



Editor's Note

The goal of ESN is to assist elders with practical helps as well as to provide encouragement and challenge. We pray this small effort will be of assistance to you.

If you are like me, though, you have many journals, books and letters that consume much time. We don't want this publication to be just coffee table "litter". All of you who receive ESN have specifically subscribed for it. But, I am reminded of the husband of about 30 years who said to his wife, "I told you the day we got married that I love you. Until I revoke that, it still stands." Now, we are not fishing for compliments, but since we don't require a yearly subscription renewal, your feedback assures this has not become "junk mail" to you and that you would like to continue receiving ESN. It also lets us know what you think about this ministry. So drop us a line (by e-mail or regular-mail) to let us know how we are doing. For those that

have already done this, thanks so much.

On another note, here are some more online web sites that you may find helpful:

- <http://bible.crosswalk.com> (Good general index of Christian resources)
- <http://www.barna.org> (Contains great research from George Barna's polling organization)
- <http://www.oneplace.com> (for tape resources)
- <http://www.ccel.org> (for Christian classics—older writings going back to the early church fathers).

As with all recommendations, you will not agree with everything in these sites, but there will be much that is helpful.

If you are a recent subscriber, be sure to check out the archives on our web-site (www.bible-equip.com/esn) for the past three years of articles.



Leadership Principles

Leading From The Heart

by Chuck Gianotti

He made it to the top, power and prestige were his. No record exists of his having any problem with women. Spiritually he was chosen and gifted by God as a leader—and the Holy Spirit came upon him powerfully at various times. Yes, King Saul was the man God knew the people wanted. In effect, he was the people's choice. But, God rejected him, despite his tenure in leadership lasting 40 years! He lacked inner character—he was all style, but no substance. At the heart of it all, he had no heart for God.

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A natural reticence may affect most of us when faced with the formidable task of leading God's people. However, our security when facing fear must be found in God. What are our fears? Is it the cost in personal time or the opposition that comes with leadership? Is it a feeling of inadequacy? Saul's successor, the one who had a whole heart for God (13:14), knew fear—but he also knew what to do with his fear: "Yea,

though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."

As an elder of God's people, the one thing I fear most is being disqualified from serving the Lord. I am not alone in this, even Apostle Paul had this concern (1 Cor 9:27). The study of the King Saul's life provides a sober check list for the shepherds and leaders of God's people—things not to do.

From the negatives of Saul's life, we can infer certain positive principles that will help us develop whole hearts for God and his people.

1) Our security must be in God.

Notice when the people gathered to recognize their new king, Saul was hiding, huddling in the baggage (1 Samuel 10:20-22). What an odd thing for him to be doing. Did no one catch Samuel's biting irony: "Do you see the man the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people?" (10:24). Samuel had previously informed Saul of his appointment from God (9:20, 10:1), but fear seemed to grip the soon-to-be-king at this juncture. There is no record that Saul looked to the Lord in this matter.

As elders of God's people, we must stand strong and tall with God, not backing down from any challenge or difficult thing.

2) We must lead by love, not intimidation.

Notice how Saul in his first leadership situation used intimidation to rally the people (11:1-7). To be sure the small community of Jabesh Gilead was frightened by the invading Ammonites, and the rest of the Israelites were frightened as well. But instead of rallying the nation with a sense of care for their own countrymen and loyalty to God, Saul manipulated the

WHAT'S INSIDE	
Leadership Principles: Leading From The Heart	p. 1
Leadership Principles: Small Group Ministry	p. 2
From The Q-Files	p. 2
Wives' Corner: Are You Misunderstood?	p. 3
Practical Ministry: Keeping The Chain Sharp	p. 4

Leadership Principles

Small Group Ministry—Part 2

by Jack Spender

Joy is indispensable to Christian living! The beloved apostle John wrote a letter to promote fellowship knowing that joy would be the result (I John 1:3-4). Things that enhance fellowship are worthy to be pondered. We have been thinking about the value of small groups in the life of the assembly, noting in the first article of this series (see July Vol. 3, No. 4) some of the Scriptures that provide a basis for the idea.

Now we want to look at the goals of a small group ministry in the church. The expression “a small group ministry” hints that this is something purposed, orderly and fully supported by the leadership, not just a splinter group of people doing their own thing.

Simply stated, the primary goal of small groups is fellowship. Wherever the grace of God comes, warmhearted fellowship will be present! Who can think of a greater need in many churches today than Biblical fellowship? Fellowship means growing together in the things of God.

