



## Editor's Note

**B**usy elders don't need "busy-work" jobs to stay occupied; they have more than enough work to do! But what about biblically important priorities? Can these be allowed to slide for lack of time? As we come to the current issue, I'm thinking again of Eph. 4:12 and the high priority of "the equipping of the saints." The apostles had priorities (Acts 6) and would not surrender them, even for urgent "people needs." They had men in the church who had been equipped, and so they delegated these urgent matters to them.

What about us? Is the elders' meeting agenda loaded with pressing items that could be delegated to others? The answer is probably, "Yes," if we were willing, and

"Yes," if we had men prepared to help. We at ESN take this matter very seriously. Are we supporting the equipping of the saints by helping to equip the elders who read ESN?

May I suggest that some (hopefully all) of our articles answer "Yes." The ongoing series on OT and now NT overview reminds elders, "Don't compromise the feeding of the flock; help them get to know their Bibles." The timely series by Jim Fleming says, "The church is not a social club; it has a mission, and maturing saints will be involved." Even the small article on tools and the shop in this issue can have a place. I hope you are enjoying and applying these resources!



## Biblical Principles

### Elders and Missions, Step 2: Put Missions Back on the Elders'

**Radar** by Jim Fleming

**T**he Bible teaches that it is God who calls. He calls individuals. In Jeremiah's case it was from before birth: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jer. 1:5 NASB). Additionally, God calls individuals to perform specific tasks. Remember Moses? "Moses! Moses!" God called. "Here I am!" Moses replied. "Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt" (Ex. 3:4,10 NLT).

In other cases the call was general, but the response was personal. Isaiah "heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" (Isa. 6:8) When the individual, Isaiah, responded to the general call, "Whom shall I send," the Lord accepted his offer and said, "Go, and tell this people..." (Isa. 6:9 NASB). Christ called individuals using terminology they could relate to. Like the fishermen Andrew and Peter, Jesus said, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). They followed. Others were

called—like the rich young ruler—but did not follow. "For many are called, but few are chosen," Jesus said (Matt. 22:14). When we come to the Church age, it becomes the role of the Holy Spirit working in and through the church leaders to do the calling. Acts 13:1-3 is a key passage where this precedent is established in the church age.

It needs more attention and expounding than a simple article can achieve. "Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers... While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off." Prophets and teachers were leaders in the young Antioch church. As they were exercising their primary role of prayer and studying the Scripture (Acts 6:2-4), the Holy Spirit called out two from their own group to be sent out as missionaries. We are not given the mechanism of that communication, but when leaders are unitedly "devoted to prayer and to the ministry of

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Probably sounds like a strange question to be asking in a religious magazine, but consider the title of our small publication “Elders’ ShopNotes.” So what is a “shop” anyway? One dictionary definition is “a place for making or repairing goods.” Interesting! That tells us that the two primary activities in a shop are creative (making something new), or restorative (returning something broken to usefulness). Most people would think immediately of the repair or construction of material things, but is there an application to spiritual things as well? Of course!

God is the original Creator, and we are made in His image, so it’s not surprising that man has always enjoyed building new things. Church planters love this! And from the beginning (Rev 13:8), God set to work restoring broken relationships and lives, and invites His servants to do the same. The world is, in one sense, our “shop.”

#### The Basics

Think with me for a few minutes on some of the implications of being “shop-workers.” I’m a workshop type of person; I like tools and I like to build things and repair things that are broken. In the basement of our home I have a small workshop with a collection of pieces of wood, screws and nails, rolls of wire, and tools gathered over a lifetime. When my wife needs a new shelf in a cupboard or a lamp “doesn’t go on when I turn the switch,” my first impulse is to head for The Shop. With rare exception, I’ll have what’s needed to build something suitable or fix what’s broken. Running out to the store seems a desperate option!

This all may sound exciting to a novice, for what can be more rewarding than to make something original or repair something needed to keep the home running smoothly? But

there are some important considerations that I haven’t mentioned yet. For one thing, I must have the right tools for the job, and the necessary raw materials to work with. And I must also have some ideas about how to proceed in working with these tools and materials. Poor workmanship can be costly. For simple projects, I can usually figure it out step by step. But for more complicated projects, I seek help from those more experienced.

