



Practical Ministry Spiritual Finger-Tips

by Chuck Gianotti

It was the final game of the 2003 NBA Championship. A San Antonio Spurs player gets fouled and goes to the line for two free throws. He misses the first. Teammates quickly converge on him, touching finger-tips down low. It never mattered who was shooting, whether he made the first shot or not, his teammates always came to touch fingers before the second shot.

Strange ritual for men, athletes of the highest caliber. It wasn't just a silly public display of affection. Rather, it was a gesture that said: "We're with you. You can do it. You the man!" He may be the best shooter, he may be the worst shooter. He is attempting to score one for the team—and the team pulls together behind him. This is a basketball expression of encouragement.

I believe that was a key to San Antonio's success. They played as a team, encouraging each other in tangible ways. I believe it is also one of the keys for effective ministry in the church today. As believers we are part of a team. As elders we are team leaders, role models. As leaders, we need to model this ministry of encouragement, this tangible expression of "team-mindedness," this spiritual "finger-tip touching."

The apostle Paul touched on this in Philippians 2:1-2: "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ ... then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose." (NIV)

The Need of it

"Oh, brother Joe knows I am behind him; he doesn't need me to tell him. I wouldn't want him to get a swollen head." Is that so? Does he know you are supportive of him? (Incidentally, the same principles apply in marriages. When was the last time you told your wife, "I love you"?)

The other elders may not tell you when they are discouraged. When was the last time you told someone that *you* were discouraged, or felt unsupported, alone at the line? The other elders probably are like you.

Encouragement is that attitude in a group that leaves people thinking, "We can lean on and trust each other when the going gets tough. I know you are behind me." David and Jonathan were a team. When David was running for his life, Jonathan "went to David at Horesh, and encouraged him in God." 1 Samuel 23:16 (NASB). The KJV uses the word "strengthened." The context doesn't say exactly what Jonathan did, but clearly he acted and spoke in a way that helped and supported David. The Divine Writer portrays this as a noteworthy event. In David's mind there was no question that Jonathan was on his side.

We elders each need encouragement, but who is going to encourage us if we don't encourage

each other? In fact, the Lord commands it (1 Thessalonians 5:11). This is not an ego-soothing selfishness, as some might suppose. Rather, the Lord recognized it as an inherent need, or he wouldn't have commanded us to do something about it. Neither is it a sign of spiritual failure. We all are weak from time to time. That is simply a fact—and we are sometimes in need of emotional help (though rarely do we men admit it).

True, the Holy Spirit is the One who supplies encouragement ("Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord." Acts 9:13). And where the Spirit encourages, there is growth. But often the Spirit uses flesh and blood (that's you and me) to work his ministry.

What does it look like?

To be sure, we all respond to different kinds of encouragement. In some cases, it is simply one elder telling another elder that he has done a good job of something—maybe a message preached, a comment made in a meeting, a better insight (horrors, that's a tough one to cough up!)

There are many ways you can encourage another

elder. How about letting him know before he preaches that you are praying for him? Let him know you are aware of the load he carries. Tell him the good thing someone has said about him behind his back. Say good things about him *behind* his back

Therefore,
encourage one another
and build each other up,
just as in fact you are doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

(positive gossip), especially to his wife (that will be sure to make it back to him). Mow his law when his work and ministry load gets heavy. When he fails or does a job poorly, don't jump all over him. Come along side of him and assure him you are still on the same team.

There have been people over the years who encouraged and strengthened me with spiritual "finger tip" touches. One of the first times took place when I was a young leader who made an unwise decision. Severe criticism assailed me and beat me down; a sense of spiritual failure overwhelmed me. An older brother, Larry, gently took me aside one Lord's Day morning. "Remember that a man who is never criticized is a man who never does anything." He didn't deny that I was unwise. However, his words were like cool water to a parched soul. He "touched finger tips" with me. And I can still hear his encouragement every time I feel overwhelmed by criticism.

Another time, the elders had prayerfully changed the time of the evening meeting to accommodate young families whose children needed to be in bed early on school nights. Many seniors

(Continued on page 4)

What, Your Church Has No Pastor?

by Jack Spender

Anyone who fellowships in a New Testament church with a plurality of elders will face this question sooner or later, often from a well meaning fellow Christian. Part of the equipping of the saints referred to in Eph. 4:12 is to teach growing believers why we do what we do, and how to defend important truths from Scripture. Otherwise, the impression may be given that this condition is admittedly abnormal, and (hopefully) will soon be rectified. To complicate matters, some assemblies that were once careful to imitate the New Testament pattern for church leadership have shifted their stand due to a sort of religious peer pressure to conform, while others aren't sure what the underlying issues are and have adopted a "use whatever works" approach.

