



Editor's Note

Elders are getting older. Of course, you say. But, who is going to fill in their ranks when they are eventually promoted to glory?

One way to do this might be to have a Sunday teaching series on biblical eldership. Another is to invite a number of maturing men (young and older) to a monthly Bible study with the elders on the subject of biblical eldership. Not all of them necessarily will become elders, but to engage them in wrestling with the topic will give them a goal to shoot for in their walk as Christian men.

After conducting numerous "elder training" sessions, over the last 6 years, I have seen many

move from indifference, to a sense of being led by the Lord to "step into the harness" and help shepherd God's flock.

Father's can train their sons, by inculcating respect for biblical eldership. I know one elder who began desiring this "noble" work (1 Timothy 3:1) as a teenager, largely because of his father's influence.

Elders' ShopNotes exists to help meet the need for training resources. One church has used issues of ESN as a basis for elders' retreats and Bible study. See our web-site (<http://home.rochester.rr.com/esn>) for links to other great elder/leadership sites.



Biblical Foundations Spiritual Gifts and Elders

by Jack Spender

Now that we have considered the spiritual gifts of elders both individually and as a group (see previous issues), it's time to think about how they relate to the gifts of others in the church. How can elders be faithful stewards (Titus 1:7) of this vital resource: the Lord's people, a gifted people?

It has often been said that an assembly exists to worship God, equip the saints, and reach out to the lost. True enough, but while all three of these functions are the privilege and responsibility of every believer-priest, worship and witness actually have very little to do with one's particular spiritual gift. Ministry, on the other hand, has everything to do with gifts, or as we have called them, "tools for service."

This dimension of assembly life is extremely important because every Christian has a need to serve and to be served. In fact, I believe that both worship and outreach are the inevitable overflows of an edified church and a serving church, a point borne out by the book of Acts.

Elders then, will have an interest in the spiritual gifts of believers in the body of Christ as a whole. Certainly, missionaries and gifted servants from other areas will visit the assembly, and bring their unique contributions to the local work. Their gifts must be applied wisely. But by far the greatest challenge elders face is the spiritual training and equipping of those right within the local church.

Every assembly must be a place where believers can discover and develop their gifts in a safe (i.e., non-threatening) environment. There must be an atmosphere of acceptance and forbearance; a place of opportunity and healthy communication. Some time ago, we studied the four works of elders (ESN, March 2000) and it is interesting to see how these responsibilities come to the fore in this matter of equipping to serve. Equipping means good, solid food from God's word for growth, oversight and protection from

dangers and discouragements that would quench the gifts (1 Th 5:19), and good leadership so that young servants may understand how a particular spiritual gift fits into the overall picture of assembly life.

One special area for this subject concerns the elders in their work for the assembly. Sometimes one sees assemblies where the elders have strong gifts in, for example, teaching and administrative areas but lack significant pastoral gift. Here is an opportunity for fellowship and interaction between the elders and those with such gifts among the believers. How can this cooperation take place?

Elders who have worked through the subject of their own giftedness, have probably also faced the question of gaps or areas where important gifts are lacking within the elder group. This requires humility! Paul appeals for this humble attitude right

in the context of his teaching on the gifts: "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think

Not all gifts needed for ministry are confined to the eldership.

soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." (Rom. 12:3).

They must remember that all the gifts needed for the work of an assembly are not confined to the eldership. Also, there are gifts like "governments" (1 Cor. 12:28) and "ruling" (Rom. 12:8) which may reside in people who are not elders. So elders must be willing, not only to delegate work out to the flock, but also to bring in and accept help from those who can assist them with the work they do.

Is this a confession of weakness in leadership?

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Practical Ministry

Taking The “Bore” Out Of Preaching

by Chuck Gianotti

It's a crime to bore people with the Word of God! It is relevant as it is, but sometimes poor preaching or teaching can make it sound irrelevant. There are many hindrances to clear reception of Biblical teaching, but boring preaching should never be one of them. Since I am writing to elders, we all know the work of conviction belongs to the Holy Spirit alone (John 16:7-11). But, how can we human instruments present the Word of God so that people listen?