Paul the apostle knew about this. He was a tent maker by trade. When he exhorted Timothy, his young son in the faith, to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15), he actually used a word applied to the tent-making trade. To “rightly divide” something meant to make straight cuts in the leather or fabric. Crooked cuts would allow leaks in the tent, and before long, the tent maker would be out of work!

#### The Elder and His Shop

So what can all of this have to do with an elder’s shop, or reading a publication like *Elders’ ShopNotes*? Very much. Elders need sharp tools to deal with hearts, and they need to know how to use them to accomplish the Lord’s work. In the same way that a dull chisel or plane may gouge the fine piece of wood to which it is being applied, spiritual tools (our words or gifts or attitudes or listening skills) can do spiritual damage to souls we are attempting to serve. The Lord Jesus had some pointed things to say about how we speak, how we listen, and the humility needed to accept sharpening in these areas of spiritual workmanship.

In a bygone era, trade guilds took in young men as apprentices to learn a trade. A young man might receive room and board, but generally speaking, he would not be paid. His “pay” was the knowledge and experience he

gained working under skilled craftsmen of the day. Just mentioning the name of one’s teacher commanded a certain amount of honor or respect. One thinks of Paul receiving a classical education in Judaism, sitting “at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3).

In time, schools and colleges offered training in the Scriptures and the art of preaching, and of course, there are widely different views on that subject. But we must not miss the point that the younger generation must be trained or disciplined by the older generation. This is clearly taught in 2 Tim. 2:2: “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”

Often there will be a young person in my workshop, curious to see what goes on there. Brimming with questions, most have little idea of the difference between a wrench and a screwdriver. But there is an interest to learn, and that’s priceless. Good questions deserve good answers. It may be years before they will have their own shop, or work with their dad on projects, but the seed can be sown early. Sometimes I wonder if the same interest, the same sort of questions, are in the minds of young people watching the meetings or listening to the discussions of the “grown-ups” about spiritual projects or repairs in the assembly.

#### The Mindset of a Workman

So back to the title of this article: “Brother elder, how is your shop?” In other words, in your service for the Lord, do you prize creativity and long to repair broken people or practices of the assembly? Do you see the Scriptures and your spiritual gift(s) as God’s tools to fit you for “every good work” (2 Tim 3:17)? Do you view problems as irritations or as op-

*(Continued on next page)*


## **Shop** (continued from page 2)

opportunities to be sharpened as a tool yourself under the careful eye of the Master Craftsman? Are you humble enough to sit at the feet of others, and learn from those who have skills you lack?

These are heart questions, but there are also practical questions that apply to the workman. Do you have a quiet place for study, and the study tools of good books and the writings of other experienced workers for the Lord? Do you take advantage of

opportunities to attend a conference, listen to messages online, talk with fellow elders and other saints about questions in the Lord's work? These can all help outfit a spiritual shop devoted to the "equipping of the saints."

The whole subject of how to use a tool properly and how to keep it sharp is huge...and fascinating. Wisdom and skill and experience do not just "happen." They come as the result of hard work and a desire to please the Lord with our workman-

ship. But if we avail ourselves of the opportunities and trials the Lord sets before us, we shall, like Timothy, become workers "that need not be ashamed" (2 Tim. 2:15) which is an unspeakable honor, bringing glory to the Lord. There are many builders, but Paul's exhortation is still true today. Speaking in the context of the local assembly, he said, "But let every man take heed how he builds upon it" (1 Cor. 3:10). 

## **Missions** (continued from page 1)

the word" (Acts 6:2), the Holy Spirit will make Himself quite understandable.

Now notice in Acts 13:3 that "they [the other elders] laid their hands on them and sent them off." But immediately in verse 4 it says, "So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went..." So who was it that commissioned the missionaries? The church leaders or the Holy Spirit? Yes! The elders, led by the Holy Spirit, recognized His commissioning, prayed over and sent them out.

Acts 13 gives us the biblical precedent for sending out missionaries "the Bible Way." Similarly, the Holy Spirit uses Ananias and Barnabas in the calling and commissioning of the great missionary, Paul, as we read the details of his ministry preparation in Acts 9-11. Years later it is Paul who comes to Lystra as an apostle, meets young Timothy and, "Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews" (Acts 16:3). How did Paul know Timothy was the one to take? The Holy Spirit must have led him to that conclusion. Again the precedent is that, led by the Holy Spirit, the spiritual leader initiates, calls, mentors, and sends out the younger Timo-


thys. This cycle has continued since Pentecost as the Lord's mechanism to further His mission.

