



Editor's Note

This first issue of a New Year brings best wishes for a healthy and spiritually prosperous New Year to you! We have all heard of New Year's resolutions; those commitments people make to do or not do something in the coming year. Often they are forgotten by February! While we don't read of them in Scripture, we see exhortations to examine ourselves and consider our ways, and instructions about diligence to live what we profess.

Suggestion: How about deciding with God's help in the coming year to share the love of Christ with someone who needs the

Lord? Or encouraging some child of God who is struggling with discouragement? But remember that we "are not of the world" (John 15:19), so while the world quickly breaks its resolutions, let's keep ours, all year long.

One housekeeping note: If you are receiving ESN through the mail and plan to move, or if you can now access ESN via the internet, why not let us know? Each month when mailings are returned by the post office for various reasons, we think of how those funds might have been better used.



Leadership Character

The Balanced Life of a Good Minister *by Warren Henderson*

When someone is accused of being a heretic, we often associate false teaching with that individual. While this may be true, Paul refers to a heretic as someone who has lost perspective and is causing needless contention among God's people (Tit. 3:9-11). Majoring on minors (e.g., genealogies), or on one truth to the exclusion of all else are marks of a heretic. Accordingly, it is possible for a well-meaning, Christ-loving person to harm others through unbalanced ministry. It therefore behooves believers to periodically review their ministries to ensure that a balanced biblical perspective is being maintained. This is especially true for church elders who are often pulled in multiple directions at the same time.

There are many key areas to consider, but it suffices here to examine two: family life and ministry, and time and ministry priorities.

Balancing Family Life and Ministry

Whether a believer is overseeing the Lord's sheep, working at a rescue mission, or serving in a foreign mission field, it is understood that the Lord's work will require a measure of personal sacrifice. However, Scripture does not endorse the breakdown of the family for the sake of Christian service. A man may choose not to take a wife in order to serve the Lord, but he is not to sacrifice his marriage to do so (1 Cor. 7:27, 33-34, 9:6). It is understood that unique situations will briefly demand more of our time, but believers are not to neglect their family obligations. The Lord desires husbands to love their wives and to provide for their families, for wives

to be keepers of the home, and for parents to rear godly children (Eph. 5:23, 1 Tim. 5:8, Tit. 2:4, Eph. 6:1).

Wayward children and broken marriages are not a good testimony of Christ's presence in the home, and ultimately these travesties cast doubt on the character of the Lord's servants. Ironically, what was sacrificed for the sake of ministry will often terminate it in time. It is therefore emphasized that things at home must be in order before ministry outside the home can be pursued. Men could not be considered for the offices of an elder or deacon unless homes were in order (1 Tim. 3:1-12). The Lord wanted Moses to learn this important lesson before journeying to Egypt to represent Him before Pharaoh (Ex. 4:20). As the head of the home, Moses was responsible to God for his family, and until things were right with God in his own house, there could be no God-honoring ministry outside the home.

Rather than being neglected, the family is to be the home base from which ministry proceeds. Here are some practical ideas to strengthen your marriage and enrich the lives of your children. Hopefully, these will minimize the possibility of ministry outside the home degrading your home and testimony.

- Set aside time daily for uninterrupted two-way communication with your spouse. Share thoughts from your personal quiet times and from the books you are each reading. Encourage your wife to verbalize her thoughts, as this will help bring clarity to any muddled feelings that she might have.
- Set aside time to pray daily with your

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During the past year, we have been considering the subject of 'Alive-ness' in the church. The current article will conclude the series as we think about the fourth item in the Acts 2:42 list: prayer.

Summaries can get lengthy; I'll just leave it with a reminder to go back and reread previous articles so that the over-arching idea will be clear, that aliveness in the church is both a work of the Spirit of God, and the result of diligent care for the needs of the flock.

Evaluating the Assembly Prayer Meeting

It hardly needs be said that corporate prayer is a very different thing from private prayer. One is public, involving numbers of people; the other is intensely private, literally "in the closet," or closed space, alone.

Prayer meetings can take many forms and have different goals, but like the other things in which the early believers continued steadfastly, there are foundations upon which they rest: the content must be biblical, the structure of the meeting must be faithful to the content and relevant to the people, and the spiritual climate must be the edifying grace of God and not the legalistic or mechanical air of the Pharisee.

Content

The word "prayer" implies petition, but it has come to refer to whenever God is addressed by man. Part of discipleship is teaching believers the different types of prayer (cp. I Tim 2:1), what is appropriate for public prayer as contrasted with what is better left to private devotions, and the elements of Christian courtesy, so important in any public meeting.

Those who lead may incorporate a brief meditation from Scripture, but care should be taken that the prayer meeting is not swallowed up by another sermon. It is the work of the elders to curtail things that compete with actually praying.

It is a good sign when the saints are not only praying for temporal needs and problems, but are also making requests for spiritual things—"Ephesians 1 and 3 prayers."

One of the most neglected parts of prayer meetings, often because even elders do not grasp it, is the importance of spending a substantial part of the time giving thanks for answered prayer! We need to be as specific about what God has done as we are in our forthcoming requests.

