

# ELDERS' SHOPNOTES

MINISTRY FOR BUSY ELDERS

*Leadership Principles*

*by Chuck Gianotti*

## *To Shepherd or Not to Shepherd*

**B**eing an elder is consummately to be a shepherd, so Peter teaches, “*Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you...*” (1 Peter 5:1-2a, see also Acts 20:28 NASB). This involves more than attending elders’ meetings and making decisions or assuming a prominent role in important meetings of the church. It means “*exercising oversight*” (1 Peter 5:2b) and being “*examples to the flock*” (1 Peter 5:3). It means caring for the people of God at various levels. How can a busy elder who has his own secular career and family responsibilities, care for the people of God in an effective and timely way?

### **Elder Unity Needed**

Of prime and strategic importance for effective shepherding is that elders serve in unity with one another. The “genius” of the plurality of elders is that one person does not carry the whole load himself, it is a shared burden. But the load is shared most effectively when elders are serving in harmony, building up each other. Dysfunction (“not being able to function together”) will obviously hinder the collective shepherding of the sheep.

Two unhealthy situations can occur. The first is when elders spend more time bickering with each other than doing the work of shepherding. This is a result of distrust, stubbornness and other violations of the biblical list of qualification (1 Tim 3, Titus 1). In this situation there is no trust or confidence in each other and therefore the flock is left insecure and unprotected.

The other unhealthy situation involves maintaining a false sense of unity, not dealing with significant differences. In this scenario, unity trumps everything else. Disagreement is avoided and differing perspectives on issues are repressed—all for the sake of unity. Elders should refuse to

settle for the “status quo” but instead learn to address their differences with a spirit of grace and cooperation, and on the rare occasion, with godly firmness. Unresolved conflicts or issues will hamstring pastoral care for the rest of the congregation.

### **Practical Shepherding**

What then are some effective, practical ways to shepherd the local church of God? Here are some ways to meet the needs.

1. Teach the Word of God, faithfully and consistently, addressing doctrinal topics and consecutive Bible book studies, as well as teaching on special needs. In everything, help people become rooted in the Scripture. This could be called “whole church” shepherding. It means that the elders must be aware of the “content or doctrinal needs” of the congregation, as well as the “spiritual living needs.” The people of God need information, but they also need to see how that information can and should make a difference in their lives, both in the long term, and also right now. I can image some preaching that goes essentially like this, “Listen to what I am saying, you will need it someday. And by the way, here are the verses to prove that what I am saying is biblical.” Elders need to ask for guidance to apply the Word of God to where people are at in their spiritual journey. Not everyone is ready for in-depth studies of Melchizedek. It does no good to say, as one preacher did, “They didn’t understand my message because I was preaching not to where they are, but where they should be.” Call people to a higher standard, but don’t preach so far over their heads that all that is accom-

plished is the preacher’s display of biblical knowledge.

2. Visit them in their homes or over a cup of coffee. Paul met with the believers in Ephesus from house to house (Acts 20:20). Enlist your wife’s help when visiting the women or couples and families. Much can be learned about a person’s spiritual condition in one-on-one times or in home conversations that can never be discovered on a Sunday morning in a religious building.

3. Go to the funerals of relatives of people in your congregation. You may not know the person who died, but you know those that are grieving for the loss. We have seen huge opportunities to build relationships and at times have huge breakthroughs with people who may otherwise be reluctant to open up about their spiritual life. The bottom line is that you show you care for people when you take the time to share in their grief. What to say at a time like that? Sometimes, “I am so sorry for your loss. I will be praying for you,” will go a long way. If the Lord gives you more to say, fine, but keep it simple and avoid clichés. Remember, “Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances” (Prov 25:11).

4. Go watch their kids play sports or perform in a music concert. When you show an interest in people’s children, they take it as you caring for them as parents as well. Send congratulation notes for graduations, engagements, and other notable life events in people’s lives. Talk to children on Sunday morning. Don’t ignore them. Even if you aren’t gifted with children, this goes a long way in showing you care for families.