NT Teaching on Church Leadership

Only a brief survey of the Acts and Epistles is needed to assure us that the earliest Christian churches were led by a plurality of men called elders. Paul instructed both Timothy and Titus about how elders could be recognized and appointed, and he expected this pattern to be followed "in every city" (Titus 1:5). No example can be found of a church with a single "ruling elder" or single "Pastor." Even in his instructions to relatively new congregations such as in Thessalonica, Paul assumes that normal church leadership will be plural (I Thess 5:12).

The writings of Peter are no different. In addressing those who had been scattered abroad, Peter expects the number of those who lead in the churches to be several, not just a single individual, and calls them elders (I Peter 5:1-2). This is significant since Peter, about to mention the Chief Shepherd (vs. 4), might have taken the opportunity to address those in leadership as "the shepherds (i.e. pastors) who are among you...." Instead, he specifically calls them elders.

The Benefits

It is beyond the scope of this article to explore all the benefits of God's design on this subject. Suffice to say that the protection provided by a multitude of counselors or viewpoints in leadership, the different spiritual gifts that make up a leadership team, the training of younger men that occurs more readily where there is no professional clergy, the spreading out of the workload, and the smooth transition in replacing elders—all are just a few of the ways in which the wisdom of God is displayed in this extremely practical matter.

Suggestions to Help

How then can the truths concerning Biblical leadership be built into the life of the church and the ministry of the Word in a way that both edifies and equips? Here are some suggestions:

1. Judge pride. God hates it. No amount of excellence in church order can compensate for an attitude of superiority toward other Christian groups. Each person in the assembly must learn both from Scripture and by the example of those in leadership that every true Christian community is a cause for thanksgiving to God, and a potential opportunity to encourage other brothers and sisters in Christ. Answers to questions, like the one at the head of this article, need to be given in a spirit of love and humility, always remembering that there are doubtless truths that others see more clearly than we do.

2. Provide basic instruction from Scripture on significant doctrine of ecclesiology.

Answers need to be given in a spirit of love and humility, always remembering that doubtless there are truths that others see more clearly than we do.

This includes the Biblical terms used for church leaders, major passages on the subject and clear statements as to how these truths are applied in our particular fellowship. Opportunities for questions and discussion, such as in a small group setting, are invaluable.

3. Practice using words correctly. People need training from Scripture as well as credible examples in real life to help them use Biblical words correctly, especially important words. For example, spiritual gifts are not intended to be religious titles. Sometimes I hear church leaders lament, "I wish they wouldn't call me Pastor, but since they do, I just accept it." The antidote for misused words is not to avoid them, but to use them correctly. It's OK to speak about people among us who are pastors (with a small "p"). Help those in the fellowship become comfortable with expressions like "pastoral visit," "pastoral care," etc.

4. Avoid lumping the terms "elder," "overseer," and "pastor" together as synonyms. They are not. The first two refer to the office or leadership position whose qualifications are clearly spelled out in several passages, and are available to mature, qualifying men in the assembly. The third is a spiritual gift given to men, women and young people by the sovereign act of God at the moment of

conversion.

5. Never say, "We have no pastor." Instead, explain that we are blessed with a number of people who have the spiritual gift of pastor though none has a title. The short answer is, "Thankfully, we have many pastors!"

6. In situations where people are coming into the assembly from denominational backgrounds, it is especially important for the elders to share or delegate functions that are often perceived as "ministerial." These include conducting marriages and funerals, baptizing, passing out the elements at the Lord's Supper, and chairing important decision-making meetings.

7. Make sure that those who have pastoring gifts are able to function in a Biblical manner, that is, not primarily as administrators but as caregivers.

8. Instruct the more mature believers on the weaknesses of unbiblical positions. One of the most compelling arguments against the church "Pastor" position is to observe the verses wrongly used to support it. For example, there is no evidence that James, the brother of our Lord, was singled out as a man of influence in the church in Jerusalem because he was a titled official. He certainly was not its "head" as is sometimes claimed.