If we evaluate our assemblies in light of the four items in which the early believers continued steadfastly (Acts 2:42), we note that historically, they have enjoyed the finest of Bible teaching (apostles’ doctrine). And what can be compared to the weekly gathering around the Lord Jesus in remembrance and worship (breaking of bread). Although numbers for prayer have often been small, most of our assemblies have made quality time for prayer meetings.

But what of fellowship? Without a shred of Biblical support, it has come to be assumed that unlike the other three, fellowship has no formal setting and is left to be cared for by the individual believer outside the formal meetings of the church or perhaps to informal times “between the meetings.” In some churches, the only time the word “fellowship” is used is to describe the snack between meetings. One older man had become so used to this association of ideas that he wryly commented in my hearing “I don’t need fellowship; it makes me fat!” Certainly these activities have their place, but is this all there is to fellowship? When was the last time you heard of a “fellowship meeting?”

Just for a moment, think of the heart or essence of these four items. Apostles’ doctrine tells us that God speaks with authority to His gathered people. By the breaking of bread, we confess that Christ is central and worthy of worship. Through prayer, the church demonstrates its dependence on the Lord. But what is the essence of fellowship? The importance of relation-

ships! It was not through correct beliefs but through loving relationships that men were to recognize Jesus’ disciples (John 13:35). We can now see a great weakness in many churches. Doctrines may be impeccable but relationships may need help. Enter small groups(!)—the believer-to-believer aspect of church life. Whatever the format, the underlying goal must always be to strengthen relationships, first with the Lord and then among the saints.

As to specifics, elders must prayerfully consider how to provide a structured yet

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informal environment for addressing “people needs.” Here are some suggestions just to stimulate discussion. A small group is:

- 1) a place of really getting to know one another through honesty and openness
- 2) a place not just to pray, but also of learning how to pray (Luke 11:1)
- 3) a place not only to communicate, but a place for learning how to communicate.
- 4) a place to share insights and discoveries from the Bible;
- 5) a place to discuss the message preached on Sunday, to ask questions and to weigh the practical implications and applications of truths learned (Acts 17:11);
- 6) a place for burden bearing (Gal 6:2).

Make a study of the 100 “one another” mentioned in the New Testament—here we find rich material for Biblical fellowship. These activities are needed by the young believers among us and our experience has shown that some of the richest blessings come to the older saints in this way as well.

There are other goals, also. Small groups encourage accountability, a place to ask how the morning quiet time is going for which prayer may be requested, or how the witness to a neighbor went. Additionally, small groups help to train future elders and leaders. A man who can shepherd 8 people is being prepared to shepherd 200. By decentralizing pastoral care, that is, spreading it among the leaders of several small groups, the workload of elders is reduced. They can now attend to the most serious needs and devote themselves to prayer and

the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4).

One important goal of small groups is outreach. People who may not “go to church” may go to a neighbor’s home for coffee and informal discussion of spiritual concerns with a few friends. This in turn suggests another long term goal: the possible planting of a new assembly in another area (more on this in the next article in this series).

The benefits to any church from strengthened relationships—in families, between parents and children, among fellow

believers—are limitless. True fellowship promotes unity.

Where division comes, it is a sure sign that fellowship was superficial.

Some will prefer other methods of ensuring that fellowship has depth and is kept warm, espe-

cially in very small churches. But for growing congregations, having a dynamic small group ministry is often a key to healthy relationships. In fact this writer believes that it isn’t the differing doctrines of gifts and the Holy Spirit that attracts so many people to charismatic groups at all. It is their understanding and outworking of the importance of loving and healing relationships among people who worship together!

In the next article we will suggest some ideas on how to proceed with suggestions for a workable plan.



From The Q-files

But I would not be too hasty in the pursuit of the preaching profession ... The contemporary proclaimer of the gospel is always living somewhere between burden and blessing. The proclaimer of the Word is always caught somewhere between the pain and the pleasure, the agony and the ecstasy. You may not believe me, you may not understand what I'm saying, but...you ought to know today that there is a peril in preaching....[The Apostle] Paul says a word ... “Pray for me that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in bonds” (Eph. 6:20, paraphrase).

H. Beecher Hicks in his book, *Preaching Through a Storm*, Judson Press, 1987. Quoted in *Current Thoughts & Trends*, October 2002, p. 5.

Heart Leadership (cont. from page 1)

people through fear of reprisal. Anyone not going to battle would have their oxen destroyed by Saul's men (11:1-8).

