



## Editor's Note

One of the joys of serving as editor of a publication is to receive notice via email of each new subscriber. Growth is encouraging! (Over the past year, subscriptions to our Spanish version, "Apuntes Para Ancianos," have come in far greater numbers than the English version, "Elders ShopNotes").

As I read the names, I think of dear believers in distant places that we will likely never have the privilege of meeting in this life. How I'd love to write each one a letter

to welcome them, to get to know them. Ah, impossible dream. But then I remember that in the book of Revelation, John saw myriads of people around the throne in heaven, people from all over the world, every one thankful for God's redeeming love and each with a story to tell, and no worry that time will run out or death will interfere. Reminds me of the words of our Lord upon meeting loved ones after His resurrection: "O joy!" (Matt. 28:9). 

## Leadership Principles

### The Loneliness of Leading *by Jack Spender*

There are times in life when we want to be in a quiet place, without other people around us, like when we spend time alone with the Lord, or when we sit and reflect or take a quiet walk alone. Those are peaceful times. But then there are other times when we want the company and nearness of family or friends, and "feel lonely" if that's missing. Everyone has been there.

Did you ever think about why the feeling of loneliness is so difficult? It can't be that we require constant noise and activity, since we rest and get restored during the quiet of night. There are probably many reasons, but a big one is the realization that there is no one to help bear our burdens, no one to listen and understand and care for us, no one that can really sympathize with us in whatever trials we are facing. One can feel very lonely on a crowded city street.

Sometimes even our closest friends and family members can be physically near but emotionally distant. There are very few who are close enough that we can open our heart to, but they have busy lives and jobs and families, and sometimes our need for closeness does not fit in with their schedule. All they can say is, "I'll pray for you," and we're surely glad for that, but that lonely feeling can creep in.

So we go and talk to the Lord. But He has chosen that in this age, we walk by faith and not by sight (II Cor. 5:7). We know He never leaves us, but we're often like the little boy whose mother was trying to comfort him in the darkness at bed time by telling him the Lord Jesus was in the room with him. "But I wanted somebody with skin on!" he protested. Yes, we know He hears; we know He understands; we know that, in time, He will help us or bring us out of our trials, but very often the feeling of loneliness is still there. And for those who lead

God's people, the work we need to do, like studying the Word, helping the saints, caring for the family, etc. is not easily done with a hurting heart.

Elders are not exempt from this! In fact, the greater the responsibility you have on your shoulders, the more complex your life probably is, and thus the number of those who could understand even if you did tell them is quite small, and in some cases, nonexistent! Is this an exaggeration? I don't think so. Consider the following.

#### Great Leaders for God Struggled with Discouragement

The list is long of those who passed through times of loneliness and discouragement and includes great names like Martin Luther, John Calvin, C.H. Spurgeon, and C.S. Lewis. Interesting that their personalities in life were very different, yet in this they stood on common ground. True, in this article we're not thinking about full blown "depression," but loneliness can seem like a mini-depression at the moment.

Think next of the characters in Scripture who had leadership roles among God's people. Moses felt the burden of trying to lead upwards of two million people through a desert. We never once read of anyone thanking him for his efforts. When the exasperated mob criticized him, no one said, "Wait a minute folks. Brother Moses is doing the best he can. Let's give him some credit."

David, who was surrounded by his warriors as he fled from Saul, was very much alone in the cave, even though his men (who would have given their lives for him) were all around him. His internal struggles were about honoring the Lord by sparing His anointed king, Saul. They were on a different page, with

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Biblical Foundations

### The Old Testament Poetic Books: The Wisdom Books *by Robert Spender*

Five times in the poetic books of the Bible, the fear of the Lord is described as the source of wisdom (Job 28:28; Ps. 111:10; Pro. 1:7, 9:10, 15:33). The Psalms, though poetic, are not included among the Wisdom literature of the Bible. A quick survey of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs reveals their focus on relationships under the covenant. And while each book has a different emphasis, the fear of the Lord is the common denominator.

#### Job

The book of Job chronicles the wisdom of a man who persevered during acute suffering and clung to God even while struggling to understand His ways (13:15). From the outset we know what Job did not know, that the Lord allowed Satan to test him. As the disasters multiplied, Job remained faithful but questioned God's plan. In three cycles of speeches, friends accused Job of some hidden sin. Job, holding fast to his integrity, directed his response less and less to the friends and more toward the Lord. In fact, he clung to God as his Redeemer so firmly that he anticipated a future dialog after death (19:25-27). Elihu, a younger voice, added little new insight. But then the Lord spoke out of the whirlwind, opening Job's eyes to His majestic power instead of providing specific answers. Job stood in awe. It was enough that God spoke, so Job bowed in silence.

