the corner of my eye I noticed an older man heading to the door with arms full of packages. Quickly I evaluated the

situation. I needed to hold the door open for him—after all, I had been thinking a lot about serving, maybe even writing about it. Smiling, I opened the door and made a few comments about his load. He thanked me, went in and got in line.

Now here's the rub. Since I opened the door for him you would think he in turn would let me go ahead of him in line. Makes sense, right? I do something for him, he does something for me. I confess I stood in line stewing. He should have let me go ahead of him.

Then I felt a tap on my shoulder, not

a physical touch but a spiritual one. It was The Servant, His presence was very real as He whispered in my soul, "Be like me." I wish I could tell you that in that instant I saw the truth and yielded. Instead I resisted, feeling a right to a better place in line.

How ridiculous! Well, now really

I do something for him, he does something for me. Makes sense, right?

you see my heart was exposed. My desire is to be a servant but I can't really do it, because there is nothing in me that even comes close to Jesus. This experience proves it.

Finding a cozy booth, I plugged in my computer and began to type. Zechariah's words in Luke 1:74-75 came to mind: it is the Lord who has "enabled us to serve Him" (NIV). That is the starting point. Serving like Jesus is not something I decide to do. I must wholly depend on Him, be enabled by Him.

We are encouraged by Paul in Ro-

mans 14:17-18 to serve Christ in a way that is pleasing to God. He tells us three characteristics that will delight the One we follow. "The kingdom of God is... righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit because anyone who serves in this way is pleasing to God..."

First, to be a servant my relationship with God must be *righteous*, free from sin. This will require being aware of His presence and making Him a part of every circumstance.

Second, my relationship with others must be characterized by *peace*, rather than by stress and anxiety. Lastly I should be experiencing *joy* in the Holy Spirit, a satisfaction that results from knowing what I have done has eternal value.

If I had used the simple grid of righteousness, peace and joy when faced with the opportunity to serve the burdened down man, it would have resulted in service pleasing to God. May we this New Year dedicate ourselves afresh to the Lord and pray that this we will be filled with service pleasing to him. 

How To Choose A Church *(cont. from page 2)*

MINISTRY CRITERIA

Some other things you might want to consider:

1. What is the church's vision statement?
2. Does this church believe in qualified, biblical leadership that is shared or does leadership ultimately rest with one individual (single pastor or other influential person)? Are there biblical elders who oversee the ministry?
3. Are you needed here? Is there room for your spiritual gift?
4. Where does this church stand on gender and ministry issues?
5. Who is the church trying to reach? What is their emphasis: youth, seniors, immigrants, minorities, etc.?

PERSONAL CRITERIA

1. Is this the best place for your family's spiritual growth? Will the spiritual needs of your children be adequately met here?
2. Will you feel comfortable bringing non-Christians?
3. Is there an atmosphere of love? A vi-

brant community of friendships?

GEOGRAPHICAL CRITERIA

Deciding on the location of your physical home and your church are related. The distance you live from your church directly affects your ability to attend the activities of the church. A thirty minute drive one-way means a one hour commute time for each activity you attend. This can make it difficult for attending weekly small groups, Sunday evening events and children's or youth meetings. Where possible, it makes sense to choose your church first, then determine the neighborhood you will live in.

SECONDARY ISSUES

1. What style of music do they use? This is important, but it should not be *the* determining factor. Other things are far more important. However, many churches are bitterly divided over this issue, so this needs to be considered carefully. The style of music and the attitudes toward differing kinds of music *does* reflect underlying perspectives on what

are or are not acceptable forms of worship and praise.

2. What socio-economic strata of life is represented by the people attending? This should be a fairly minor issue, but, every church has its own "culture"—and this culture is affected by the people who make up each local body.

DOES GOD WANT YOU AT THIS CHURCH?