This tactic worked, in the sense that he raised an army of 330,000 men and they defeated their enemies. But, leadership by fear alone works until a greater fear comes along. Compare that with Jesus " ...he now showed them the full extent of his love" (John 13:1 NIV). His "army" has grown continually through the centuries.

Yes, intimidation works for the short term, but as elders we are looking for long term results. Love is mightier than fear (1 John 4:18).

3) Live by the truth rather than rationalization (13:2-15).

Fear continued to grip the troops into the next battle (13:2-7). Saul, himself beginning to fear, disobeys the command to wait for Samuel seven days. You know the story well. Upon completion of Saul's insubordinate sacrificing, Samuel shows up and points the accusing finger at him. Saul tries to shade his disobedience through rationalization. He

- "saw" the circumstances, rather than God's command (13:11)
- "thought" human thoughts rather than God's thoughts (12a)
- "sought" God's blessing rather than God's guidance (12b).

The consequence? He was convicted by God of a terminal heart condition

(13:13-14). A small infraction? Hardly! As elders, we must tenaciously hold ourselves to the truth, we must be hard on ourselves in this area. Like teenagers who clearly see the hypocrisy in parents, the congregation can clearly see hypocrisy in elders. As we commit to walking in truth, this lends credibility to our message.

4) Admit fault rather than self-justification.

Saul must have thought he got away with his rationalization, for his disobedience became a habit. Subsequently, God had told him to completely destroy the wicked Amalekites, including all people and all their livestock (15:1-3). Saul, seeking to justify himself, recasts his disobedience as an improvement on God's Word. He saved the best of the people (King Agag) and the best of the livestock to offer as sacrifices to the Lord. And then he had the gall to claim faithfulness to God's word (15:20)! The Lord is grieved and proclaims through the prophet "to obey is better than sacrifice" (15:22b, see Hosea 6:6).

When confronted with rationalization, elders (of all people) should admit their failings. This may be one of the hardest things to do, because it involves acknowledging that we are covering up our sin. We fear people will reject us, when in reality it is God who will reject us for our hypocrisy. Yes, we are to resolutely hold to God's Word, but we must vigorously hold ourselves to the humble standard of non-

esty when we fail.

5) Promote God rather than self.

Did you notice in this story that Saul sets up a monument in his own honor (15:12)! Then after his inescapable conviction by Samuel, he offers the self-promoting confession: "I have sinned, but please honor me" before the people (15:30). At the heart of the matter, our ministry as elders is for God's glory not our own.

Eldership is not a position to which we ascend for personal glory. Our one and ultimate goal is to bring glory to God, no matter the expense to ourselves. The Apostle Paul with great satire, chides the competitive, self-glorifying Corinthians: *I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men* (1 Corinthians 4:9). His goal was like that of John the Baptist's: *He must increase, but I must decrease.* (John 3:30 NKJV).

Elders must be vigilant in the character aspect of leadership. It is an impossible task, because every one of these principles requires humility. Yet, that is exactly what is needed to lead God's people. Peter, just after addressing elders, charges both young men and elders to *"clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time"* (1 Peter 5:5b-6). 

Wives' Corner

Feeling Alone?

Loss of a loved one may be a situation where we feel abandoned by God. After losing my mother recently, I feel somewhat like an orphan. During her illness and death, I had great faith in front of family members, but now and then I find myself asking God if it was really necessary. After all, who doesn't need their mom?

Though the temptation always exists for me to question the Lord, I sense His tug at me to cling ever tighter to Him. It is when I try to find contentment in other things that I get into trouble.

While I'm looking toward friends and hobbies to find comfort, somewhere in the depths of my heart rings the verse, *My grace is sufficient for thee...* 2Cor. 12:9 (KJV). I wonder how many other situations we can name that prompt our own feelings or perceptions to squeeze God out in favor of a temporary and unsatisfying substitute.

Losing a job, being disappointed by

people we trust, being persecuted for our faith, dealing with illness, or watching sin occur in the church are some things which can affect our ability to trust God. Just add your struggle to the list. However, a quick reference to Romans 8:28 is not always helpful to a struggling saint ... true as it is that ... *all things work together for good to them that love God.* One of the reasons that all things do work together for good is that all things lead us to one conclusion. We need Him. There's no way around it. Like Peter, we must agree, *Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life* (John 6:68).

