



## Editor's Note

Being an elder is challenging and rewarding. Challenge comes when we must do the hard work of praying for the sick—in faith. Reward comes sparsely—if we are looking for honor from our peers. Both of these subjects are addressed in this issue.

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Years ago a godly woman gave me some counsel that remains with me to this day. I can't remember her first name, but it could have been "Priscilla" (see Acts 18:26). I have valued so much the influence of such godly women in my life. I asked her that if she had one bit of advice for this young fellow setting

out into fulltime ministry, what would it be.

She grew quiet, squinted—looked squarely in my eyes. I knew this was going to be good. Opening her mouth slowly, the words came carefully, solemnly—as if rehearsed and stored away for this occasion.

"Remember this one thing. You are not going out to serve people ... " and she paused. What? Isn't that what ministry was all about? Serving people? Before my thought could spiral in disappointment, she stroked the concluding note: "... *you are going to serve the Lord.*" That makes all the difference in the world—20 years later.

Thank you, Mrs. Montgomery! 

### Practical Ministry

## Praying For The Sick (Part 1)

by Jack Spender

Ministering to the needs of sick people occupied a sizeable part of our Lord's earthly ministry. There were many in every city He visited. It is possible for us today to become so taken up with the descriptions of His work (e.g. He healed "all"... "every"... "all manner of sickness...") that we forget the main point: the Lord had *compassion* for the sick, and included them in His daily activities.

In Matthew 25, where Jesus links Himself with the needs of His people, there is an interesting reference by the Lord to sickness; "I was sick and ye visited me" (vs. 36 KJV). When questioned about this, the Lord was emphatic that caring for His people was the same as serving Him personally. As His appointed shepherds of the flock, elders must be constantly concerned for, and be reaching out to those in the fellowship who are sick, remembering it is a ministry to the Lord Himself. There are several ways in which this can be done.

In addition to private visits made to sick people by loving friends, there are two important opportunities to pray for the sick collectively. One is when the elders of the church are called as described in James 5:13-18; the other is during the fellowship time in the gathered assembly. Let's consider each of these briefly.

#### "Let him call for the elders...."

The passage in James is important for elders to study as it provides a wealth of insight about church leadership and ministry to

the sick. In the first place, James was one of the earliest New Testament writings; perhaps the very first. One might have expected James, writing at such an early date (49AD), to have advised sick people to contact those in the church with healing gifts. Instead, he instructs them to call for the elders [plural] of the church [singular]. From earliest days we see that leadership in the local church was a plurality of elders, and that they were to be concerned for the physical well being of the flock.

Secondly, it's interesting to note that the elders were a known and identifiable group. James doesn't say, "Let him call for those he considers to be elders..." The elders of the church were men who had been recognized

by the people and publicly identified so that when a need arose, there was no question as to who should be called.

This truth is seen

again later in Acts 20:17 as Paul summons "the elders of the church."

Thirdly, we note from verse 14 that the initiation of action lies with the sick person (or his family), not the elders. At times over the years, we have heard people grumble that the elders did not visit them when they were sick. When asked, "Did you call for them?" the question was treated as irrelevant. One lady replied, "That has nothing to do with it." But it does! God blesses His church with the best men available to lead, but they are still finite human beings! They cannot know intuitively when a certain person has fallen ill or is in hospital unless they are told. God puts

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*Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. James 5:14*

# Honoring The Other Guys

by Chuck Gianotti

Some verses in Scripture are difficult to preach—like men speaking on the subject of wives’ submission to their husbands in 1 Peter 3:1. There is something perceivably self-serving when a male too easily, over-confidently or too frequently asserts the biblical truth of this subject. Equally difficult is for an elder to speak on the subject of 1 Timothy 5:17 NIV.

I agree with most commentators that this verse in context provides justification for financially supporting one or more elders, in order to free them from the burden of secular employ so that they can give more time to ministry. My point, however, is not to prove this interpretation. Rather, I would like to address the more difficult issue: how do you apply the concept of bestowing “honor” in a given situation? This can be extremely difficult to do.

A few observations are in order. All elders are called upon by God to shepherd the flock of God (1 Peter 5:1-2) and are to be commended for their sacrifice and commitment to this work. However, implicit in 1 Tim 5:17 is the recognition that some elders excel in their “elder ministry” and should be “doubly” honored for it. I suppose it is possible that all the elders of a given church may qualify, although that probably is not the norm for most churches. Simply put, some elders direct the affairs of the church well and some not as well. Some preach and teach the word well, and some not as well.