First of all, the word must be operable in the preacher's own life. Your message may be true to the biblical text, but it may not ring true to life, if it has not been “clothed” by your human flesh.

The word “integrity” comes to mind. Paul, the apostle supported his teaching with consistent example: “Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.” Phil 3:17 (see also Phil 4:9, 1 Cor 11:1). This reminds me of a parent teaching a child how to tie his shoe, “Here watch me.” People are looking to you as an elder to see how the word of God plays out in “real” life. More than once, before going to the pulpit to preach on “relationships”, I have had to ask someone's forgiveness.

Second, use your imagination. By this I don't mean make stuff up. Rather, study the scripture, picturing the truths in your mind (I am presuming you have studied your subject and text thoroughly). To communicate it in an interesting way, picture yourself by the sea of Galilee on a sunny summer day as Jesus spoke of the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. Smell the air, watch the birds flying by and notice the flowers off in the distance. Get into the “author's skin.”

Imagine a church where divisions based on pride are ripping it apart (1 Cor 1-4). What would it feel like to wonder if the Lord had already returned and your deceased loved ones missed out (1 Thess 4:13-18)? What questions do you have when you first read the text on which you are going to teach? Chances are your listeners will have the same questions and will readily listen when you address these questions.

I remember sitting our children down for family devotions when they were very small. We told them they could doodle on paper while we read the scripture to them—they could draw anything they wanted. Our

text was Genesis 1. Boring? No way! We hardly got started and they were trying to draw the earth, heavens and a “firmament” (KJV) “Dad, what's a firmament?” Bingo, instant interest was triggered as they tried to image a “firmament.”

Third, don't be afraid to say, “I don't know. I'm still working through that. But, this is what I do know ...” As an elder, you don't need to know everything! In fact you don't! And it is good to say that once in a while! This adds credibility. A godly older man once confided in me that he occasionally struggled with the assurance of his salvation. When I emerged from my initial shock, a profound appreciation for

The Word must first of all be operable in the preacher's own life.

him came over me—he was real, not phony. I came to know him as one who didn't sugar coat things and try to bluff his way. He wasn't a “super-saint”, but he was someone like me. I listened when he talked.

Fourth, be clear. Avoid “Christian” jargon we assume everyone knows. Or if you use it, explain it in everyday terms. I once spoke “eloquently” to an educated friend and a seasoned Christian about “appropriating” God's grace. His response floored me: “You lost me on that.” I had thought it sounded good, but in reality it didn't convey much of anything to my friend. Your role as a communicator of God's truth, is to explain it so that people can understand it, not so that they admire your knowledge and use of big words.

There is a wonderful doctrine theologians have called “propitiation,” the sound of which sounds quite boring. But, if you explain it in simple terms, it comes alive: God is angry at sinners for sinning and those who do not believe are under God's wrath and condemnation (John 3:34b). However, according to 1 John 2:2 God has provided a “propitiation” (KJS) or an “atoning sacrifice” (NIV).


What does that mean and so what? Christ experienced the wrath that we deserved. Think for a moment why He prayed three times “Father if only this cup could pass from me.” He was facing the “cup” of God's fury (Jer 25:15). If Jesus' reaction to God's wrath against me was so “repulsive” to him and brought such an agonizing death and “forsakenness” from

His Father (Psalm 22:1) that even He, God the Son in the flesh, winced three times at the coming blow—imagine what it would be like for us to experience that wrath for eternity?

I remember the anger of my earthly father when I was young (most of it well deserved, I might add)—his belt left it's impression on my back side many a time. I would recoil every time he began to remove that long piece of leather from his pant loops—anticipating both the physical and emotional pain inflicted by his anger. God's fury is a million times more severe, so much so that Christ Himself recoiled from it! Because he stepped into the full swing of

God's descending wrath, neither I nor any other believer has to ever fear God's consuming, eternal anger again. His anger was completely satisfied, my sin has been justly dealt with. His anger toward me has been spent on Christ, fully exhausted of it's energy. Now *that* is good news! Thank you God for your propitiation, I am free from your wrath forever. All because Jesus died in my place. What love! Yes, even a teaching like “propitiation” can come to life.

