



## Biblical Principles Sharpening The Blade

by Chuck Gianotti

Studies in 1 Timothy 4:6-16—part 10

“First put on your own mask, then help those around you.” This familiar refrain is heard by air travelers at the beginning of every commercial flight. In the event that air pressure in the plane cabin drops, oxygen masks will appear from the ceiling. A panicky parent may struggle to get the mask on the children and in the process lose consciousness—then be of no use to help anyone. In order to help others you need to keep yourself in a state of being able to help.

This is true for leaders of God's people, as Paul points out in 1 Timothy 4:6-16. There are several specific things an elder or leader must give personal attention to in his own life before he can be of help to others.

### 1) And elder must continually feed himself spiritually (6)

This involves two things. First, the elder needs a steady intake of God's Word. The method of reading through Scripture may vary, but the important thing is the wholesale infusion of God's Word into our minds first. (For a simple “do-it-yourself” Bible reading plan see the side bar on page 4.) Second, the elder needs to move the Scriptures from his mind to his heart. He needs to be nourished by what he reads. It is not enough to become the “Bible-answer man.” We need to constantly be transformed “from glory to glory” (2 Cor 3:18 NASB) as we discern the Lord in and through His Word.

One cannot adequately lead God's people if he is not in the Word daily and in it seriously. This needs to be supplemented by a steady diet of reading or listening to godly teachers who are sound in doctrine and “words of faith.” This may seem overwhelming considering that many elders have full-time secular jobs and families. Keep in mind we are not in a sprint, but a long distance effort. A little bit each day over time amounts to a great amount—like compounded interest, involving a far greater investment than money in a retirement fund.

### 2) Don't waste time on useless things (7a)

Paul warns in verse 7 to stay away from “worldly fables fit only for old women.” Earlier he spoke about avoiding “myths and end-

less genealogies, speculation, strange doctrines” (1 Tim 1:4). These are like gossip tabloids found in many supermarkets, which draw attention with sensational headlines that are often little more than rumors. It is surprising that those publications stay in business. However, it is even more surprising the audience which results from passing on rumors and sensational news bits and being caught up in titillating stories. People like to hear “juicy” criticisms of others and it gives the bearer of such news a certain sense of importance.

An elder needs to constantly ask, “Is this

An athlete focuses only on those activities which help him become a better athlete. So also a leader focuses on the things which help him become a better leader of God's people.

thing I am spending so much time on really that essential? Is the time spent tracking down a minute thing of Scripture worthwhile when the weightier things of people's souls are

neglected? If I didn't have this thing to spend energy on, what more beneficial thing could I be doing for the Lord and His people?

### 3) Work on disciplining yourself (7b-8)

True biblical leadership and teaching is hard work and requires discipline—the flesh resists this. It is hard to be consistent in reading the Word. The practice of true godliness is difficult. So Paul tells Timothy to “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness” (7b). There are too many important things to deal with, so why waste time on trivials that don't help you toward your goal of godliness?

The Greek word for “discipline” is *gumnazo* from which we get our English word “gymnasium.” An athlete goes into training and eliminates any activities that are superfluous or unnecessary, anything that wastes his time. He focuses only on those activities which help him become a better athlete. In contrast, our goal is to become godly which has greater value than physical discipline of the body. Our leadership will be more characterized by godliness as a result.

### 4) Stick to what is important (9)

This teaching of Paul's is a “trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance” (9). This is one of five times he uses this description of his teaching (see 1:15, 3:1, 2 Tim 2:11, also Titus 3:8). Of all that he has to say, these rise to the top in importance.

(Continued on page 3)

# Leadership Principles

## Watching for Souls

by Jack Spender

There is an interesting reference to the work of church leaders in Hebrews 13:17; “they watch for your souls...” (KJV). What does this mean? Let’s think about it in this article.

### Context

The book of Hebrews was not written to a particular church like many of the other letters. It was written to a widely scattered group of professing Jewish believers whose faith was being tested by adversity. Some of them were considering a return to Judaism. The writer seeks to encourage them by skillfully presenting a contrast of what they had left and the better things into which they had come in Christ. After describing the faith of bygone saints (ch 11) and some strong words about discipline (ch. 12) the writer closes the book with a collection of practical reminders and exhortations in chapter 13.

