



More Help For the Busy Elder

Editor's Note

Welcome to the second issue of Elders' ShopNotes, a publication for the busy elder who is secularly employed. We have been greatly encouraged by the response to the first issue, praise the Lord. This confirms our belief that this kind of ministry tool is vital for today.

If you missed out on the first edition, e-mail us, snail-mail or call us to receive your copy (see last page for details).

As you will quickly notice, there is a variety of articles. Jack Spender furthers the idea of how to add more elders. There are two articles dealing with the "fruitfulness" of elders by Ross McIntee and Ron Hughes—you'll want to read both! Also, you will notice a continuing look at aspects of visiting the flock when they are sick.

Last, but not least, we have heard

back from some of the wives about "Wives Corner!" Thanks, fellows, for showing ShopNotes to your life partner.

A special thanks to all who have passed around copies of ShopNotes. Our initial responses have come from a wide geographical span including British Columbia, West Virginia, Connecticut, New York, Ontario and Colombia, South America.

The effort you invest in sharpening your understanding and skills as an elder is like the time you spend sharpening a lawn mower blade. It takes time away from your ministry, but it helps you become more effective. We pray that reading ShopNotes will become a helpful "blade-sharpening" time for you.

May the Lord cause your ministry to overflow in praise and glory to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Editor 

Personal Life Abiding Elders

By Ross McIntee

It's a beautiful part of Canada. Now, it's not the majestic snow capped Rockies of Alberta or British Columbia, or the golden wheat fields of the endless prairies, or the canoe and camping country with its myriad of lakes and rivers of northern Ontario and Quebec. Rather, it's my country, part of the Niagara peninsula, that strip of fertile soil squeezed between the

Niagara escarpment on the south and lake Ontario on the north.

It's Canada's renowned vineyard—grape growing country. In early spring you see workers tying, supporting, pruning. In late summer and early fall the results are obvious—bulging clusters of grapes hanging from loaded vines. Much fruit destined for nearby wineries.

But what does all this have to do with you and me? What elder has not longed for more fruit in his life with which to strengthen God's people? Paul instructed the

Ephesian elders, "Feed the church of God..." (Acts 20:18 KJV). What a responsibility! But how can we do this, unless we are fruitful in our own personal lives?

Jesus put it succinctly: "I am the vine, ye are the branches, he that abideth in me and I in him the same

tively, effective feeding of the people of God is the fruit produced in the life of the elder who is abiding in the Christ.

Nourishment from modern wisdom, knowledge and psychology will not do. True nourishment comes from the life of our Lord Jesus Christ and flows through Him to the elder, bringing forth fruit. This is the fruit

..he that abideth in me and I in him
the same bringeth forth much fruit ... John
15:5

bringeth forth much fruit, for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). I might add, as an elder you can't even begin to "feed the flock" apart from abiding in "the vine." To put it posi-

that, when mingled with the pure milk of the Word, will cause the sheep to grow. The elder who is abiding in Christ is the elder who can feed the flock. After all, did

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Biblical Foundations

Adding More Elders

by Jack Spender

Everyone wants to fellowship in "a good church," one that is large enough to meet their needs, but small enough to provide a sense of belonging and ownership. Most people love the joy and intimacy of a new meeting where everyone knows everyone, and everyone seems involved.

Trouble is, what we like, others like too. And as they join with us in fellowship, the church grows and we may hear it said that "something has been lost."

People accustomed to a certain quality of fellowship and care struggle with the feeling of being pushed out into the fringes of the group. It takes hard work to feed and care for a growing flock, which in turn requires more shepherds to keep up with the growing needs, and careful delegation of peripheral tasks to younger believers.

There are a number of reasons why a local church may want to add one or more elders to the existing number. Two obvious reasons are that the work is growing or that some elders have moved away (or been called home).

A Parenthetical Thought

This raises the question as to the duration of eldership. Some say that eldership is for life; others say a man should step down if he no longer qualifies (e.g., if he can no longer do the work of an elder).