To be sure, some may be elders in name only, enjoying the recognition but not the responsibilities. Others may be doing the work for the wrong reasons, such as greed or power (1 Peter 5:2-3). These individuals, lacking in character, do not qualify for the honor about which Paul writes to Timothy.

However, there are various legitimate reasons for the differing levels of quality that do not reflect negatively on an elder’s character. Differing individual strengths may mean some do better than others—some men may have spiritual gifting that is more suitable to “leading” and “communicating” the Word of God.

Some elders may have more time, because of their life situations (children grown, self-employed, retired, etc.). Some may have a greater desire, expend more effort and make greater sacrifice. Some may simply be used by God in a greater capacity with a greater effect on the body, and we just do not know why that happens.

Dealing with this verse honestly and forthrightly means that some elders, therefore, ought to be *more* recognized and *more* honored for their work. In an ideal church with perfect leaders, this all sounds good and acceptable. However,

*The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.*

1 Timothy 5:17

even in churches where the apostle Paul and his understudy, Timothy, spent considerable time, this teaching had to be given—indicating these were not ideal churches with perfect leaders.

Here is where things become thorny. Who is going to teach on this verse? The elder who attempts this may be stirring up a hornet’s nest of problems. The danger of pride, fleshly comparisons and judgementalism is ever present. At best, his efforts may be awkward. At worst, he may appear self-serving, if not in reality, at least in perception. How is this?

You see, a godly elder desperately wants to embrace John the Baptist’s maxim: “[Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). Yet genuine, brutal honesty forces an elder to deal continually with his own heart. There was a time when I would not have admitted this shameful truth, but I must admit that I find in myself the insidious, competing desire, “I *also* want to increase! I want to be honored.”

Please forgive me for being overly dramatic. Humor me if you must, as one who may be overly introspective. But

think hard about your own heart. Invite the Lord to search your soul deeply (Ps 139:23-24).

There may be a sense in which the desire to be honored is a good thing. Otherwise, one should reject all honor. A godly elder wants to do his work in an honorable way. However, the desire to *be honored* can become a self-centered endeavor intended to boost oneself above others. This desire easily lies dormant in the background of the mind, hidden away like a coiled snake.

How can you tell if that snake is nesting in your life? Let me ask you a question? When you read 1 Timothy 5:17, do you find yourself objecting, “No one has honored me for all the work I do as an elder!” How do you feel when someone else is honored for their work as an elder? Do you quietly assert, “I do as much as he does. Why should he get credit?” Or, “Who does he think he is, accepting that honor?”

This attitude completely muddies any efforts an elder may have for leading the flock into the truth of this verse. You or I can not just get up and assert our worthiness for honor, for we may be dead wrong in our self-assessment. Our objectivity is definitely limited and our pride is greatly tempted as we speak on our own behalf. We simply cannot make people honor us. Such attempts are ostentatious and obvious to all but those making the vain attempts. “Honor” found this way is cheap.

This desire can be seen in subtle ways. An elder can position himself to do more of the pulpit speaking or he can angle for the significant preaching opportunities on special occasions. He might speak in terms designed to lead others to think that he is the “leading” elder. In its most obnoxious form, the elder who insists upon his way is argumentative or is stubborn, exhibiting the desire for honor through people bowing to his influence. One of the more subtle forms is to seek honor through false humility, in what I call the “gosh, ‘twernt nothing” syndrome.

At the core, can we be satisfied when another elder gets honored ahead of our-

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# Mentoring: Biblical Examples

by Ruth Spender

In recent issues of Wives Corner, we have been looking at the importance of the mature Christian woman training the younger women. This ministry is vital to the health of any assembly, but where do we go to see it modeled if we ourselves were not trained in Godly principles by an older woman? May I suggest that we have a couple of excellent examples in Scripture which offer us some important insights on how to do this job effectively.

We all know the Old Testament story of Ruth and Naomi. Ruth, the Moabitess follows her God-fearing mother-in-law back to the land of Israel. Under Naomi's tutelage, Ruth becomes an important figure in the ancestral line of King David, as well as our Lord Jesus. Naomi is not without problems in her personal life when she accepts this responsibility. As Ruth watches Naomi handle life's trials, she desires to be with her and to have her faith. We see Naomi's total acceptance of

someone whose ethnic and religious background is very different than her own. As the story closes, Naomi's faith is strengthened and she sees God's blessing in her life as a result of the love, instruction and encouragement she has given to this younger woman.