Three of these instructions to believers involve those who “have the rule” over them. Together they imply some sort of structured gathering of believers, along with those who exercise authority among them. In verse 7 Christians are to remember them, possibly recalling former leaders, although the present participle in the original Greek permits the idea of remembering present leaders in prayer. “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the Word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.” (Hebrews 13:7)

In verse 17 they are to obey and submit to them (“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.” Hebrews 13:17). And in verse 24 they are to greet them, perhaps on behalf of the writer (“Greet all those who rule over you ...” Hebrews 13:24a). Taken together, they paint a picture of cordial Christian church life. God can more easily bless a company in which the people pray for their leaders, submit to them, and speak kindly to them. One thinks of the warm relationship that must have existed between Boaz and his laborers with whom he exchanged greetings in the book of Ruth (“Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, ‘The Lord be with you!’ And they answered him, ‘The Lord bless you!’” Ruth 2:4).

### Questions

Verse 17 raises at least four interesting questions:

**1) Who are the ones in authority?** In all three occurrences in Hebrews 13, the Greek term for “rule” is “*hegeomai*” often used in the NT of military rulers and leaders. Acts 15:22, using the same Greek word, speaks of “chief men among the brethren.”

The NIV and Darby’s translation render the word as “leaders,” which gives a good sense.

Why aren’t they called elders? There are a number of possible reasons for this. In young churches, it takes time to recognize elders, but there are usually men providing leadership from the start. Further, such a word can also include gifted men of influence in the church (see Acts 13:1,2). Paul would not become an elder when he visited the churches of his day, but he would certainly be recognized as someone with spiritual authority, a leader or man of influence among the Christians. Since the Lord is the ultimate source of all authority, the desire of the spiritual man is to submit to the Lord’s authority wherever he encounters it.

**2) What shades of meaning are conveyed by “obey” and “submit?”** Homer Kent comments: “Be obedient (*peithesthe*) denotes assenting to another’s direction. Submit (*hupēikete*) yielding one’s contrary opinions in favor of someone else’s.” Two prominent responsibilities of shepherds are teaching the people God’s Word, and setting direction for the church (leading). Perhaps the word “obey” corresponds to the former, and “submit” to the latter. The New Testament provides some striking examples of both (see Acts 6, 15, 20).

In any case, the whole matter of coming into a right relationship with authority is foundational to the Christian life. Without submission to God’s authority, one cannot even be saved. After conversion, Christian discipleship centers around teaching younger believers all things that the Lord has commanded (Matt. 28:18-20).

**3) What is the meaning of watching for the souls of people?** According to Hebrews 4:12, there is a difference between the soul and the spirit of a person, and the Word of God helps us discern the difference. By our spirit we have God-consciousness and the soul provides self-consciousness. (Normally, we think of the body, soul and spirit, where the body with its senses allows us to interact with the physical world around us. See 1 Thess 5:23 where all three are referred to as distinct entities in the same verse).

We can think of the functions of the soul as the mind, the will and the emotions. How necessary that each of these be brought under subjection to the Spirit and the Word of God in the believer! Paul charges the Christians at Rome to be transformed by the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:1,2). Certainly the will must undergo change from the world’s outlook, “My will be done” to the believer’s prayer, “Thy will be done.” And who can deny that the emotions, while God-given and precious are no foundation on which to build the choices of life?

This relationship between soul and spirit is beautifully illustrated in the words of Mary (Luke 1:46,47): “And Mary said, ‘My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my savior.’” Careful attention to the verb tenses will disclose that the praise of Mary’s soul was a response to the earlier work of God in her spirit. In the same way, maturing in Christ means bringing the functions of the soul under the control of God’s Spirit. As they care for the flock, elders bathe this process in vigilance and prayer. Spiritual warfare has been described as a battle for the mind.

Here is a question on which elders can ponder: Are we seeking to shepherd the whole person? It is easy to think that if we provide good Bible teaching, the rest is up to the individual. In addition to constantly teaching the people, the Lord Jesus also worked with them on matters of the will (e.g., John 5:6) and matters which touched the emotions (e.g., Luke 10:17-20). He also had great compassion for the physical needs of people, as did the early church.

**4) What does the “giving account” refer to?** Finally, what is the account leaders must give? Not only in a coming day which is certain, but also in the present must they answer to the Lord, for they are stewards (Titus 1:7). John Owen, the Puritan writer, wisely remarks, “Much of the life of the ministry and benefit of the church depends on the continual giving an account unto Christ . . . and the dealings of Christ with the church itself are regulated according unto this account.”

### Practical Steps

How can all of this be worked out in the life of the church? Each Christian can ask, “Do I contribute joy or sorrow to the work of the elders?” “Are those who lead smiling or sorrowing as they mention my name and spiritual progress before the Lord?”

