



Editor' Note

Welcome to our new subscribers. The mission of ESN is to provide encouragement and practical teaching for elders who seek to shepherd God's flock in the local church.

Many elders work responsible fulltime secular jobs, have families and are involved in various ministries. In addition, some have been thrust into eldership with little or no training. The busy elder has precious little time for self-study and further training. Much of the practical teaching for pastoral leadership is contained in resources that are directed toward "The Pastor" of a traditional church, so is limited in its applicability to working

elders who are not seminary trained and have limits or their time.

ESN exists to encourage you by providing:

- 1) "Bite-size" teaching readily digestible for the working elder whose time is at a premium.
- 2) Helpful how-to's that are practical for shepherding the congregation.
- 3) Basic biblical leadership principles.
- 4) Teaching for how elders' wives can be a support to their husbands.

If you would like us to address a specific issue, please let us know. The Lord bless you as you continue to serve Him, the Great Shepherd. (ESN)

Biblical Foundations Spiritual Gifts of Elders

by Jack Spender

We have been studying the relationship between elders and spiritual gifts. We found that while all elders as believers are gifted, no particular gift is required for eldership. In the last article we looked at the biblical pattern of elders functioning as a team, noting the first of two vital principles, that spiritual gifts are intended to be complimentary and never competing.

The Second Important Principle

Working together with others in leadership is rewarding! There is fruitfulness and joy but there are also dangers. Mistaken ideas about gifts and authority can give rise to serious problems when church leaders cease to be servants and become masters. Without question, humble servant leadership is first and foremost a matter of the heart. But those who lead in the church must understand that spiritual authority comes only from God, never from any spiritual gift. Knowing this truth as theory will not suffice. It must be thoroughly worked out in the life of the church.

Thinking it through

It will help us to observe that the New Testament writers never confuse gift with office. Spiritual gifts are not titles and do not carry within themselves authority to act. Elders as "under shepherds" are made by God (Acts 20:28), and accountable to Him (Hebrews 13:17, I Pet. 5:4). While gifts are permanent (Rom. 11:29) and part of the believer's spiritual birthright, leadership positions depend upon a certain degree of spiritual maturity and recognition of performance. Because authority can be dangerous when concentrated in one person, the church is to be led by a true plurality. One of God's provisions to protect the church from autocratic rulers is an equal brotherhood under Christ without religious titles, a point clearly taught by our Lord Himself (Matt 23:8). Peter charged the elders not to become lords over God's heritage (I Pet.5:3).

Evidence of misuse in the church today

Many people would find these truths new and even shocking. In many churches, "The Pastor" is the presiding religious official in the

church. He may have a board of elders but he presides. He may or may not have a shepherding gift, but his title refers to his office. Although we can be thankful for every godly church leader, it is not too much to say that there is absolutely no support in the New Testament for a position of church "Pastor" or any other official gift for that matter (e.g. "Teacher"). Examples abound of the dangers of a single person as the recognized authority in the church.

Safeguards

What steps can elders take to protect the local fellowship from authority problems? They must know and seek to apply the New Testament pattern for church leadership watching carefully for signs of imbalance in power. True plurality must be defended making sure that no brother has greater authority than the other elders, even though because of a particular gift he may be more visible. This should hold whether he gives full time or part of his time to the work.

Careful terminology should be encouraged. Believers must be trained to avoid using spiritual gifts as titles. Sometimes I ask young students, for example, how many times the expression "the Apostle Paul" is found in Scripture. Of course the answer is never! "We have no pastor" is commonly heard, meaning we have no church official with that title. But since God has provided a number of men, women and young people in the assembly with priceless pastoral gifts it is better to exclaim that we have many pastors!

Guarding against elevating any gift to an authoritative position or office will also help young believers discover and develop their gifts—a vital part of elders' work. We'll look at that in the final article in this series. (ESN)

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Leadership Principles

“Getting People to Volunteer”

by Chuck Gianotti

Have you ever gotten discouraged or frustrated when there is important work to be done for the Lord, but no one volunteers? Why don't people see the need and why aren't they more committed? Sound familiar? The irony is that at the same time many Christians feel they are not making a worthwhile contribution to the Lord's work.

