



Elders' SHOPNOTES

January 2001, Volume 2, Number 1

Editor's Note

With this issue we mark a New Year of publishing ESN. Thank you to so many that have encouraged us on with feedback and comments.

We have designed ESN so that each issue can be stored in a 3-ring binder for future reference. At the beginning of each year, we will include an index of all articles for the previous years (see insert). The best way to get caught up on back issues is to download them from our website (see back panel). If this option is unavailable to you, let us know and we can send them to you (while supplies last).

ESN is offered on a "freewill" basis as the Lord supplies through his people. However, many have asked about the cost of producing ESN and how they can help. Last year the Lord was gracious in providing for these costs through the generous donations of many who

have received it.

On average, a single subscription costs about \$8/year to produce and send out. Multiple subscriptions to one address help reduce postage costs. Oversees subscriptions cost more to mail out because of higher postage. These subscriptions have been subsidized by domestic support. Subscriptions for the e-mail version (ESN Online) greatly reduce the costs.

The above is shared only as a guideline for those wishing to share in the costs of this ministry. We are pleased the Lord has seen fit to use this small work in building up the undershepherds of His people. To Him be all the glory!

The Lord bless you as you serve the Great Shepherd.

Leadership Principles Leading by Faith

by Chuck Gianotti

As elders, we must lead the people of God in walking by faith. Of course, in order for an elder to lead he must be "out in front!" It does no good to simply tell people to walk by faith—we must *show* them what that means, how it works and the relationship between faith and reasoned thinking.

There are times when the whole congregation must step forward in faith, with the elders leading the way. For example, how does a local group of believers decide when to move ahead with a building project? Can we afford it? Do we take out a loan? What about when faced with beginning a new ministry or outreach into a difficult area? Will we have enough people to staff it? Will it take away from other ministries? How do we step in faith in such a way that the congregation walks in faith with us?

I believe that informing the congregation of the pros and cons of major ministry decisions is wise leadership and shows them the thought processes spiritual men go through when walking by faith. Too often, Christians look at "spiritual giants" and think faith is something that simply comes upon them in some mysterious way and that it has no relationship to reason. But, this is not the case. In fact, faith involves a considered use of wise thinking. How really *do* men make wise decisions regarding stepping out in faith?

We may gain some insights from George Muller, a man widely regarded for his faith in trusting God for resources to support hundreds of orphans. In the 1800's Muller, by faith, developed and operated orphanages in Bristol, England.

In his autobiography ([The Autobiography of George Muller](#), Whitaker House Publishers, pp. 206-210), he shares some of the pros and cons he worked through as he struggled with whether or not to build another orphanage.

Reasons *against* another Orphanage:

- 1) Would I be going beyond my spiritual capabilities?
- 2) Would I be going beyond my physical and mental strength?
- 3) If I felt sure that the present state of the Scriptural Knowledge Institution [another ministry he had] were to be the limit of my work, I would lay aside this thing at once.
- 4) Is it like "tempting God" to think of building another Orphan House for seven hundred more orphans? ("Tempting God" means, according to the Bible, to limit Him in any of His attributes.)
- 5) How will I get the money for building this large Orphan House?
- 6) What would become of this institution after my death. (My business is to serve my own generation with all my might.)
- 7) Would building another Orphan House cause

How do godly men make wise decisions regarding stepping out in faith?

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Leadership Principles

Psalm 23: Don't Push Too Hard!

by Bob Lehman

The world in which most of us live has long ago replaced the rural serenity of lush meadows and gurgling streams with concrete lawns, tall buildings and frustrating traffic. The rising and setting of the sun is now traded for a time clock; dependence upon God for a good crop or ample pasture is replaced with performance ratings. What can the shepherd of old teach us for the culture of today?

Amidst the barren, worldly landscape of Israel, the shepherd directs his sheep to the wholesome meadows of green grass. The pasture is particularly suited to their needs. Tender grass the Psalmist chooses, a field desirable to the taste and refreshing to the body. His procedure is not to force feed them or overly structure their meal but simply to direct them to the source of nourishment. He desires that they will leisurely enjoy the grazing and rest in the satisfying contentment of their provision.