The above list may seem overwhelming. One thing is for sure, you will not find the perfect church that meets all your requirements. Therefore, you will have to determine which factors are most important to you, before God. The bottom line is, where does the Lord want you? As we have seen above, He has outlined in His Word the kind of church He desires. Our prayer is that you will follow His lead, and experience the fellowship and spiritual growth that He wants for all His followers. 

Note: Feel free to use, modify or make any part or all this article your own. CG.

Shepherd's Heart (cont.)

naturally care for the state of God's people. Paul knew the weight of this word because he had earlier referred to the burden that was upon him daily in "the care of all the churches" (II Cor. 11:28).

Shepherds care! People are like sheep: weak, defenseless, often entangled and an easy prey for the enemy. The shepherd heart does not punch a time clock or have hours when care is in session. He must care for them because the Good Shepherd cares for them.

Priorities

Peter, in writing to his scattered readers, reminds them that by God's grace they have returned to the "Shepherd and Bishop of their souls" (I Peter 2:25). The order of these beautiful titles is noteworthy. "Shepherd" speaks of ownership and sacrifice. "Bishop" (or Overseer) speaks of order. Both are important, but feeding the sheep must have priority over organizational pressures. Many in the business world today reverse these and display greater concern for decision making and administrative duties than concern for people. This is always a danger, especially in a growing church where administrative functions can sap emotional tenderness, not to mention his time.

Knowing the Sheep

Proverbs 27:23 charges the shepherd to know the state of his flock. As families grow, this becomes a challenge. What are the names of all those little sheep (children) coming along? Can we call them by name? The Good Shepherd does (John 10:3). Praying for them one by one, and visiting them in their homes will be a great help in getting to know and love them as individuals.

Another question: Do we have some idea of what the next growth step is in each life? Understanding this will help us decide what passages of Scripture to expound in the teaching time; what contributions fellowship must be making to families, what prayer needs should be emphasized in the assembly prayer times, and so on.

The Basin and Towel

Before He went to the cross, the Lord Jesus gathered His own in the upper room to spend time with them. There were things in their lives that needed attention before He could teach them about the future. In John 13 we see Him patiently washing the feet of each disciple. They might not understand the significance of all this now, but in time they would see the need to do for one another what He had done to them.

Shortly thereafter, He speaks to them in a different analogy: the vine and the branches (John 15). Here the subject is fruitfulness—the vineyard owner comes with his knife to prune the branches. Washing feet is a dirty job; lopping off branches suggests power and control. How do we think about all this in regard to our own work as elders? Note that the Lord gives to each of us the ministry of the basin and towel, but he never lets the knife go from his own hand. It's a great temptation when the sheep are stubborn and unthankful, to abandon the basin and seek for the knife! Yet the shepherd heart knows that only One hand is worthy to do that work.

The Rod and Staff

Eastern shepherds had few tools of the trade, but they usually carried a staff,

sometimes called a "crook" due to the curved hook on one end. This was useful for pulling a straying lamb back into the pathway. David, the shepherd-king, knew the value of this instrument in working with sheep and mentioned it in a famous song, "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

When a sheep strays some will say (or think), "Let him get what he deserves..." But the shepherd cannot reason that way. He leaves the 99 sheep in a secure place and heads out into the hills to seek the lost one. This can be thankless and time consuming work! But when the sheep is safely home, the heart of the shepherd shines forth. Calling friends together he says, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost" (Luke 15:6). Is there provision in your assembly for celebration when a wandering soul is returned to the fellowship?

Developed Over Time

Shepherd hearts are not mass produced, they are formed over time in life's experiences, and through quiet fellowship with the Head Shepherd.

Remembering the Basics

Every elder should keep the basic in focus: remembering that his own family is a small flock; that through the Word and prayer he can sit and learn at the feet of the Great Shepherd; that his fellow elders are co-workers among the flock; that the elder's meeting is not primarily a business meeting, but a mini-shepherding conference; and that healthy, well fed sheep will grow and reproduce. Working in an environment like this will lead the busy elder to join in song with David: "My cup runneth over..."



ELDERS' SHOPNOTES

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