5. Send an e-mail to a brother who has just preached, telling him what you appreciate about his message. I know one man that did that with me every time I preached at his small church

Nov. 2011  
VOLUME 12 NUMBER 6

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*To Shepherd or Not to Shepherd (cont.)*

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*Chuck Gianotti  
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nearby. A letter would arrive about a week later with a newspaper clipping of some event that related to my message with his handwritten note of thanks. If that kind of thing encouraged me, then doing a similar thing for others will certainly encourage them.


6. Ask the women about their ministries. We all fear unhealthy entanglement with women not related to us; some men feel an awkwardness around women. Unfortunately, this can be interpreted by women as the elders not caring about their ministries or being prejudiced against women. While we need to maintain proper safeguards, we should not ignore the women. The point here isn't about gaining information (you can get that from your wife); rather the point is to show interest in how others are serving the Lord, including the women—this lets them know you care as well as being on the alert for any problem that may arise. We as elders need to pray for the women and their ministries, and we, along with our wives, need to visit them and pray for them when they are sick and shut in.

7. Be on the alert when people are going through difficulties, loss of a job, a broken engagement, the struggles of singleness, and disappointments, for example. Take note of or send a card on the anniversary of the passing of someone's loved

one. That first anniversary of a loss can be especially painful. Continued absence from church meetings can be an indicator of personal struggles – don't just assume it means lack of commitment. Call or visit to find out what is wrong.

8. Ask the Lord to give you more of a shepherd's heart, to give you the perception to know when people are struggling, to see the warning signs of spiritual waywardness, or when people simply are in need of encouragement. Sometimes all that is needed is, "I really appreciate you and all that you do in the assembly."

9. Don't forget, as elders, to shepherd one another. It takes an elder to know another elder's struggles and frustrations, particularly as it pertains to matters in the church. We need to let each other know that we've "got your back," and that any idle criticism against each other will be resisted and defended against. We need to let each other know that our bond together is the Lord Jesus Christ working through our love for each other.

10. Finally, pray that the Lord will help you sort through the above list and help you sharpen your focus, putting some of these into practice in your own shepherding ministry as an elder. 

*Practical Application*

*by Jack Spender*

*Are Unbelievers Welcome?*

*The local church will have some important priorities such as worshipping the Lord and training the believers, but its mission is to reach out to the world with Good News from God.*

Often I'm asked if unsaved people are welcome in our assembly. This may seem a strange question, but it's a fair one for several reasons. For one thing, we are often reminded about the importance of keeping the church pure, yet the Lord Jesus gladly received sinners. Also, the Great Commission sends us into the world with the gospel, yet where beside the church might people go to learn more about God? Moreover, growing Christians want to understand the role of the church in outreach. Finally, there seems to be no end to different views churches take on the subject, anywhere from "outsiders are not welcome," to groups that build the entire life of the congregation around visitors. I have heard more than one elder say, "You do whatever works to attract new people." This is surely a subject worth considering.

**Personally Speaking**

Before going further, I should answer the question. Yes! "Lost people" are very welcome in the church where we fellowship. We're blessed to have them coming and going continually. But we also keep in mind the lesson from the second parable of the Kingdom of Heaven in

Matt. 13, that we must be cautious about pronouncing who are the wheat and who are the tares.

One other caveat; this article is not intended to critique the way other churches handle this question, nor is it aimed at convincing anyone to change. We thank the Lord for all who love the Lord and are seeking to win people to Christ. But it is not uncommon to find elders who are tired of "canned" outreach programs, having discovered some things that clearly do not work. They want to see people coming to faith in Christ, not in spite of the church, but through its efforts. Then, too, there are new gatherings that want to understand what options are available and worth studying.