Finally, in order to keep your teaching interesting, summarize when you are done, so that people can go away with a “Let me put it this way...” kind of thought. Use pithy sayings that capture the truth, like-sounding words, an easy to remember list or some imaginative way to help them remember what they have learned..

In summary, to help take the “bore” out of preaching, you need: integrity, imagery, credibility, clarity and summary. 

Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

1 Cor. 15:58b

To the elders among you... when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

1 Peter 5:1a, 4

Leadership Principles

Get It Across

by Ron Hughes

One of the obstacles elders must overcome is the communication gap within the assembly. Effective communication involves five components:

A Messenger

Though the elders are not always the originators of information which needs to be communicated in the local church, for this article we'll use them as the example. I stress here that we need to be clear about whether a given communication is from "the" elders or from "an" elder. When the elders communicate a position or policy statement, it must be seen to be the work of the group.

A Message

The message itself must be clear. Think it through ahead of time. Write it down. Try it out on a few individuals. After a group of elders has spent several hours discussing an issue, their grasp of it will be strong. But clarity isn't the whole story. It can be difficult to communicate all the subtleties and nuances of hours of interaction in a brief announcement. Such statements can sound

high-handed or dictatorial. So check for tone as well as clarity. Be sure that the emotional content is as accurate as the intellectual content.

A Means of Communication

The means of communication bears more than casual consideration. Information buried in long lists of announcements can easily be ignored, as can a few lines inserted in the regular bulletin. If the message is of extraordinary significance, do something special to draw attention to it. Print it up on a separate bulletin insert, preferably of a different color. If a special announcement is to be made, don't bury it among notices of regular meeting times, the sick, and other common items. Dare I recommend a little creativity? Maybe two elders could make the announcement, trading off to keep the energy and interest up. Perhaps it could be made at a different time in the service.


A Recipient

When it comes to the recipients, be considerate. For example, if a couple of families need challenging about punctuality,

don't make a public announcement. Talk to them. If we often publicly address issues which don't apply to everyone, they will learn to tune us out. Be sure that you have the right audience. We've all heard preachers scold the faithful who showed up at the meeting when their comments were aimed at those who weren't there.

Verification of Reception

Finally, it is a good idea to confirm that the message was received as we intended. Sometimes, even when care is taken, distractions can interfere with the reception. So talk to a few people afterward. Choose some you suspect would have responded positively and some who might have resisted. If they heard different content from the same announcement, you'd better be prepared to restate and clarify your message.

Though effective communication requires recipients to hear or read the message, the burden is on the communicator to get it across. Effective elders learn to bridge the communication gap to keep the links within the assembly strong. 

Wives' Corner

How Supportive Are We?

by Ruth Spender

In a previous article, we were challenged to see our husband's spiritual work as a noble task and to think about various ways in which we can be supportive as wives. This set me thinking. Because of my husband's teaching ministry, we often have the privilege of visiting different assemblies and spending time with those who are in leadership and their families. In conversation with these women, I sometimes ask them how they feel about their husband's spiritual work and how that work affects them. While the answers may vary, inevitably how a wife feels is displayed by the way she relates to her mate.

During our years in the Lord's work, we have seen three different types of elders' wives. First, there are those who, while they say they are happy that their husbands are elders, display by their actions that they see his work as exclusively "his thing". Subconsciously, the idea is, "He has his life, I have mine." These wives may busy themselves in the world of self-improvement ventures, job opportunities or community affairs. There is little, if any, sense of oneness in the project of being a

godly example to the flock and helping their husbands in their role as leaders. They do not seem to understand that they actually hinder his spiritual work by their own lack of partnership with him. These men may eventually need to step aside from their work to deal with problems at home and in their marriage.

A woman who is a true helpmate has spent time with the Lord.

Secondly, there are wives, who while not as indifferent are nevertheless apathetic to their husband's spiritual calling. The demands on his time and energy may put a wedge in their relationship. Perhaps the husband does not share his work, his burdens or his spiritual goals with his wife. In frustration, she may pour all of her energy into family responsibilities and activities, failing to carve out time to keep in touch with her spouse. The result is little desire to pray, show hospitality or do visitation together. This condition can exist for years with the husband carrying on his

work as an elder less effectively than he might.