This scene is not one packed with busyness and extravagance nor is it a regimented, efficient process like caged chickens receiving programmed food at designated intervals. The shepherd directs them to the provision for their need and leaves

them to appropriate it for themselves. Without strict schedules they are permitted time to rest and enjoy the blessing they received.

In the rat race of modern society, spiritual shepherding must not add to the spiritual flock's stress and the busyness of already overloaded lives. Instead the elder/shepherd should emphasize rest and time to relax in the source of provision. The Lord described to Ezekiel His shepherding care for His people:

... He makes me lie down in green pastures.

Psalm 23: 2 (NKJV)

I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD (Ezekiel 34:14-15 NKJV).

Too often the church contributes to the rat race rather than encouraging rest in the blessings of God. Instead of leading God's people toward relaxing in and meditating on spiritual food for thought and personal growth, too often elders encourage the flock

to get so involved in programs and activities that family life can fracture and hectic schedules can increase. As a result family responsibilities are neglected and personal growth is stunted.

Careful evaluation must discern a **proper balance**. As spiritual shepherds, the elders' overview of the collective flock must not ignore the personal concerns of the individuals. Enthusiasm for the final goal must not sacrifice regard for current conditions.

Jacob wisely cautioned Esau, revealing well the heart of a shepherd, when he refused Esau's escort back to Canaan: *My lord knows that the children are weak, and the flocks and herds which are nursing are with me. And if the men should drive them hard one day, all the flock will die. Please let my lord, go on ahead before his servant. I will lead on slowly at a pace which the livestock that go before me and the children are able to endure, until I come to my lord in Seir (Genesis 33:13-14 NKJV).*

Elders do well to follow the example of David and Jacob in not overloading the people they are called to shepherd. ●

Practical Ministry

Shepherding Teens

by Jack Spender

No age group in a church congregation is "easy" to shepherd. But many agree that the hardest group to impact is the teenager. No longer a child but not quite an adult, the teen presents special challenges to all in leadership: parents, school, and assembly workers. Sometimes one hears the lament that the young people grow up and leave the assembly. It seems that the number who go on for the Lord is small and those who remain in active assembly fellowship smaller still. What can be done?

It is clear from Scripture that the home, not the school or church, is to be the primary sphere for the training of children. According to both Old and New Testaments, fathers have the front line responsibility (Prov. 13:1; Eph. 6:4). The church must support whatever godly training is being done at home, a challenge for the best of elders! Ideas that help church leaders break down barriers and draw young people into closer fellowship should be considered carefully. Here is one that has

been a real blessing to the work here in Connecticut.

Most assemblies have some type of Sunday School program on Sunday mornings. A significant part of the congregation is dismissed just before the teaching portion of the Bible hour. Now the idea of Christian education is a good one. Small children benefit from simple lessons bro-

Many benefits derive from incorporating high schoolers into the regular teaching service on Sunday morning.

ken down for young minds. And thank God for those who teach them!

But, we have found that there are many benefits derived from incorporating high schoolers into the regular teaching service on Sunday morning. First is the blessing of having teens and parents hear the same message. On the way home from the meeting, or at the dinner table, parents can discuss with the older children not

only the subject material, but its application both to personal and assembly life. This provides a substantial period of transition from 4 to 6 years in which parents (and elders) can prepare young people for the day when they will head off to college.

Instead of going from the Sunday School room to being completely on their own, they are learning (as young adults) with their parents the truths of Scripture and Biblical distinctives of gathering in a way that allows the parents to continue as teachers (or disciplers) long after the meeting is over.

Just as important as the education of our youth, is the training of workers in the assembly. Too often some of our most promising future leaders are absent from the main ministry of the local church, as they are (understandably) the ones chosen to teach Sunday School. Yet, they too need solid ministry of the Word to grow.