In every reference to him in Acts he is simply called "James." Most likely his kinship to the Lord Jesus was recognized (much like the mention of Mary in Acts 1:14).

Some imagine that the angels addressed by the Lord in the letters to the seven churches in Asia (Revelation 2,3) must be the "Pastors." But there is no good reason to reject the normal meaning of the word used there as being "messenger." We must not bypass teaching about church leadership that is abundant and clear in favor of what is at best conjecture.

One of the truly great needs of assemblies today is a vibrant pastoral ministry that reaches out to the new, the hurting and the needy. This good work must not be left to the elders alone! All those gifted must be functioning and encouraged. In an age when many churches acknowledge only one pastor (and he a preacher, administrator and caregiver combined), groups seeking to follow the New Testament example have an opportunity to excel by providing rich shepherding skills from many different points within the fellowship. 

The needs of Christian women are as varied as the seasons. God has called older women in the faith to help meet these needs by mentoring those who are spiritually younger. He knew exactly what we would need to be teaching the women in our fellowship. Titus 2:3-5 (NIV) says "...the older women...can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God."

A very important note is made in Titus 2:1: "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine." Everything we teach must be based on the Word of God, it must be healthy teaching. Let's briefly look at this mentoring curriculum for women.

Teach Her to be Self-controlled

You will at some point find yourself in a conversation with a woman who is very upset. What do you do? This is an opportunity to teach self-control by example. As the woman shares her struggles, don't minimize her problem or get all worked up. Be quick to listen and slow to speak. Yielding to the Spirit's control within us should be part of our teaching.

Teach her to be pure

God calls us to live holy lives, because He is holy. We model holiness by what we choose to read, which movies we watch, and how we use our tongues. Teaching pure living includes sharing with women that sexual

We honor God by making our homes a safe haven.

purity before marriage and fidelity after marriage is God's way.

Teach Her to Love Her Husband

This "phileo" love is that of friendship and enjoyment. The newly saved or the young married women need our encouragement and example of how to truly love their husbands. Sharing 1 Peter 3 with women is just one of the many scriptures you can use in your mentoring.

Teach Her to Love Her Children

Most women do not have to work too hard at this "philoteknos" love. This is having a warm affectionate love for our children. It is important that we communicate

that our love for our children should never exceed the love we have for our husband.

Teach Her Management of Her Home

In a world that minimizes the importance of women managing the home, God's Word makes a clear statement. The KJV uses the term "keepers at home." We honor God by making our homes a safe haven and making wise financial choices. One woman wrote, "When home management is seen as a significant ministry to one's husband, the most mundane tasks can take on eternal worth." We are called to demonstrate and teach this truth. (see book review on page 4).

Teach Her To Be Kindhearted

Scripture tells us that we are to teach the importance of responding to life's difficulties with kindness. Our local church is filled with people God has given us on whom we can practice kindness. Our actions will demonstrate how Godly women are to behave.

God has given us a curriculum for teaching women. Ask Him to bring into your life young women who need a mentor, and then begin to practice Titus 2.



Leadership Principles Changes That Count

Planned changes should come through a multiple-step process. I recommend five:

1. Define the issue. What is the problem? What is the real issue? Can it be summarized in a single sentence? Does everyone agree on what the issue is?

Defining the issue may be hard work. Writing it down takes discipline. Getting agreement takes time. But without such definition and agreement, a good decision is unlikely, and successful implementation may be impossible.

2. Get the facts. Once the problem is defined, the next step is assembling the facts so we can be as objective as possible. It is rarely possible to get all the data to guarantee 100 percent accuracy; it takes too long, and some information is just not available. Like the members of a jury, we must learn what we can in order to make our best decision "beyond a reasonable doubt."

Usually the fact-finding step begins with a list of research assignments. Doing those assignments often leads to a longer list because we discover how little we knew at the start. This step continues until enough data has been gath-

ered to underpin a comfortable decision with predictability of success.

3. Consider the alternatives. Through the process of defining the issue and getting the facts, alternatives will naturally appear. Typically, new alternatives trigger new research, and new research triggers new alternatives. While prayer for wisdom and divine

A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.
Proverbs 14:15

direction is necessary all along the way, it is crucial at this stage. The alternatives should be tested against the standards of Scripture, principles of morality, requirements of the organization, cost, and data collected.