In the end, Job was exonerated and remembered for his endurance (James 5:11) as the Lord affirmed Job's position over the errors of his friends. Job was wise because he tenaciously held on to the Lord during the struggles of life. Job's friends were unwise because they embraced their own interpretation of life bolstered by tradition. From Job we learn that sin and suffering are not automatically connected. From Job's friends we can learn that it is better to empathize than to criticize. Holding a hand in silence often speaks louder than uttering syllables of comfort. Job reminds us that our relationship with the Lord is greater than we will ever understand, so prompts us to be more thankful for the wisdom of His revelation through Christ (1 Cor. 2:14-16).

#### Proverbs

Proverbs are small packages of condensed truth that provide wisdom for daily living in the Lord. Because the book of Proverbs presents the Lord's perspective during Israel's kingdom period, a consideration of culture is important for interpretation. Relating to royalty, for example, is not on most of our agendas today, but standing behind such proverbs are timeless concepts of leadership, loyalty, service, and justice.

Israel did not have formal schools so biblical values and occupations were learned from parents. The opening of Proverbs endorses family education and sets the stage for the book. The first chapter communicates the goal, source, tone, and value of wisdom. It's important to remember that proverbs should not be read as infallible promises. Proverbs 3:9-10, for example, offers advice on the Lord's desire for our handling of money but does not guarantee riches to all faithful believers. Instead, Proverbs offers counsel on how we can please the Lord with our life, influence our neighbors in a godly way, and avoid the potholes of life, all in a way that accentuates living out the fear of the Lord each day. God is the source of wisdom and He wants believers to grow and mature wisely in the fear of the Lord (2:5-7).

One effective way to learn from the Proverbs is to trace subject threads. By reading about the fool, for example, it becomes apparent that there are different kinds of fools.

The naïve person is gullible and easily led (14:15) but wisdom offers help (9:4-5). The fool likes folly and is stupid (10:13 & 12:23) while the obstinate fool is blind (7:22) and despises wisdom (1:7). Because they spurn the fear of the Lord, stubborn fools are offered little help from wisdom.

By recognizing that God is the Lord of all wisdom and by fearing Him, we open the door to a better way. By patterning our lives after Christ, we follow the One in whom are hidden all of the

treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3).

#### Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes reads a bit like a mental meandering, but several key concepts unite the thinking of "the preacher" (1:1), who reflected on the repetitive struggles of life. The immediate emphasis on vanity or emptiness signals the direction of his perspective. The futility of the author's search is signaled by his occasional references to wind and trying to grasp it, while the repeated phrase, "striving under the sun" denotes the earthly limits of his quest. Ecclesiastes is a search for meaning in life and ultimately reveals that only God can provide true meaning to human existence. Throughout the book the tensions of human existence are boldly developed, and by God's implanting eternity in the heart (3:11), the human struggle for ultimate meaning in light of certain death becomes more critical.

Along the way, the preacher mentions the fear of God to provide a glimpse at the ultimate solution (3:14, 5:7, & 8:12). Ultimately the book culminates in the reminder that all are accountable to the Lord (12:13-14).

In my experience, young people relate to this book better than other age groups as its honest searching resonates with their position in life. Ecclesiastes can be effectively used today to show that the ultimate meaning of life lies beyond routine existence and our quest for a

human legacy. It also provides an effective way to think about time in our fast-paced technological society (3:1-8). The Lord created us to be wise people but Ecclesiastes teaches us the limits of human wisdom, since even the wisest of men

cannot make sense of life without God's perspective, reminding us of the frailty of life and the limits of human wisdom. In conclusion, the words of Ecclesiastes should provoke the listener since they are from the true Shepherd (12:11).

*Even the wisest of men cannot make sense of life without God's perspective*

*(Continued on next page)*

**Song of Songs**

Song of Solomon is a great love song based upon Solomon’s love for a maiden that he wanted to marry. After developing the importance of gender relationships (greatly challenged by our society) the king’s wedding comes into focus (3:6-11). The wisdom of this book provides God’s perspective on human love and sexuality that are ultimately intended for His glory.