Some believers take the initiative and put themselves forward in seeking places and ways to serve. They are eager and often take on way more than is prudent. Elders need to keep them from overloading themselves and burning out. Yet, we secretly wish we had more of these kinds of people.

On the other hand, many are reticent and do not take the initiative or put themselves forward. I can hear some tired elder respond, “But, I have asked, and they just don't help out!”

Central to solving this dilemma is prayerful and careful communication. Certainly, the old platitude has some truth to it, “A person's gift will make room for itself.” But, wise elders can help make that room.

First we must approach people on the basis of their spiritual giftedness, not on the basis of our program needs. Sure, there are some things that simply need to be done, whether there is giftedness or not. But, people tend not to respond to repeated requests to serve outside of their gift area—this puts priority on the task, rather than the people.

What to one person is a joy in service, is another person's struggle in servitude. For example, one elderly woman for years stuffed envelopes, finding great satisfaction in serving the Lord in this way. Others find that rather tedious and boring, but would find great fulfillment in keeping the building clean. Others, still yet, feel greatly used of God in a teaching capacity or looking after children or organizing an event. But, remember, not everyone has the same spiritual gift (1 Cor 12:30). Not every one fulfills his or her God given responsibility by doing the same things.

The key, as elders, is to work with the Holy Spirit in His enabling people for ministry, not to work against Him. Instead of telling people where to serve, the elders' work involves helping people “discover” their gift and where/how to put it into service. We show great respect by “enabling” individuals, that is, encouraging

them in the use of their gifts through acknowledgement, verbal affirmation, appreciation.

Does this sound like the elders should pander to everyone's whims? Absolutely not! When Christians are being taught the word of God and are developing in their faith-walk, a growing sense of responsibility to use their gift ensues. We shouldn't

What to one person is joy in service, to another is struggle in servitude.

squelch this by continually trying to plug them into the wrong ministry areas.

A simple “tool” we have found helpful over the years is what I call a “Skills and Services Inventory.” A few times a year, everyone in the fellowship receives this form to fill out, giving them an opportunity to tell us (elders and ministry leaders) where they would like to be involved. The assumption is that a person's desires often line up with his or her giftedness.

The form contains a list of all the specific ministry/service areas in our local church, such as Sunday School teacher, assistant teachers, hosting small groups, greeting, setup/take down crew, bulletin editor, usher, custodian, etc. The first time we did this we were amazed at how many distinct ministry roles became evident!

Beside each item on the form are two letters to be circled: “d” – to indicate the person “desired” to be involved in this area; “w” – to indicate the person is “willing” to be involved in this area if really needed. Of course, the third option for each line is to mark neither letter, which means the person does not desire to be involved in that area at all.

The results are tabulated by service area and forwarded to the various ministry leaders who then contact each individual. Some times there are no volunteers for certain areas. Other times, more people volunteer than can be used in certain areas. And some people simply won't fill out a form.

At times, there may be extenuating reasons why a person shouldn't serve in the area they desire. For example, a person wanting to be the Sunday school coordinator or a teacher may not have the full confidence of the elders—this needs to be dealt with sensitively.

But, the point of the inventory is that it

gives people time to consider all the opportunities and pray for the Spirit's guidance--no more responding to the urgent plea or being cornered by an elder. The people have a practical means of communicating to the elders the Lord's leading in their lives.

There are other benefits to using a form like this. 1) People have an opportunity to change their involvement. Most are willing to volunteer occasionally outside of their desired areas, if it doesn't mean a life-long commitment. One individual expressed his fear this way: “I'm afraid if I volunteer, I'll be stuck

there the rest of my life!” 2) People are exposed on a regular basis to all the ministry needs of the church. They can better see the need for their involvement as well as become aware of new areas of ministry. 3) Ministry leaders have a ready list of willing individuals to serve in their respective areas of ministry—this removes the fear of rejection when approaching these individuals.