Thirdly, the woman who is indeed a true helpmate is the wife who has spent time with the Lord and gained His perspective on her husband's spiritual work. She has caught the vision of the many ways in which she can increase his effectiveness—and with

God's help, she desires to see him reach his full potential as a godly leader. What fulfillment I sense when talking with the wife who has learned what it means to be there for her husband, gently drawing him out, learning what his spiritual burdens and goals are, being available to pray with him, encouraging him when he is down and learning to speak the truth in a loving manner when a problem does arise. This couple is seeking to work in harmony with God's plan for their lives and not only they, but the assembly reap great blessing from their oneness of heart, mind and purpose.

While none of us is always the supportive help we should be, do we honestly desire to see our husbands be the very best leaders they can be? Do we

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Three Simple Tips

1. Keeping a notebook handy when having daily devotions helps preserve thoughts and ideas the Lord gives. When sermon ideas come to mind, add them to a list. Then when looking for things to preach on, peruse your compiled list of ideas and passages.

Also, keep track of “encouragement” verses, so that when the Holy Spirit prompts you to encourage someone, you can look to your compiled list. You can make lists of many things as you read through scripture: verses of comfort, leadership, attributes of God, special doctrines. Great ideas from God are often lost if we don’t write them down.

2. Keep a personal encouragement file, where you keep notes that people have sent

to encourage you. The labor of an elder is often a thankless work, and words of appreciation are few and far between. Certainly, the Holy Spirit is our “Encourager”, but He often does his work through others. When I am discouraged, I go to my “encouragement” file to remember God’s encouragement to me through others.

3. Make it a regular habit to pray that the Lord would give you a shepherd’s heart.

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*Humble yourselves, therefore,
under God's might hand, that
he may lift you up in due time.*
1 Peter 5:6-7

How Supportive Are We? (cont.)

understand the part we play in that? I have found it helpful to ask myself the following questions:

1. Do I encourage my husband in his leadership role in our home or do I make it difficult for him to lead our family?

2. Do I react with understanding or impatience when he is called away unexpectedly to tend the needs of the flock?

3. How long has it been since I asked him how I can help him in his work as an undershepherd?

4. Do I pray for him regularly asking the Lord to give him wisdom and protection necessary for the spiritual battle he is involved in?

5. Do I allow the Holy Spirit to convict him of needed change in his life, rather than nagging him?

6. Do I seek to maximize his strengths and minimize his weaknesses?

7. Do I understand that my desire to have “my own life” signals a lack of fulfillment in my present role and may be Satan’s trap to keep us from functioning as a team? “Keeping busy” can be an false antidote for covering pain in our lives. Are there any issues regarding my husband’s work I have not fully dealt with?

8. Do I encourage and help to protect my husband’s quiet time with the Lord realizing this is the source of his strength and vision for the work?

We can only be the wives our husbands need by divine enabling, therefore we must learn to zealously guard our own personal quiet time with the Lord, “from whence cometh our help”.

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Spiritual Gifts (cont.)

On the contrary, it is a mark of spiritual meekness and strength! And it should not surprise us, for elders frequently employ the services of visiting speakers to help in feeding the flock and this is both proper and edifying. Why not call upon gifted believers within the assembly to share in work for which they have special abilities by reason of gift? A group of elders that can accept assistance and even training from other believers will be both enriched and respected.

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Resources

Spiritual Mothering: The Titus 2 Model For Women Mentoring Women
by Susan Hunt (Crossway Books, Good News Publishers: Wheaton, Illinois).
1992, 187pp.

We all have women in our church fellowships that are younger than we are. The book of Titus tells us that older women should train the younger women (2:3-5). If you are older by years or in your walk with the Lord, you will find “Spiritual Mothering” to be a practical help and encouragement.

Each chapter begins with a woman’s story and how a mentoring relationship changed her life for the Lord. The author covers our mandate to teach other women, the model of how to disciple and a method to help you get started or to become encouraged in your current work. Each chapter ends with a short “Spiritual Mothering Challenge” that will have you look at different scriptures to help prepare your heart for this ministry.

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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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