### **Who Takes the Initiative?**

In summary, the practical-biblical lesson: Elders and Missions Step 2. Elders should not be waiting for exuberant young people to come and implore them for commendation to missions. It is the biblical role of the elders to continually be in tune with the Holy Spirit, listening to Him and looking for those He wishes to send out! Even if it includes one or two of the elders themselves! The elders should be part of the practical outworking of the Lord's call and commissioning of maturing believers to ministry both in the local assembly as well as internationally. Try it! The Lord will bless it. The Assembly will come alive when the Lord starts using the elders in this way.

I end with what I call "The Blasdel Gospel Chapel Model." From the 1940s through the 1960s the elders of the Blasdel Gospel Chapel near Buffalo, NY, would invite each child when they reached middle school to come and talk to the elders. They befriended the kids, showed interest in their lives, but also challenged them to be living for God. They specifi-

cally emphasized missions as a high calling of God and something to be considered. And those young people responded! Is it any wonder that the Blasdel Assembly commended more missionaries than any other in North America during those decades? Many second- and third-generation descendants of that generation are still on the mission field. Many of the well-known missionary pioneers to Africa were a result of those elders lovingly and sensitively living out Acts 13 in their simple assembly, seeing God take young lives and turn them into powerhouses for the Gospel!

Are we elders still passionate to reach the world with the gospel? Are we willing to ask the Lord to show us who from our local assembly the Holy Spirit may want us to send out? Are we willing to send our best men and women if the Holy Spirit says, "Set apart for me \_\_\_ and \_\_\_ for the work to which I have called them?" This is not a one-time prayer. This prayer should be as frequent as our intercession for conversion, blessing, growth, and the many facets of church life that we are always praying about. "One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said..." 

## Wives' Corner

### "The Virtuous Woman" by Marti Miller

The virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 is known by what she does for all those in her sphere of life. I am amazed at her energy and her resolve to accomplish so much for so many! How could one person do all that? Have you heard it said, "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time!" Was her whole life being summed up in this passage, rather than just her individual days? Are seasons of life being described here and not necessarily daily routines? One bite, one season at a time?

We are surrounded by women experiencing their various seasons. Each is working hard but some are struggling more than others. Those who are soaring like eagles have a panoramic view of life while those living frame to frame strive just to care for the babies in their nest another day. Too often, I believe, our expectations of others and ourselves are not mindful of these seasons.

Wives, whatever season you are in, love your man to the fullest, giving him respect in submission as the provider and protector of your home as Ephesians 5 encourages. Young wives and mothers, you are not expected to be the one who fills the role of provider and protector in the home. God gave Adam that place of responsibility in Genesis 2:15 and we see God affirm that in 1 Corinthians 11:8, 9.

So what is the place God gives us as

we seek His wisdom and help in our season of life? I am encouraged by this verse in Psalm 144:12 that somehow gets lost in David's request for help: "...That our daughters may be as pillars, sculptured in palace style."

A pillar is a prominent structure of importance and stability, carefully and properly placed as a support. As women

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of God, we have an important place or role in God's church order and home order. He makes no mistake in positioning us as women, quietly covered and submissive to our husbands.

The Proverbs 31 woman seems to be a worker and a provider but I don't believe that is to the exclusion of her husband. Her role as a helper (Genesis 2:18) is to support him in his work and efforts, not to do his work. I myself worked outside the home till the children came and there were other brief seasons that I worked and earned throughout our marriage. I am concerned that in today's culture, women are expected to work in

order to have, and maintain, a lifestyle of affluence. Yet, have you ever thought about mothers in the Word as being known by their children, not by their work? Often we read: "the mother of..."

Titus 2:3-5 says "the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed".

These verses seem to indicate that the work of women is more about their character and about being homemakers. I do not imply that women must only bear children but rather that in bearing children she is the one who nurtures and teaches them. Except for a few, I dare say, most of us would struggle to be a help to our husbands and an efficient, loving mother to our children if employment were added into the mix.

Whatever season of life we find ourselves in, may we be developing our character and conduct so that "the Word of God may not be blasphemed" and so that others may see Jesus Christ in us.

Proverbs 31:29: "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all."

ESN

## THE SMALL PRINT

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

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