**Help For Elders**

The following list of suggestions is not offered in the spirit of "Here are the answers," but as lessons that have made an impact on this writer after many years of studying the subject, and therefore things that may be worthy of prayerful consideration.

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## *Are Unbelievers Welcome ? (cont.)*

1. Be familiar with the mission of the church as set forth in the several accounts of the Great Commission. Simply stated, the commission is to make and train followers of the Lord Jesus. The word "mission" refers to sending people out with a purpose. The local church will have some important priorities such as worshipping the Lord and training the believers, but its mission is to reach out to the world with Good News from God.

2. Have a plan to accomplish the mission, and be sure the people in fellowship know it. A local church cannot do everything, but it can do something and it should know what that is and what steps are needed to carry out its part of the mission. Scripture speaks of growth of the church in quality through the equipping of the saints (Eph. 4:11,12 NKJV) and in quantity as the body makes increase (Eph. 4:16). Don't shy away from either!

3. Study the example of the early church. All Scripture is profitable, and we must not relegate the record of the Acts to merely "history." True, methods must adjust as times and cultures change, but there are some timeless principles to be learned from how the earliest church grew. In His great prayer for all believers (John 17), the Lord Jesus emphatically connected the unity of His people with the world's coming to faith in the message. Accordingly, we see greater emphasis on unity ("being of one accord") in Acts than on any outreach program or method in the church. Because of the unity and purity of the church, the Holy Spirit was free to convict the world of sin (John 16:8).

4. Teach clearly the difference between witnessing and evangelism. The former refers to all believers (Acts 1:8), as all believers have a story to tell and must be ready to respond when asked (I Pet. 3:15). The latter refers to one of many spiritual gifts given as the Lord sees fit (Eph. 4:7, 11) and describes a special enablement to initiate reaching out to people with the gospel. Any believer may seek to do the work of an evangelist (II Tim. 4:5), but it is wrong to make any spiritual gift the possession of every believer.

5. Teach clearly the nature of the local church. It is not a mixed multitude, but a family which gathers around the Head of the body. Lost people may be welcome, but they are looking in on "a royal priesthood, a holy nation; a special people....." (I Pet. 2:9) coming together to attend to family business (Acts 2:42). Welcome as they are, the unsaved do not become the center around which church functions revolve. Along this line, it is helpful to note how the apostles address the church; always as the spotless bride of Christ, with terms like "holy" and "faithful", "saints"

and "brethren," in spite of the many failings which were undeniably present at times.


6. Check your environment. This includes everything that pertains to Christian courtesy, the setting in which the believers gather. Is the meeting facility clean and neat? Are there realistic provisions for families and children? Is there a warm welcome without condescending? The checklist of questions could become long, and it's not a bad idea to ask repeat visitors to share what impressed them or what things they found difficult to work with during early visits. Of course this is not referring to matters of doctrine, but to the setting in which the congregation learns and works together.

7. Rest assured in the long established fact that healthy sheep multiply. The old adage is true: "If you want more sheep, feed the ones you have." Wise elders will make certain that the feeding of the flock is taken seriously, that the ministry given is both faithful to God and relevant to the people. This will have a purifying effect on the lives of the Christians, resulting in a living fellowship that moves from superficial social activities to that refreshing love and care for one another that has been so aptly described as "body life."

### **Conclusion**

The great story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 has occasioned much discussion about whether the prodigal pictures a lost soul being saved or a son being restored. Probably both are valid lessons but without question, the parable has been greatly used of God as a great gospel text.

In that sense it is interesting to note what the joyful father did not do. We might have expected him to say something like this to his servants: "Bring this boy into the house and get him washed and cleaned up, and then put on him clothes, the ring and so forth." Rather, the father tells the servants to bring forth (i.e., out of the house) the marks of sonship - clothes, shoes and a ring - and put them on him right there in the street, apparently unconcerned about his ragged and vile condition. The boy entered the house with the marks of sonship on him!