The Scripture doesn't address the question directly, but we do have the example of men who had been called by God to a work, using their own judgment about the length of service.

It takes hard work to feed and care for a growing flock ...

In Acts 13:2, we read of God's call of Paul and Barnabas to an assignment which seemed open ended; there is no record of any length of service given. Yet, after some months of travel and preaching, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch having "fulfilled" the work to which God had called them (Acts 14:26). True they went out again later, but that was a new journey, the first mission having been completed.

It would, therefore seem reasonable for elders to use this as a model for their own status. That is, the scripture does not specifically mandate the length of service for elders—the duration may vary depending on the Lord's leading as situations require.

Finding Them....Adding Them

We have already mentioned that there is no Biblical example of an existing assembly adding elders to those already functioning.

How then do we proceed? First we should recall the steps by which elders were obtained at the beginning, as outlined in the last issue of ESN: God works first in the heart, a desire to serve grows in the individual, qualifications of character and family are met and there is public recognition by the believers in the church.

Now, is there any good reason to seek a different plan than this? I think not. In fact, herein lies the probable explanation as to why Scripture does not provide additional revelation on the subject. Whether an assembly is new or longstanding, the same

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Leadership Principles

Leading by Example

by Ron Hughes

True plurality of leadership presents some difficulties. When the New Testament was being written, the apostles were still alive and exercised their special authority (Ephesians 2:20). Thus, little was written about how elders met and related in the capacity of their office.

However, the New Testament's general instructions regarding life in the body are helpful today. Believers need a good example. Therefore, it is important that elders should exemplify the kind of life they encourage in others. This is exactly what Peter emphasizes: "...not lording it over those entrusted to your care, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3).

Let's apply Romans 12 to the way elders lead. First, elders recognize their own need of the transformation which comes from the constant renewal of the mind. While they are more mature than the flock, elders have not peaked spiritually. They still seek to discern the good, acceptable and perfect will of God, not only for themselves but also for those in their care (vs. 1-2).

Second, elders realize that leadership, like all gifts of the Spirit, must be exercised

humbly, according to the measure of faith God has granted (vs. 3, 16). Humility is one of the most difficult virtues for leaders to cultivate. It comes from recognizing that in the spiritual realm they lead only under God, not of or for themselves. Thus Paul speaks of putting others first in issues of honor (vs. 10).

Then, elders must truly love the people

... not lording it over those entrusted to your care, but being examples to the flock. 1 Peter 5:3

God has put into their care. The genuine love of an elder (vs. 9) combines the paternal desire to protect and develop with the maternal goals of nurture and care. Familial affection should characterize the shepherds as well as sheep!

Diligent service is raised in verse 11 and the need for spiritual disciplines of rejoicing, patience and prayer in verse 12. An elder knows that spiritual growth in others takes time, for it has taken time in his own life. He also knows that his faithful God

will produce the spiritual fruit in others (including his fellow-elders!) that he, as a co-laborer of God, longs to see (Phil 1:6).

So he can rejoice while he waits patiently and prayerfully for God to work. He need not be manipulative or heavy handed to see God's will done in the assembly.

His role is chiefly a spiritual one, but he is not to neglect practical issues of generosity and hospitality (v. 13). Elders stand out because they don't retaliate in kind. When they are attacked, they pray for God's blessing on the attacker, knowing that as their Father reveals himself, hearts will soften towards others as well (vs. 14, 19,20).

Elders are also empathetic. They are able to enter into the rejoicing of others without envy, and can mourn the loss of another without gloating (vs. 15). They don't play favorites either, having the same attitude toward all (vs. 16).

Finally, elders serve as men of integrity who are not seduced by power to use carnal means to reach spiritual ends. Rather, they overcome evil around them with the word

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Encouraging the Sick

by Chuck Gianotti

Quarantined! Upon returning from a trip to Colombia, South America, I was exhausted and dehydrated—feeling miserable. With alarms of “malaria,” the doctors quarantined me in the local hospital. All I wanted was to get out and back to work!