Toward this end, it is helpful if praises for answers, or requests concerning needs are explained briefly and clearly, so that all may understand what has been granted or what is being asked. The Lord places a high premium on unity, and unity is impossible where there is ignorance.

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Encouraging "first-person prayers" is rewarding. Too many requests for people and situations unknown to the group can weaken a meeting, and is one good reason to have someone leading the meeting. Someone's uncle in a distant city is having foot surgery. Ask the question, "How may we pray for you in this matter? Will you be visiting, or writing or sharing a witness for the Lord with the person?" Otherwise, such requests can be prayed for privately.

Structure

Much of this is common sense. Avoid what is dingy or dreary or cold. Provide a location free of distractions, with seats that can be set so people can see one another's faces, and hear what is said. Men must be taught about 'leading in prayer.' There are basics to leading people. Stand up, speak up, be concise. Paul refers to listeners saying, "Amen" (I Cor. 14:16; lit. "the amen" i.e., as something expected; "may it be so"), which cannot be added if the speaker cannot be understood.

Some find it helpful to take private notes of requests, and some assemblies even print up the lists for use during the week. If the time is lengthy, it helps to stand and sing a suitable hymn. Some groups have found it helpful to hold a fellowship supper in conjunction with the prayer meeting. One older brother used to say, "The loaves and the fishes will bring them in every time." Of course this is not necessary for mature prayer warriors, but it can be a great help in holding and training young people for serving as they mature.

In meetings of the gathered church where the men will pray (I Tim. 2:8), it helps to have some provision for sisters to make requests known. If they have no husband to speak to at home, sharing a written note or communication before the meeting can be encouraged. Some groups divide the men and the women into different rooms for prayer. It is very important that the assembly be reminded frequently that God hears silent and vocal prayers equally! Speaking out loud is for men and pertains to leading. It has nothing to do with prayers being more acceptable to God.

Where small groups of believers meet midweek in homes, an excellent opportunity is afforded for young people and new believers to learn to pray, and provides a forum where personal matters can be shared with a smaller number of close friends.

All these and many other details about the structure of the meeting will be attended to by sensitive elders who understand that a dynamic prayer meeting can do more to strengthen fellowship among the saints, and dependence upon the Lord, thus building up the assembly, than over much attention to traditions.

Climate

Prayer is spiritual work, and elders must also safeguard the spiritual environment of the prayer meeting, knowing that a harsh or critical spirit can do great damage to the flock, and especially to the spirits of young or sensitive believers. On the other hand, a spirit of love and acceptance toward the saints, and thankful praise toward the Lord will cause timid hearts to open out toward the group.

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The Balanced Life of a Good Minister (continued from page 1)

spouse. Busyness often keeps couples from sharing their burdens with each other, but as they speak jointly with the Lord, they may also learn what might have been communicated.

- Go to bed together. End the day in a mutually profitable way, but not by working at problems.
- By co-laboring in ministry together, engage the entire family in ministry where possible. Wives assisted their deacon husbands (1 Tim. 3:11), and Aquila and Priscilla used their home to disciple God's people (Acts 18:26).
- Enjoy the same activities together. Through marriage the man and woman became "one flesh," which is a singular noun (Gen. 2:23). Two individuals thinking as one is challenging; but it should be unusual to do things apart.
- Protect each other from too much ministry. For example, a wife may get stressed out by too much hospitality. D. L. Moody's wife Emma often turned visitors away from their home to ensure her husband had private time for study and prayer.
- Have daily family devotions in which all can participate. After mealtimes is a good time to read Scripture, a devotional, a biography, etc. If you have young children keep it short.
- As a goal, try to daily spend a few minutes of quality time with each of your children privately, and occasionally take them out of the home for some "dad and me" time.

Balance time and ministry priorities.

One of the most difficult aspects of ministry is prioritizing where to expend our time and energy. Ideally speaking,

if we want to do our best for the Lord, we must be willing to put aside what is merely good and to sacrifice that which is permissible. The following are practical considerations for managing our time more effectively and prioritizing what we do:

- Sacrifice the "fluff of life" (i.e. what is robbing your time: TV programming, sports, gaming, etc).
- Prioritize your ministries and cut what is of lowest importance (i.e. where you are the least effective and burdened).
- Ease into new ministries slowly and with time constraints (e.g., I can commit only two hours a week to this activity). God grows ministries as He grows people, so allow Him to mature both.
- Learn to say "no." Just because you can, does not mean you should.
- Stick with your calling; there are many who can do much of what we do and better than we can.
- Minimize travel time by accomplishing as much communication as possible through electronic means and schedule as much as possible in one trip (this saves travel time and resources).
- Don't waste time entertaining 'goats.' Christ's teachings are to be committed to faithful believers who will in turn teach others (2 Tim. 2:2); however, new converts require special care initially (1 Thess. 2:7-8). After a few months commit the dependent to the Lord, but keep an open door with them.
- Keep an organized filing system to quickly find past emails, letters,

studies, spreadsheets, receipts, etc. Maintain an electronic log of already answered questions, so you don't have to start from scratch again to answer the same question.