Let me suggest that this is a good lesson for all of us to ponder. The Great Commission has at its heart the word "Go." As the Lord once came looking for our first parents in the garden (Gen. 3:9), and as the Son of Man went out "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), so the church today must be willing to go out to the world with Good News. But when lost people do come into the church, they can be greatly blessed as onlookers to what God is doing among Christians. How often it has been rightly observed that the best gospel meeting is a good time of worship and remembrance around the Lord Himself! 

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## Encouraging Your Husband

## PUBLISHING INFORMATION

*It is important to look at your situation and determine how you can best serve your man.*

A group of elders and their wives from different churches sat in our living room one evening. As we talked about our different ministries I turned to the women beside me and asked, "What do you think?" To my surprise she replied, "I never get involved with my husband's ministry, I don't think it is any of my business." I was speechless (which rarely happens!)

Before I go any further, I want to make it clear that encouraging our men in their work as God's shepherds does not mean we are privy to all the decisions and concerns of our leaders. That is not our place. But on the other hand, I believe we are helpmates and should endeavor to encourage them, and so something can be shared. So how do we strike a balance?

Here are three suggestions:

**Learn to listen.** This requires time, patience and clearing our minds so we can concentrate when they are talking with us. Asking questions for clarification and repeating back what we have heard are just a few things that can be done to communicate that we really care and want to understand. Often the temptation is to suggest a solution when what our husbands may need is our love and support. The person in proverbs who listens is described as righteous, full of integrity and wise.

**Ask for wisdom.** Doing what James suggests should become a way of life: "If any of you lacks wisdom let him ask God, who gives generously and without reproach and it will be given to him" 1:5 NIV. Requesting that God give us wisdom in responding to the challenges our husbands face will stand us in good stead. Rather than coming to a quick conclusion and venting our own frustration, we can pause and remember our Lord has promised us an abundance of wisdom if we ask for it.

**Serve him well.** Each of our husbands has different needs. It is important to look at your situation and determine how you can best serve your man. In a world that does not put much value on service, we can fall into the thinking that this is not important. I have been struck recently by Jesus' words in Luke 22:27, "I am among you as one who serves." This was said in the upper room just before Jesus washed His disciples' feet. Now, I don't recall ever washing my husband's actual dirty feet. But am I willing to do what it takes to make life easier for him to be an elder? Taking time to make my home a haven, preparing healthy meals or running an errand for him may lighten the load. I know one woman who occasionally does one of his chores around the house to give her husband more study time.

How about making it a goal this coming year to encourage your husband in what God calls "a noble, good and excellent work?" 1 Timothy 3:1.




Mary Gianotti

## Biblical Eldership Resources

A new website has been developed to "provide Biblically based resources to encourage the practice of Eldership worldwide." As is obvious, the predominant leadership structure in the contemporary church is the pastor-headed, hierarchical model. Many churches and assemblies that do have a group of men called "elders" are often not functioning as biblical elders, but more as an executive board, or have a de facto dominant elder. On the foreign front, the church in Asia is expanding in an unprecedented way, but unfortunately is adopting in many cases a CEO-style corporate leadership model.

At the same time, there is a growing interest in biblical eldership because of leadership burnout and also increased exposure to biblically sound teaching on church leadership.

A collaborative effort by Alex Strauch, Bob Deffinbaugh, Kevin Fitzgerald and Chuck Gianotti has been spurred on by the need to not only promote biblical teaching of eldership, but also to help churches transition to true eldership and to help existing elders function in biblical ways.

This project is still in the early stages, but a considerable amount of content has been uploaded. The plan includes expanding to include online learning, elder training plans, leadership counseling and more. Check it out [www.BiblicalEldership.com](http://www.BiblicalEldership.com) and go back frequently as more is being added weekly. 

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The specific Scripture versions used in ESN articles are indicated at the first bible quotation in each article.

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*"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers ..."*

1 Peter 5:2a NIV