Undoubtedly some will object, saying they would miss working with the kids,

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Elder Qualifications

Personal Character

by Chuck Gianotti

Leadership requires qualification. How much more is required for that particular leadership of God's flock, the shepherding of His people. The importance of qualifications increases proportionately to the importance of those whom one is leading. And there is nothing more important to God than those whom Christ "*bought with his own blood*" (Acts 20:28b NIV). Therefore, the qualifications for elders are significant and should be continually reviewed.

The Apostle Paul asserted the importance of guarding themselves when he charged the Ephesian elders: "*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.*" Acts 20:28. An elder cannot guard others unless he guards himself.

While Paul primarily talks of guarding against doctrinal error in one's own life, this admonition would seem to include warning against "character drift" as well. The qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 delineate the standard against which an elder should measure himself—to see how well he is guarding himself.

Clearly, no one measures up completely, but there should be no excuse for

"accepting" major failure in any one area. Rather, an elder should have a good measure of maturity and growth in these areas. It does us well to regularly review these qualities and examine ourselves.

Five of the qualifications have to do with an elder's personal character and his reputation:

Above reproach

An elder should be blameless, presenting no patterns of Scriptural disobedience or grounds for accusation. An elder should not only *be* blameless, but also *appear to be* blameless.

Respectable

An elder should demonstrate a well-ordered life and good behavior. People look up to him with esteem.

Gentle

An elder should be characterized by forbearance, tenderness and graciousness. He does not bulldoze his way around and trample carelessly on people's feelings.

Loves what is good

An elder must desire the will of God in every decision. He is not given to moral compromise or ethical shortcuts.

Devout

An elder must be reverent, continually desiring to be separated from sin and devoted to prayer and the study of Scripture.

These character traits form, as it were, a foundation for the rest of the list. Although all Christians should aspire to do well in these five areas, an elder should excel in them all.

Granted, these five areas are difficult to quantify. Who does the judging? It is a wise elder who honestly seeks the Lord as David did, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*"

It is also an astute elder who recognizes that he can blind himself to his own weaknesses. Pray that the Lord would help you find someone who can honestly level with you about your failings and not be afraid to confront you. Humility at this point will do you a great service. This is too important an issue to soft pedal. We elders *must* be men of character.

In the next issue we will look at the elder's self-discipline qualities. ●

Wives' Corner

Wives Above Reproach

by Mary Gianotti

The remains of Christmas are frozen in a plastic bag in my freezer. The turkey bones are waiting to be simmered into a delicious winter soup. Any good recipes out there?

When making soup from scratch there is a point in the process when you get rid of the bones—the big stuff. That's the easy part. Then there are all the other things—a bay leaf or two, small bits of bone, and unknown partials floating around in the broth—the small stuff. That's when you get out your strainer and carefully pour the broth through.

It is sometimes easier to be aware of the big sins than the micro sins that become a comfortable part of our lives. As you begin this New Year, ask God to put you through *His* strainer showing you areas of your life that need to change. His strainer is the Word and I believe it is most effective in showing us the sin in our lives.

Early in the New Year, determine to spend time each day reading your bible and praying. God will use His words to teach, correct and train you in righteousness. This process is much like making soup. The

broth becomes usable when freed from unwanted partials. Our character is refined as we allow God's Word to work in us.

This process at work in our lives will, in turn, be very helpful to our husbands as they seek to be the elders God desires them to be. Paul conveys to Timothy under the guidance of the Holy Spirit a list of qualifications for the "noble task" of eldering. The

*Our character is refined as we allow
God's Word to work in us.*

first in the list states that an elder is to be a man "*above reproach*" 1 Timothy 3:2 (NIV).

Elders' wives also need to be characterized in the same way. As God's Word refines our attitudes, actions and conversations we will find ourselves walking in the same direction that God has commanded our husbands to walk. This means that my behavior must be blameless. There should

be nothing in my conduct that would cause someone to point out a serious wrong in my life. It does not mean I am sinless but rather that if I do commit sin I make it right with both God and man.