Why not make a complete list of every specific area of ministry in your church—you will be surprised at how many things there are. You may also be surprised at people willing to get involved. The Skills and Services Inventory is simply a tool to help the elders and ministry leaders prayerfully and carefully open up lines of communication with God's people. (ESN)

Q-Files: Leadership

Leaders are those who know what to do next, know why that is important, and know what appropriate resources to bring to bear on the problem at hand. Then, through effective communication they influence others to follow. *Barry Bowater*

It is not such a fierce thing to lead once you see your leadership as part of God's over-all plan for his world. *Calvin Miller*

“People first, strategy second.” *The motto of successful CEOs, Fortune, June 21, 1999, p.74.*

Supervisors who want the best out of people have to lead, not push. It is harder to do, and it takes a lot more skill. But it is worth the effort. *Leadership With a Human Touch, January 18, 1994.*

“You are not finished when you are defeated. You're finished when you quit.” *Leadership, June 6, 1995, p. 24.* (ESN)

Being An Example to the Flock

by Ruth Spender

Recently, as I was praying for our U.S. President and his family, I wondered how anyone could ever want such a stressful job. Among other things, I contemplated what it must be like to have a whole nation watch your every move with media cameras always following you and journalists persistently questioning you regarding your motives, decisions and actions. You could not leave your residence or go on a trip without the whole world knowing about it. LITERALLY! But somehow the loss of privacy in exchange for the opportunity to impact history makes it all worthwhile to some individuals.

Certainly, none of us have ever had this problem to the degree to which the president has, but do you ever feel on a smaller scale, the lack of your family's privacy because of your husband's position in leadership? Our family has talked from time to time about the impact of living a fishbowl-like existence which allows others to look in and observe how we may be responding to a given situation or reacting to

a particular crisis. "Why can't we be like other families?" the children ask.

In meditating on this question, 1 Peter 5:3 came to mind. Peter talks to elders about being an example to the flock of God. While this passage is directed specifically to elders, their families are definitely implicated as well. Being an example implies a willingness to allow others to watch you

As a pebble tossed into a pond ... our actions have a long range impact.

so they might learn how to deal with life's issues and problems. Sacrifice is involved on the part of an elder and his family as they are asked by God to live open—book lives so that others may learn from their strengths and even from their weaknesses.

Can we perhaps look at this "inconvenience" as a blessed privilege? For we have the opportunity to impact other lives for God and at the same time, we ourselves are pressed closer to the Chief

Shepherd in an effort to live the Godly life needed for the great work we have been called to do.

We become more dependent on the Lord as we seek to make wise moves, realizing that what we do and say does indeed affect many around us. As a pebble is tossed into a pond and we see the resulting effects in the ripples that are created, so our actions

have a long range impact on those whose lives we touch.

We may value our privacy, but God has asked us to lay aside our rights so that others might be drawn closer to Him. It's one way in which we can lay down

our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16).

Are we willing? I believe we will be as we understand that the temporary loss of privacy will result in tremendous eternal blessing and reward. We have the privilege of affecting lives not only for time, but for eternity. As we understand this, we are better able to support our husbands in this aspect of their work. (ESN)

Relational Qualities

Empathy

Def: "Empathy—identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives." This is required for shepherds of God's church, to be able to get outside of themselves and see through the eyes of others. We must, for example, resist the urge to arrange the ministry of the word as a reaction to our own feelings, rather than the leading of the Holy Spirit in meeting the needs of the flock.

Case in point: suppose at work another Christian criticizes the leaders of his church (a different church than yours). This upsets you, because you know the difficulties of being an elder, the frustrations and disappointments—and you have poured yourself into shepherding God's people. So you find yourself either mentally siding with the leaders of that man's church, or you find yourself judging them (believing what your co-worker says about them).

Now, further suppose at the next elders' meeting, you push for teaching about respecting leadership. Stop and ask yourself, "Is this a reaction to what upset me or is there a real need for this teaching in the assembly right now?"

Elders must prayerfully consider and be willing to recognize when their own feelings cloud their judgment and selection of topics for teaching. Clearly, teaching on biblical leadership, authority and honor is needed, but we need to be careful about preaching to people who aren't there.

Another example of this can occur when you have a prayer meeting or Bible study—and few people show up. When you begin to teach, you have two options. First, you could get up and comment on the lack of commitment in this "Laodocian church." The problem with this approach, is that it discourages those who do come to the meeting. The ones that may need to hear that message are not there! Maybe your need to speak about this comes from your own frustration, not the people's need.