- If you are a teacher, double-up studies in the same week with the same teaching material; this reduces preparation time. Be sure to develop and save teaching materials with answers so future preparation time will be reduced.
- Minimize social networking, unnecessary phone calls, and serial text messages; these can waste a lot of time—a brief email or text message can often accomplish what is needed, and if not, a focused phone call.

Reading Scripture, and knowing sound doctrine does not ensure that a believer will be a good minister of Jesus Christ. Paul tells his spiritual son Titus that sound doctrine is not just what is learned, but what must be lived out (Tit. 2:1). To his spiritual son Timothy, Paul implores, "If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed" (1 Tim. 4:6). A good minister is someone who not only knows sound doctrine, but also lives it out so that others may learn of the Lord Jesus Christ. What we know and what we do are meaningless unless the character of the Lord Jesus in observable and His Word obeyed. To this end, may our lives and ministry both be Christ-honoring.



Thoughts on Local Church "Alive-ness" (part 6)

(continued from page 2)

All must be committed to the truth that the Heavenly Father has a deep love for each one in the family, from the youngest to the elderly, and wants to hear what is spoken in the heart or out loud as the case may be. Happy is the church that prays together and then rejoices together at answers sent by the Lord to encourage the hearts.

Conclusion

Like most controversial subjects, this matter of alive-ness can bring

blessing, but it can also be misunderstood. There will always be those who turn away with the comment, "Life in the church does not come by gimmicks," and of course they are right. It's just that the terms we use to describe essential ingredients of a healthy church gathering are not gimmicks, but they are new, and some folks look with suspicion on anything new. Others, however, will look beyond the term to the idea it represents, and can then work and pray toward

making it come to life where they are.

One thing, however, is certain. There are things about the assembly that ordinary believers may not understand, but they do know the difference between deadness and aliveness, and no amount of orthodoxy in our method of gathering can provide the attraction of a spiritual family that breathes with a life that can neither be counterfeited nor hid!



Aye, there's the rub..." conveys Hamlet's perplexity in desiring death but fearing what lies "in that undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns." Well, here I am, asking myself, "How can I write an article of encouragement during an extremely discouraging time in my life?" Aye, there's the rub.

Well, where there's a rub, there is a God with the ointment. May I share His gentle rebuke of my egocentricity with you? For one thing, we, unlike Hamlet, do know what lies on the other side of death. Paradise, safety, sinless perfection, peace, satisfying relationships. These are the realities Christ's sacrifice has won for us and which give us strength and perspective...most of the time. I don't mind sharing my recent struggles as I've talked with many women who have felt and come to the same wrong conclusions I'm about to share.

When physical weakness, circumstances, and spiritual warfare all attack at once, we ladies (although men are not exempt) come to the faulty conclusions that 1) God is mad at us for something, and/or 2) we are friendless. We convince ourselves that we must suffer alone or that no one cares.

How do we arrive at this? It's often because we have an adversary who makes sure that it is at these very times that our phones do not ring, or we over-

hear a partial conversation without knowing the context, or everyone at church seems too busy or preoccupied to notice our calamity. In any case, women with whom I have spoken often think the same thing I do. "I do not want to call anyone for help." "I don't want to bother anyone." "I don't think anyone would care." "It seems such a small thing that I'm embarrassed to be struggling." Sometimes it's easier to nurse a wound than to appear "weak."

We come to the faulty conclusions that God is mad at us for something, and/or we are friendless. We convince ourselves that we must suffer alone or that no one cares.

When I asked ladies about this, we all agreed that we are susceptible to this reasoning. Why would we isolate ourselves instead of reaching out to our friends, our sisters in Christ? Conversely, when we see a friend in turmoil, or someone who is just "not themselves", what convinces us that our friend would rather be alone? What prohibits us from reaching out? Have we persuaded ourselves that not

knowing what to say is a worthy reason?

Well, the Lord, in His wisdom, has asked me the same question about my fellowship with Him. "Maria, why would you rather be alone than speak to Me about your problem? I am here, waiting for time with you. I know what troubles you and I want to help. I am not angry with you. I understand how and why you feel this way. Let me give you the correct perspective." Yet, like I do with my sisters, I avoid Him, suspect Him, fear Him.

A morning devotion helped me straighten my view of my discouragement. "In repentance and rest you shall be saved. In quietness and trust is your strength" Isaiah 30:15 (NASB). Charles Spurgeon wrote in *Faith's Checkbook*, "We are sinking by our struggles when we might float by faith." Now seriously, who would rather sink than float?

I think so many times we judge God by the same standards we judge our misguided friendships. If He cared, He would do something. He would put me on someone's heart. He would put someone on my heart. The truth is, difficult as it is to accept, God is still looking for faith in us. He doesn't want us to put faith in our friends, circumstances, money, occupation or ministry. They will always fall short or even disappear. He alone is our resource. 

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