Over time, a number of different interpretations of the book have surfaced mostly due to difficulty in identifying the changes in the dialog. However, the message of God’s sanction of love and sexuality between a husband and wife is clear. Especially important is the emphasis on the strength of one’s emotions during courtship and marriage. Embedded in

the wisdom of the Song is the integration of the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual aspects of love. Love is such an important topic in the Bible that the Song, which develops the human perspective, symbolizes the love that the Lord has for His people.

Crucial for developing the message of this book is grasping its teaching on the power of the emotion of love as revealed at the end (8:6-7). The graphic descriptions provide beautiful cultural pictures and expressions that enhance the development of love, but the wisdom of this book reminds us of the strength of the emotion of love and why it should be developed under God’s revealed guidelines.

The older, Jewish view expressing God’s love for Israel provided the foun-

ation for Christian expositors to see in the book the New Testament message of the love of Christ for the church. But this avoids or misses the wisdom of the book. The love of God is indeed a key theme in the New Testament, reinforced by many Old Testament figures. However, the Old Testament has a message in its own right, even the Song of Songs.

**Wisdom summary**

Collectively, the Wisdom books teach us the value of grounding our worldview in the fear of the Lord and His desire for each of us to grow in wisdom. These books are so important for young believers today to encourage their relationships with eternal values in view. The wisdom of God enables us to build upon the Rock rather than the sand, for there is no middle ground (Matt. 7:24-27). 

**Lonliness** (continued from page 1)

counsel like, “Now is the time God has given; kill him now.” David recounts this lonely place in one of his Psalms. “My soul is among lions, and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men whose teeth are spears and arrows...” (Ps. 57:4). David was spiritually alone, and there was no one to say; “Tell me your thoughts. Let me understand your reasoning to spare Saul.” And yet, at such times we read that, “David encouraged himself in the Lord” (1 Sam. 30:6).

Even the Lord Jesus had such times during His earthly life. When He asked His disciples to watch with Him for a single hour, they fell asleep (Matt. 26:40).

The conclusion? Loneliness at times goes with leading; it’s part of the job description.

So how should we deal with this problem? When we bring our burdens to the Lord, even relating them carefully, and then go on our way believing that He hears us (1 John 5:14), and that He sympathizes with us (Heb. 4:15), are we secretly thinking to ourselves, “But I really don’t feel much better”? The question then becomes, “Is that all that the Lord intended to happen?” I don’t think so.

**A Minor Prophet with a Major Message**

There’s an interesting passage in

the little book of Micah that has a message for us now. Micah brought before Israel the Lord’s complaint of idolatry, and His promise of impending invasion. In the last two chapters, (6, 7) we find a dialogue between the Lord and the prophet as Micah struggles with what the Lord has revealed. Unquestionably, he was discouraged, unable to understand it all. Note what the Lord says in this dialogue.

In 6:3, He offers a challenge which we can paraphrase: “What is your problem? Share it!” In verses 4, 5, we read, “Oh my people, remember...” and, “I brought you up out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you....” The goal of all this? The closing line in this section: “that you may know the righteousness of the Lord.”

Application: Stop and think about what the Lord has done for you in the past, and put the emphasis not so much on how or what you feel at the moment but on the righteous character of the Lord Who has led you this far.

Micah’s next reply contains this confession of trust: “Therefore I will look

unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.” (7:7). Here is a deliberate choice to look away from self to the One who saves—yes, from discouragement.

In the Lord’s final, brief reply, we get a commission and a promise. “Feed thy people with the rod...” (7:14) or, keep doing your job, Micah. And then: “According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt, will I show unto him [Israel] marvelous things” (7:15). What a promise! The blessings of the past are the blessings of the future. God is not finished with His people, even at discouraging times.

*Put the emphasis not so much on how or what you feel at the moment but on the righteous character of the Lord Who has led you this far*

**Conclusion**

Elders’ work can be a blessing, but at times it can bring some deep discouragement and loneliness. Knowing how to “encourage oneself in the Lord” is important. The indwelling Spirit of God will honor the decision to “Set your affection on things above [the righteousness of God], not on things on the earth [self-centered feelings]” (Col. 3:2). 

## Wives' Corner

### The Journey of Faith: Miriam by Marti Miller

A young girl stood at the edge of the river, waited with concern, curiosity, and maybe even fear to see what would happen to her small and helpless little brother. Did her mother instruct her to watch and wait? She lingered, hidden amid the bulrushes. Would he drift away? Suddenly he was in danger of being found. What would happen? Exodus 2:4: "And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him."