The second option would be to get beyond your own feelings and encourage those who did come to learn and pray. For them, it is good to be there. Someone once said, "Don't shred the enthusiasm of the few because of the failure by the many." In order to do this, you must get beyond your feelings.

Empathy is sensing the needs of your audience and ministering accordingly. (ESN)

Q-Files: Leadership

You don't have to be brilliant to be a good leader. But you do have to understand other people - how they feel, what makes them tick, and the best way to influence them. *Leadership, January 19, 1993.*

A leader lives with people to know their problems. A leader lives with God in order to solve them." *John Maxwell*

The key to successful leadership today is influence, not authority." Kenneth Blanchard in *Leadership Inspirational Quotes & Insights for Leaders, p. 18.*

You don't have to hold a position in order to be a leader. *A. J. D'Angelo* (ESN)

Spiritual Hotshots or Servants?

Marcy Gray always wanted to be famous. "I had no intention of being a singer," says Gray. "I didn't really plan on a career in music. What I wanted, though, was to be a hotshot. I always wanted to be a celebrity. I wanted to be treated like I was special." This wish is coming true.

Last summer the Canton, Ohio native released a collection of pop songs, topping the charts in England and Australia. America seems to be catching on as well with two Grammy nominations, one of which is for Best New Artist! So went the news report (*Rochester, NY Democrat and Chronical, March 30, 2000*).

What caught my attention was the bold-faced, unashamed, though honest, admission of Gray's motivation in life. The actual venue could have been anything, it didn't matter. What was of first importance was to "be a hotshot."

Many, who believe God has designed the church to be pastored by a plurality of elders, eschew the single "pastorate" ministry with fears of "one-man" ministry which can lead to pride--the "hotshot" mentality. Yet, pride can assert itself in a plurality of leadership as well. The actual venue matters little when it comes to this sin.

Consider the following: Where else can a person with little training ascend to the pulpit and "lecture" an audience numbering anywhere from a few to hundreds of people. A heady experience to be sure!

Or consider our efforts to assert equal authority of all elders; I can so easily want "my" equal authority to be recognized more than the others' authority. And since there is no human authority above the elders, I can at times arrogantly think I must stand alone for God, and set the others straight.

Though I am not "The Pastor", am I not by such thoughts falling prey to the very thing I am against--the desire to be treated "like I was something special"? Just being part of the elders group can stroke the ego. As one young man once said, "Since I was a child, I thought that becoming an elder was the pinnacle of Christian achievement." This thinking betrays a wrong attitude.

Now, don't mistake the thought here--desiring to be an elder is not necessarily a sign of self-assertion. Scripture indicates such a pursuit can be "noble" (1 Tim3:1), if done with the right motives in the heart.

My fellow elders, in order to pursue this great work with God's blessing, we must allow the passion of John the Baptist to grip us, "He [*i.e. Christ*] must become greater, I must become less" John 3:30.

Paul puts it this way, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3).

Contemplate the words of our Master: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34b).

"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35).

"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many" Mark 10:43b-45).

Are you, am I, a "hotshot" elder or a servant who desires Christ to "become greater"? 

Resources

Believers Bible Commentary: New Testament

by William MacDonald, (A & O Press, P.O. Box 8550, Wichita, Kansas 67208). 1205 pp.

Most single volume commentaries of the New Testament lack breadth of scholarship or simply give summary exposition. But, MacDonald's work is refreshing exception. Written from a conservative perspective and espousing solid scholarship, this commentary should find its place in every elders' library.

He exhibits an acquaintance with various interpretations of key troublesome passages. While this is not an exhaustive commentary, it has sufficient depth to prove useful for many applications. Although, commentaries are not a substitute for studying scripture, I find myself turning to this work before other commentaries.

Speaking To Life's Problems

by Lloyd M. Perry & Charles M. Sell (*Moody Press:Chicago*), 1983. 272 pp.

Subtitled "A Sourcebook for Preaching & Teaching," this volume provides biblical insight into contemporary problems with extensive bibliographies and sermon sources. Someone has said it is relatively easy to be Biblical, and it is relatively easy to be relevant, but it is very difficult to be both. This book helps bridge the gap. The appendices, in particular, contain lists of contemporary issues along with pertinent biblical passages.

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

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