4. Make the decision. Despite everyone's eagerness to reach this point, however, deciding can be very difficult. Who should decide? The majority, since we operate democratically? God, since we operate theocratically? The people who did the research, since they know best? The people who will

implement the decision, since they are responsible? Those most affected by the decision, since they have the most to gain or lose?

It is far better to choose those who pray fervently, think clearly, work hard, and make wise decisions. If given authority by the body, the best-qualified persons will be the ones most likely to make good decisions that will be accepted by the organization.

5. Do it! Implementation is the final, critical step. Recognize that some will not own a decision until they actually participate in it, so there should be minimum delay between deciding and doing. Don't wait for everyone to agree.

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Finger-tips (cont. from 1)

were up in arms because it disrupted their evening meal schedule. Gordon, in his 80's, relayed to us that many of the older people were quite upset at the elders. But he "touched finger tips" with us. He went on to tell us how he responded to them. "You and I will not be around in 5 or 10 years. Let's let these younger men make the decision and stand by them." Encouragement? You bet!

Just do it

Only an elder knows the pressures that frequently accompany the time-consuming, energy-expending, emotion-wrenching work of "eldering." Discouragement is often only one conversation away. We need to pull together and encourage each other in tangible ways. Who else understands the need of it but we elders?

Touch finger tips with another elder. Do it often, do it verbally, do it unreservedly. But, just do it. ESN

When None Encourage Us

Sometimes the reality is that no one encourages us. We find ourselves in the position of David when Jonathan was not around and there was no one else to strengthen him.

In times like that, follow his example: "David encouraged himself in the Lord." (1 Samuel 30:6 KJV). Like David, we can feel we are on the run. So how can we encourage ourselves in the Lord?

We must go directly to the Lord. Sit in the seat of the Thessalonians as they read Paul's second letter to them: "May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father . . . encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word." (2 Thess 2:16-17). If Paul prayed that way for his 1st century readers, you can be sure the Holy Spirit prays that way for us today (Romans 8:26). ESN

Brother Elder

'Twas an elders' meeting run late;
The men at the table were starting to grate.
The talk grew fierce and tempers flare,
Said the younger, "You simply do not care.
Struggles of power and prestige consume
precious time,
While the body suffers from our lack of one
mind."

Retorted the older, condescending his eyes
"Are you trying to cut us down to your size?
Important decisions they are, I must stay the
course.

If you don't like it, ride away on your hobby
horse."

Back came the reply, "It's true I'm much
younger.
But to you, I insist, my title is "Doctor."
Years of study, school and graduation
Have earned me the right to some adulation."

The older dispatched his much rehearsed tirade,
His pride was too much, a point must be
made.

You must take notice, before we go further
Everyone here gives *me* the title of 'Mister.' "

"Doctor" proclaims one, "Sir" counters the
other.
Round they went, resisting each other.
"Respect you must give me, it's my demand."
Derailing the meeting, they took their stand.

They dug in their heels, neither would budge,
So often begins a long standing grudge.
Quiet the voice, but steadfast and sure,
Hearkens to character more noble and pure.

"If titles you must, why settle so low,
Earthy appellations must ultimately go.
Dear sons of the One we all call Father:
No higher esteem can we have than the title
of "Brother." CRG

After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak."
Acts 13:15

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.
2 Timothy 4:2

Book Reviews

Meetings That Work: A Guide To Effective Elders' Meetings, by Alexander Strauch (Littleton, Colorado: Lewis and Roth Publishers), 2001. 87 pages.

If you have ever gotten frustrated at long, unproductive meetings and poor communication, this book is for you. The first two chapters borrow from the author's more extensive book "Biblical Eldership". The third and fourth chapters are the practical "goods".

Strauch outlines practical, sensible ideas like having an agenda and an identified facilitator, how to delegate, determining frequency of meetings, and effective communication.

Many of his suggestions are transferable to committee and board meetings in general. We highly recommend this for every elder.

The Family Manager, by Kathy Peel (Dallas: Word Publishing), 1996. 305 pages.

The author covers strategies for everything from finances, schedules and personal growth to food, special projects, etc. Very practical and wise. "If your home is spotless, your children never argue, your marriage couldn't get any better, you're never stressed out, you have plenty of extra time, money and energy, then by all means, do not read this book. You don't need it."

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