When either of us *do* sin, we will be able to respond graciously rather than criticizing each other. This will free us up to seek each others forgiveness. So often as women, we hold on to our husbands faults using them as ammunition in times of disagreement. Learning to have this gracious, forgiving attitude will encourage our husbands to be men above reproach. Look for ways to affirm your husband. There will be only a few people who will let him

know they appreciate his work and godly character. You can be his biggest fan. This will strengthen your marriage and ministry.

If you are like me and the turkey bones are still in the freezer, maybe it's time to make soup! Serve it to your hungry man with a kiss and word of praise. God is going to use you both for his glory in the coming year. ●

Leading By Faith *(continued from page 1)*

me to be lifted up in pride?

Reasons for another Orphanage:

- 1) Many applications for admission continue to come in.
- 2) The moral state of the poorhouses greatly influences me to go forward.
- 3) I am further encouraged by the great help which the Lord has given me in this blessed service.
- 4) My experience and capabilities have grown with the work.
- 5) The spiritual benefit of more orphans is another reason I feel called to go forward.
- 6) My greatest desire is to show forth God's glory and His readiness to hear prayer.

7) I am peaceful and happy in the prospect of enlarging the work.

You may not be considering the building of an orphanage. But, you are faced from time to time with significant decisions regarding ministry opportunities for the church. Do the Christians see you wrestling with "big" steps of faith? Are they aware of what the pros and cons are that you struggle with? If they only see the end result, they may have a tendency to place you on a pedestal of faith. But, by sharing your "thought processes" with them, you are helping train them to walk by faith just like you do.

Oh, by the way, Muller went ahead with the project with the Lord's blessing. ●

Shepherding Teens *(continued from page 2)*

and in many cases, tapes of the message are available. Consider the following:

1) The Scriptures presented in the teaching service of the church are relevant to the assembly not only as to content (what was spoken), but also as to timing (when it was heard). These things ought to be discussed at the time of their being sent by the Lord. Too often important points drift away as we mean to "catch up," but other things were pressing, and crucial ministry that may not be visited again for some time was missed.

2) Those burdened for youth ought to listen to the ministry on Sunday morning along with them, and then meet with them to question them about their understanding, the implications and applications of the truths presented. Here is an ideal way to help elders relate to teens on a topic of mutual interest. Questions like: "How was this

subject helpful to you?" or "Were you able to follow this speaker's presentation?" can open the door for meaningful discussion, as well as helping the elders plan future "food" for the flock.

Logistics can be worked out. We prefer that young people sit with their parents, but we realize that is not always possible. Instead, we welcome them to sit anywhere they wish—except the back row. Then we agree that an elder should sit in the back row every Sunday. This encourages teens to listen rather than engage in whispering or other distractions.

This idea is something like an apprentice system, and will help to train future leaders for God, giving them instruction in the doctrines of the Word and how to support and defend the practices of the Christian assembly from the Scriptures. ●

From the Q-Files (quotes)

Just before winter sets in, geese from northern Canada begin their journey south, migrating to the lakes and ponds of North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Perhaps you have seen the majestic flight of those birds—whose wingspan can reach 5 to 6 1/2 feet—as they traverse the sky in their characteristic flight pattern. According to Lamar Dodd's Mark Trail, some authorities believe that "Canada geese fly in a V-formation to take advantage of the air currents stirred up by the birds flying ahead. The lead goose does most of the hard work, overcoming air resistance." The trailing birds benefit from the ones in front.

All of us are indebted to godly men and women who have gone before us.

A young African convert prayed one evening like this: "O Lord, You are the needle and I am the thread!" That day he had visited a school and watched some girls who were sewing. He noticed that the thread always followed the needle, and he saw in that simple task a profound spiritual truth. If he stayed close to the Lord, praying, reading His word, and depending entirely on Him, he would always be led by God's Spirit.

Elders cannot lead God's people effectively unless they are following God faithfully.

Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds.
Proverbs 27:23 ●

ELDERS' SHOPNOTES

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Scripture versions are noted in the first reference in each article.

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

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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