Although Miriam is not named in Exodus 2:1-10 we read the account of a girl who helped to save her brother, who boldly approached Pharaoh's daughter and who found a nurse to feed and care for him. We rejoice with her in God's wonderful deliverance and provision to save baby Moses and eventually the children of Israel from bondage. God so kindly used Miriam, who was not even yet a young woman, for protection.

Exodus 15 records the song of Moses and the children of Israel singing a song of triumph with special recognition given to Miriam. "Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances." (15:20) In this portion, Miriam is first called a prophetess and then a sister. *Strong's Concordance* defines prophetess as, "inspired woman; by implication, a poetess; by association a prophet's

wife." As a sister, Miriam knew the deep agony, fear, and pain that defined life under Egypt's rule. As a prophetess, she led other women with rejoicing and was filled with exuberance in song and dance. No longer would they feel hopelessness! Their lives would forever be changed and filled with great expectations. Freedom at last! What a privilege to be a woman of prophecy, rejoicing in the wonders of their God.

However, we see a different side of Miriam by the time we get to Numbers. She became envious of her brother Moses and lashed out at him. The testing of her faith was not producing patience (James 1:3)! On the contrary, we see that she developed a bitter attitude and envy crept in. Worse, she drew her brother Aaron into her discontent and complained to Moses. "So they said, 'Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?'" And the Lord heard it. (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth)" (Num. 12:2,3). God tells us that Moses was very humble. Miriam was now a problem.

God took strong action against this attitude of Miriam's. He could not allow His authority to be challenged. While she may not have realized it, that is exactly what she did as she allowed envy to control her.

Sometimes our thinking is clouded by our feelings. Pride raises its ugly head and what little humility that might have characterized us is now gone. Socrates said, "Envy is the daughter of pride, the author of murder and revenge, the begetter of secret sedition, the perpetual tormenter of virtue. Envy is the filthy slime of the soul; a venom, a poison, a quicksilver, which consumeth the flesh and drieth up the bones."

Jerry Bridges says, "First, we tend to envy those with whom we most closely identify. Second, we tend to envy in them the areas we value most."

The sad truth is that you and I are no different than Miriam. We, like Miriam, may start well, but once we begin to look at others instead of the Lord, envy begins to creep in. Each woman of God must remind herself that it is the Lord's work and we should be zealous for Him and His work, to be done His way. May we value most the Lord and His words above our feelings.

"I...besech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3)



## THE SMALL PRINT

**Elders' SHOPNOTES** is published bimonthly in English and Spanish. We seek to serve elders by publishing short articles that can be read in brief sittings and that are intended to provide practical teaching from a biblical perspective.

**E-mail subscriptions.** Visit our web site at: [www.eldersshopnotes.com](http://www.eldersshopnotes.com). Issues will be sent via e-mail as an attachment which can be printed down or read online. Feel free to pass ESN on to others. E-mail subscriptions (as opposed to postal mail) help us reduce the costs in publishing ESN.

**Postal mail subscriptions.** If you are unable to access the internet conveniently, write us at the address below and

we will send it via postal mail. Group subscriptions are also available via postal mail. Please indicate how many your group wishes to receive.

**Spanish subscriptions.** Go to [www.apuntes-para-ancianos.org](http://www.apuntes-para-ancianos.org).

**Subscription fee.** We trust the Lord for the funds to publish ESN. If you would like to be one of the instruments God uses to support this ministry, please mail your gifts to the address below, payable to: Jack Spender. Feedback/comments are welcomed.

Back issues of ESN can be found in the online archives at [www.eldersshopnotes.com](http://www.eldersshopnotes.com).

**Contact Info.** Elders' ShopNotes, c/o 112 Doolittle Dr. Bethany, CT 06524, USA E-mail: [alan7s@yahoo.com](mailto:alan7s@yahoo.com) Phone: 203-393-0078.

Publisher/Editor: Jack Spender  
Editorial assistance: Ruth Rodger  
Layout: Ryan Farrington

Specific Bible versions used are indicated at the first quotation in each article.

Note: All words referring to God have the initial letter capitalized. While the original languages of the Bible do not use capitalization, this is the convention in some translations but not in others. So at times there may be inconsistencies in usage in ESN articles.