A well-meaning brother came to minister to me. He shared a “mini-sermon,” explaining why God allows suffering. I appreciated his intention, but it did little for me.

Why? Because I was not struggling with the “Why?” question. My faith was not taking a hit—but my patience was! (Turns out it wasn’t malaria, but an intestinal parasite).

He missed the mark—all because he didn’t take time to find out where I was at spiritually. The real message I needed was to be patient (no pun intended).

I learned much from that experience. As elders, our goal in visitation is to help the sick or struggling Christian look to God for whatever their need is. The writer of Hebrews challenges us to “encourage one another” (10:25). But, what do I say when visiting someone to encourage him or her?

First, it is important to realize that encouragement is not simply trying to make a

person feel good. Literally, the word means “to invite, implore, appeal to, entreat, comfort.” Spiritual encouragement, as Dr. Larry Crabb points out, involves “. . . the careful selection of words that are intended to influence another person meaningfully toward increased godliness.”

We must first understand where the individual is at in their spiritual struggle. For me, it was patience. For some, they may wonder if anyone cares. For others, there

Everyone should be quick to listen,
slow to speak . . . James 1:19a

may be deeper questions and struggles.

How do we know what they need? Having prayed for divine guidance, we need to listen carefully to what the individual says.

Learn to ask good questions, like “What’s God been saying to you through this?”, “How can I pray for you?”, “How can I be of help to you?”, “Do you have any questions?” Of course, you don’t barge into the room, firing away like an interrogator.

After initial “ice-breaker” conversation, carefully thought out questions will help move the discussion in a spiritual direction.

We want to encourage them to deal honestly with their struggles. David says, “Surely you desire truth in the inner parts. . .” (Psalm 51:6). It is possible to inadvertently hinder a person from being honest with their doubts and fears. For example, some well meaning statements may have the wrong effect: “I came to encourage you, but you have encouraged me.” We think this is an encouragement, and it may well be. But, it also may pressure the individual to make a “good show” while struggling inwardly, for fear he may be seen as weak in faith (who wants to be seen that way?).

Consider the struggles of David (as well as the Lord) in Psalm 22:1, Moses in Exodus, Jacob in his wrestling with the Angel of the Lord. And don’t forget Job’s masterful recollection of his intense turmoil with God! God can handle those honest wrestlings of the heart. The question is, can we as elders? Only then can we begin to encourage them at the right level.



Wives’ Corner

A Woman of Respect

by Mary Gianotti

I have been pondering the question, “How can I best help my husband in the demanding ministry of being an elder?” Hospitality, mailings, counseling, food preparation--the possibilities are endless. We can become very busy “doing” and then miss what God really wants from us as elders’ wives.

Paul points out some very important qualities we are to have, powerfully packed into a single verse in 1 Timothy 3:11: “In the same way their [both elders’ and deacons’] wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers. . .” We are to be “women worthy of respect” -- not for status or glory, but so God can do his work through us. Other women will not listen, take counsel, or follow the example of an elders’ wife for whom they do not have a high regard. A woman of respect is a woman of integrity—this is the woman God can use.

Respect is not something we can demand from the people around us. Respect is earned as our godly character enables people to trust us so that we can serve them more effectively.

In particular, we are commanded by the Lord not to be malicious talkers. Webster’s

dictionary helps us understand the breadth of this word. It may imply a deep seated dislike that is expressed in words or a cherished feeling of resentment that coats our comments like a stench. If we hide away in the corners of our heart attitudes such as ill will, spite or a simmering anger towards someone, sooner or later malicious talk will result. A sharp word or a careless passing comment will wound a sheep or cause a “fire” to start out of control, seriously damaging the flock (James 1:26, 3:1-11).

I made a list of things that tempt me to be malicious. Your personnel list may vary from mine but this is worth the exercise. Part of my list includes when my pride is hurt, my husband is criticized (nothing gets up my gander quicker!), I get drawn into gossip as the sympathetic ear or I wrongly share a prayer concern (that’s the classic one). There is more but it is important that you identify your own areas of weakness.