Of course, making God our sufficiency isn't without its own difficulties—teaching virtue to a sinful heart rarely is. We tend to think of alcohol and drugs as the "evil" escape methods of the masses, but if we could name some "Christian" coping techniques, what would we call

them? Sleep? Food? Television? Computer? Cleaning? *SHOPPING*??? How about... *ministries*? We need to be wary of the endless parade of idols waiting for us to heap our sorrows on their impotent shoulders.

Many times, I find myself looking to my husband for all the answers. How unfair to add my burdens to his when he is looking for encouragement from me. Solution? Rather, I should go to the One who has the answers. Going anywhere else can lead to a false sense of security, confusion, or even deeper emptiness.

You would think as we grow in the Lord, we would become more able to stand on our own, but the opposite is true. The more we know Him, the more we can acknowledge our total dependence on Him. And this is nothing to be ashamed of. It is something to rejoice in. *For He satisfieth*

(Continued on page 4)

The first time I used a chainsaw years ago was a real challenge. I borrowed it from a friend, who suggested I sharpen it first. Well, the work of taking down a few trees quickly became very tough, sweat poured off me, muscles strained. I began to wish for a bigger saw with more power. Fatigue set in—nagging doubts about my manliness overcame me.

When I returned the tool to my friend, I didn't want to admit how hard it was. "Did you get the chain sharpened?" he queried. Sheepishly, I admitted that I was in a hurry to get the job done, so I did not think that task was necessary. I wanted to get right to the trees! Had I taken the time to sharpen the saw, the work would not have been quite so unbearable. I borrowed it another time with a sharp chain, it cut through the trees like "butter."

Being an elder without ever taking a break to "sharpen" our spiritual saw, can cause us to lose effectiveness and wear us out. Consider the multitude of meetings, counseling, problem solving, planning, communication issues, interactions with deacons, lining up speakers, keeping the congregation informed, conflicts with other elders, wrestling with biblical interpretations and applications to the life of the assembly, etc. These all challenge the stamina of the most robust elders.

When Paul says, *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up* (Gal 6:9 NIV), he speaks of the long haul. But, the accumulation of burden takes its toll. In training the 12, Jesus made allowances for those who get wearied: *Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even*

have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" Mark 6:31.

To be sure, some seek a life of ease (see Luke 12:19), but the Lord had something else in mind. The Greek word *anapauo* translated here as "get some rest" in its most basic sense it means to rest from physical labor, to sleep (see Matt 26:45). Sometimes, establishing an adequate sleep pattern is essential for "doing good."

But, there is another sense conveyed by this word, namely the spiritual refreshing one receives from another Christian. Paul says of three co-workers: "*They refreshed my spirit and yours also* (1 Cor 16:18 see also 2 Cor 7:13). Such experiences were a break from the spiritual burden of ministry. Christians ministering back to the one doing the ministering, like a breath of fresh air amidst the tense atmosphere of strenuous work.

When Jesus invited his disciples for a short spiritual retreat, three things seem obvious: 1) Jesus is the one who ultimately gives us the refreshing we need to rejuvenate our ministries 2) He recognizes our need of it 3) This requires time away from the people we are ministering to!

Just like with Jesus and the 12, people will demand more and more of you, hindering you from re-freshing yourself. But, it remains that Jesus recognized the necessity of "saw sharpening."

One elder proclaimed with a certain machismo, "I haven't taken a vacation in 15 years!" I believe the Lord would frown on this. He loves us too much to see us burned out like a horse running till it drops. We need times away allowing the Lord to minister to us and to refresh us—

for the sake of our ministries. This is not a sign of weakness or laziness. Rather, we need to maintain a "sharp edge."

How long? How often? Different people have different needs and capacity for work. Keep in mind a secularly employed elder works two careers! Unfortunately, irrational thoughts sometimes plague us. "Satan doesn't take a break, so why should I?" Well, praise God, we don't use Satan as our example. "I would rather wear out for the Lord, than rust out." The Lord would rather us *last out*. "What will people think?" Rather, what does the Lord think!

My wife and I just returned from a week away; we parked our camping trailer by a lake and refreshed our souls. No pressures, no phone calls, no e-mail (and no Elders' ShopNotes to work on!) We relaxed and listened for the Lord through our reading, praying, bike riding, hiking and, truth be known, just sitting and talking together. No high pressure study program for the week. Very refreshing! By the end, we were ready to dive back into ministry.

Are you due for a refreshing time away from ministry? You will be refreshed and sharpened for the elder work when you return.



Misunderstood (cont. from page 3)

the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness Psalm 107:9. And when we let Him do this, perhaps we will be better equipped to ... *Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep* Romans 12:15.



ELDERS' SHOPNOTES

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