Elders have some things to think about, as well. Are we discipling the whole person? Is the assembly of God’s people a place of training or just a place where information is available? Are the elders placing sufficient emphasis on pastoral work as shepherds, or have we become primarily administrators? Are we gentle and kind, or domineering? How about our seeking the Lord as a group of elders? Is there time to mention the sheep and their needs to Him? Even the little ones and the elderly?

### Conclusion

One of the most prominent words employed to describe elders is “overseer;” one who watches over others. How fitting that this alertness and vigilance be extended to the whole person; a reminder that spiritual growth is much more than just “head knowledge,” but extends to every aspect of the Christian life!



## Sharpening the Saw (cont.)

The trustworthy statement is the importance of discipline in order to attain godliness. We must keep the main focus, the main focus—and that is difficult due to the many things that compete for our attention! Godliness is well worth the effort, because it has huge benefits for both here (in our temporal ministry) and in eternity (eternal effects). Growing in godliness as an elder must never be underestimated.

### 5) Keep fixed on God (10)

This hardly needs to be said in a ministry letter to elders. But this is our motivation for the energy expenditure, so we need to make sure our motivation is not skewed. It is so easy to “fix our hope” on earthly recognition, on prestige, influence, tangible rewards whatever they may be. But these things are quite shallow. When we fix our eyes on God, we are dwelling on Him whose goal is to save people from their sins, and give them new life in Christ. As one commentator puts it, “He is the Savior of all men potentially (1Ti 1:15); of believers alone effectually.”

### 6) Call others to the same high standard (11)

Don’t hold back in calling other Christians to work hard toward godliness. Challenge people to winnow out the things that slow down their spiritual growth. All should choose carefully where they spend their energies.

### 7) Don’t let your youth hinder you (12)

While being an elder of necessity presupposes a level of maturity, which may imply some level of physical age, youthfulness in itself should not bar a man from spiritual leadership. The onus is not on others to overlook Timothy’s youthfulness—Paul is speaking to Timothy himself. It is up to Timothy to not let people dismiss him because of his age! In other words, don’t let other people’s attitude toward you hinder your ministry. “Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.”

When I was baptized as a new believer in my early 20’s, a faithful older brother in Christ gave me this verse (1 Tim 4:12) at my baptism. I was full of zeal, but with little knowledge or experience, still looking very much like the world in my outward appearance, lacking Christian “brethren” lingo or traditional

behaviors and mannerisms. I remember sitting in Bible studies and men’s meetings, offering my enthusiastic thoughts on Scripture—only to be dismissed with those “you’re still young, so we don’t take you too seriously” looks and comments. This verse was a great encouragement to not give up even though I was young. My mentor just encouraged me to continue walking strong in faith and serving where the Lord opened the doors.

### 8) Engage people in the Word (13)

While this involves public ministry, strengthening all through reading, exhortation and teaching, the leader is benefited from the exercise, as well. Paul says to “give attention to the public reading of Scripture.” Though the word “public” is not in the original Greek, it is clear from the context that is what is intended. The elders in one local church have taken this seriously by implementing the reading of Scripture publicly every Sunday morning at the Lord’s Supper. A portion is read consecutively each week through the Gospels and selected Psalms.

### 9) Give priority to your gift (14)

“Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you.” A leader among God’s people is pulled in many good directions. And the proverbial “tyranny of the urgent” can crowd out the “important” things. However, an elder must not become so busy that he never functions in his area of giftedness—this is a recipe for frustration in serving. Nothing will kill an elder’s vitality more than spending all his energy outside of his area of gift.

### 10) Finally, give attention to your leadership (15-16)

Paul says to Timothy, “Take pains with these things,” “Be absorbed in them,” “Pay close attention,” and “Persevere.” It is absolutely essential, of critical importance, that a leader carefully watches his own development and ministry. I have a hobby as a woodworker (hence the origin of the name of this ministry – Elders’ “ShopNotes”). My table saw is the main tool in my shop and I use it on just about every project I work on. However, after awhile it gets dull and needs sharpening. This takes time and slows the pro-

ject down when I have to do this. However, without sharpening the blade, the cutting takes longer and tends to burn the wood. I more easily blow an electrical fuse which then cuts power to the whole shop. Taking time to sharpen the blade, in the long run, makes all my woodworking projects go much better.

As elders we need to spend time sharpening our own spiritual development and growth as leaders. We cannot afford to “wing it.” We’ll end up burning ourselves out or hurting people. And we can easily blow a spiritual fuse and thereby limit the power of the Holy Spirit in our midst. There is too much at stake!

A leader is always asking how he can improve, grow and become a better leader of God’s people. I pray every day the Lord will help me to be that kind of leader.