What can we do about all this? We need to be constantly reminding ourselves of several things. The first has to do with our “list.” Being aware of our weaknesses is a good start, confessing as sin any form of malicious talk--this is what God wants. It is much easier to justify ourselves than to ad-

mit sin and confess it. God sees confession as a sacrifice (Psalm 51:17); it is something he delights in.

The second step is to not become comfortable with our thought patterns. Romans 12:2 makes it clear we need transformed minds which includes time in God’s word and prayer.

The third step is to practice encouraging people, especially those you don’t feel like even talking to. “But encourage one another daily. . . so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness” (Hebrews 3:13). This becomes a powerful tool God uses to refine us as we put it into practice and bless others in the process.

Florence Littauer, in her book *Personality Tree*, speaks of encouraging words as being like little silver boxes with a bows on top, that we can give as gifts to people. Can you think of someone who rarely receives a silver box with a bow on top from you?

An elder’s wife who is not a malicious talker is a tremendous asset to her husband. She becomes clear minded, develops spiritual insight and a loving concern for the people her husband has been called to shepherd. This helps her gain respect in the eyes of others.





“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers ...”
1 Peter 5:2a

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Abiding Elders *(continued from page 1)*

not our Lord clearly say, “without Me ye can do nothing”?

So I ask myself this challenging question: Am I abiding in Christ? One way to tell is by examining how much “Father glorifying” fruit exists in my life? Check this list from John 15 for evidence in your life:

1) Has the will of Christ become my will? (vs. 7 as implied by answered prayer)

2) Has the love of Christ become my

love? (vs. 9)

3) Has the obedience of Christ become my obedience? (vs. 10)

4) Has the joy of Christ become my joy? (vs. 11)

So, as we remember back when the leaves began to take on their gold and reddish hue, and the first frost silently descended on the vineyards to give that extra taste of sweetness to the grapes, may we hear the voice of our beloved Lord saying, “Abide in me and I in you.”

Adding More *(continued from page 2)*

process will work if applied carefully and prayerfully.

Conclusion

This means that we should expect God to anticipate our changing (or growing!) needs, and move in hearts to provide help. If elders are working together in harmony, the saints will know it and can expect that younger men will respond with a desire to share the burden. This will manifest itself in the life and spiritual activity in the assembly. But those already so recognized must be watching for

these evidences and inviting younger men to join with them in whatever shepherding activities will serve as training tools.

A good rule of thumb may be to add another elder for every 20 or 30 people received into fellowship.

Happy is the church that moves through this process of adding to, or change, within the leadership without trauma to the work. This is one of the greatest differences between God’s pattern of a functioning plural leadership and the tragic case of the “empty pulpit” seen in many churches today.

Leading by Example *(continued from page 2)*

of God and power of the Spirit demonstrated in a life above reproach (vs. 21; Titus 3:6; 1 Timothy 3:2).

Wise shepherds understand that their own spiritual life and character, patterned

after the Great Shepherd, are key factors in the spiritual development of their flock.



Sometimes ... You Just Can’t Win!

Becoming an elder is like stepping into the line of fire. Kind of like the woman who was married to a very critical man. One morning she determined to make him a perfect breakfast. She asked what he wanted. So she made toast, coffee, O.J., one scrambled egg and one fried egg. Everything thing was perfect...but he complained, “You scrambled the wrong egg.”

Some people thrive on the gift of “criticism!”

RECOMMENDED READING

Encouragement: The Key To Caring, by Dr. Lawrence Crabb (Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, Michigan), 1984.

This insightful book deals very thoroughly and insightfully with the subject of spiritual encouragement.

The Training of the Twelve, by A.B. Bruce (Kregel Publications: Grand Rapids, Michigan), 1971.

A classic, originally written in 1894, this is a “must” read for Christian leaders. An exhaustive look at Jesus’ training of his disciples.