## “Do-it-Yourself” Bible in a Year

One simple method for reading the Bible through in one year is to divide the number of pages in your Old Testament by 365 and then read that many pages per day. If you read ahead to the next chapter break each day, that will give you some flex in missing the occasional day. Do the same for the New Testament. You will read a portion of the OT and NT each day. This is the “do-it-yourself” Bible in a year program! You can adjust this to a two or three year plan, if desired.

Further, a simple way to turn what you read into nourishment is to ask one of three questions, kind of like mental crow bars: 1) What does this passage say about God? 2) What does it say about mankind? 3) What does it say about the relationship between God and mankind?

Let me encourage you to make it a habit, one that is non-negotiable. Just as regularly as you eat breakfast, you can read God’s Word on a daily basis. Find a method that works well with you and do it. I have probably used every excuse in the book to let this slip. But in the end you have to ask yourself, “Is this important to me?” If you commit yourself to the discipline of reading God’s Word regularly and seriously, over time you will gain a broad diet of spiritual intake, and grow toward godliness.



## Wives' Corner

# Thankfulness

by Mary Gianotti

I'm thankful my husband is an elder. I'm thankful I'm an elder's wife. Does thankfulness characterize you? Recently I have been challenged while reading the book *Lord Change my Attitude (Before It's Too Late)*, by James MacDonald. The first attitude he addresses is complaining which needs to be replaced by thankfulness.

Complaining comes in many forms. For some of us it is a comfortable companion. It's too cold, too hot, no one listens, kids are noisy, I'm tired, there is not enough money, and the list goes on. It spills over into our ministry as well. The meeting was long, the food is cold, she is never friendly, the decision is bad. MacDonald summarizes it this way "Complaining is an attitude choice that if left unchecked will wither my capacity to experience joy and genuine thankfulness."

God is not impressed with our complaining. In fact he takes it very seriously. Moses records, "Now the people became like those who complain...and when the Lord heard it, His anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp" (Numbers 11:1). The thought gives me chills. They grumbled about their hardships, God's anger was aroused and He sent His destroying fire. Complaining makes God angry.

This attitude is not something we easily turn off. Patterns of thinking are formed over a long period of time. Some one recently said to me, "Wrong attitudes don't change until we repent." How true that is. We can justify, reason, admit and even be sorry for our attitude but until we see it as sin, our hearts re-

main the same.

Replacing our attitude of complaining with an attitude of thanksgiving is truly a work of God in our lives. Our own efforts will fail. As I read the book mentioned above, three levels of thankfulness were described. The elementary level is an act we do out of obedience to the Christ. Thanking God is a sacrifice, an obligation. We are told in Scripture to "offer up a sacrifice of praise to God..." (Heb 13:15).

The high school level of thankfulness is a better place. "In every thing give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1Thess 5:18). At this level we find something in every situation to be thankful for. This produces joy ... as long as things don't get too difficult.

The university level thankfulness is a place of real joy. "Be filled with the Spirit...giving thanks always for all things to God" (Eph. 5:18, 20). This is a thankfulness that trusts God completely no matter what happens. We are able to see small irritations and the heavy trials as God's sovereign hand in our life. Our thankfulness is not dependent on changing circumstances but on the One who remains the same.

Where are you in the school of thankfulness? Maybe you need to enroll. Maybe you need to move ahead to the next level. For some of us repentance is the next step to moving ahead, leaving complaining behind and taking thankfulness seriously. God does!



## From the Q-Files

He was a seasoned veteran of the Christian ministry ... a respected mentor, and a dear friend. I had asked him what he had to say to younger pastors like me as he approached his retirement. It was one of those what-would-you-do-if-you-had-it-to-do-over-again questions. His answer came quickly: "Don't take it personally."

"Don't take what personally?" was my next question. He told me not to take it personally when things get tough in the church, when I am attacked or tired or depressed. Things like that go with the territory. We're in a spiritual battle. When a soldier is shot at, he isn't shocked. His feelings aren't hurt. He doesn't peer over his foxhole at his adversary and shout, "Was it something I said?" He expects it, he plans on it.

That's spiritual realism. That's what impelled Paul to write the Ephesians that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12). Note that the apostle assumes his readers already know that the work of the kingdom is a struggle. He doesn't need to argue the point. The question is not whether we're in a battle, but what kind. The battle is spiritual. So we don't take it personally, we don't get hurt feelings when things get hard. We are spiritual realists.

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"... shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight ...voluntarily ... with eagerness ..." (1 Peter 5:2 NASB)