Turning to the New Testament, we read of the beautiful relationship existing between Elizabeth and Mary in Luke chapter one. We see a mutual excitement about God's work in each other's life. It's interesting to note that there is no hint of jealousy on Elizabeth's part because Mary, as the younger woman, has been given such a high and noble calling. Elizabeth is a wonderful example of a person who knows how to share in someone else's joy. She is genuinely happy that Mary has been chosen to be the mother of the Messiah and she is a tremendous encouragement to Mary during the early

months of her pregnancy. She provides acceptance for her at a time when others are doubting her. She blesses Mary and inspires her to stay on course, trusting that what the Lord has said, He will do.

Can we be like these women of old—those who accept others where they are at, encourage and equip them by our words and with our actions, then rejoice with them at what God is doing in their lives? We need to be secure as believers ourselves before we can reach out in this way to others. Our personal relationship with the Lord needs to be strong and vibrant.

But let us not think that we are to wait until our lives are without difficulties before we carry out this important work which has been committed to us as mature women in the faith. That younger woman God sends into your life can be a source of comfort and blessing to you just as Ruth was to Naomi as they made the long journey from Moab to Israel together. 

## Honoring (cont.)

selfes? Or do we feel it is our responsibility to see that that brother is humbled rather than exalted? In the church, that job is the prerogative of God alone. The Lord never called us to humble anyone other than ourselves (1 Peter 5:6, James 4:10). However, God *has* called us to honor others above ourselves (Romans 12:10), and in particular, the elders who direct, teach and preach well.

So, how can we teach the whole counsel of God, which includes 1 Tim 5:17? Of course, someone who is not an elder could teach on this. But it will most likely be the elders who decide this, so we cannot pawn this off on others. However, an elder can teach the passage, if he does so as an explanation of what he has already put into practice, namely, he is actively bringing honor to another elder who is worthy of "double honor".

Yes, it may turn out that you will not be honored as much as another elder. You will never receive enough honor here in the "office" of elder. We all need to get used to that fact. However, that should not stop us from obeying the Biblical mandate. If your heart is not right, you will feel like Haman in the story of Esther and Mordecai. The better path is to humble yourself and to

honor others above yourself. That is the example of our Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 2:5-11). Then, when the Chief Shepherd appears, "you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (1 Peter 5:4).

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**W**hen [Jesus] noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 14:7-11 

## Historical Example

**A**fter the American revolutionary war, but before the drafting of the US constitution and the election of the 1st president, a group of officers contemplated an insurrection and a march on the Congress and to make Washington their leader. Washington "suddenly appeared at a meeting of the officers . . . He summarily rejected their offer to become the American Caesar and denounced the entire scheme as treason to the cause for which they had fought. Then, in a melodramatic gesture that immediately became famous, he pulled a pair of glasses out of his pocket: 'Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles,' he declared rhetorically, 'for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in service to my country.'

"Upon learning that Washington intended to reject the mantle of emperor, no less an authority than George III (King of England) allegedly observed, 'If he does that, he will be the greatest man in the world.' True to his word, on December 22, 1783, Washington surrendered his commission to the Congress, then meeting in Annapolis: 'Having now finished the work assigned me,' he announced, 'I now retire from the great theater of action.' In so doing, he became the supreme example of the leader who could be trusted with power because he was so ready to give it up."

"Founding Brothers" by Joseph J. Ellis. (New York: Vintage Books, Random House), 2000, p. 130. 

## Praying For The Sick *(cont. from page 1)*

this responsibility upon the sick person.

Requesting help from those in spiritual authority becomes an act of faith and obedience, and the timing of that process, even the desire for it, is carefully left to the one with whom God is working.

Finally, these verses contain some very practical instructions for the elders as to how to proceed when called. They are to go as a group to where the sick person is, and pray over him/her, anointing him/her with oil specifically in the name of the Lord Jesus. Acting as instruments through whom God can work, they make request in Jesus' name, and if God grants them faith, "the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up..." (verse 15). This should not be taken as a guarantee that any prayer offered by elders is in this sense, "the prayer of faith," and therefore a guarantee of recovery. Healing is God's sovereign domain and elders should seek the mind of the Lord concerning each case.

As verse 15 implies, sins may have been committed, so the elders should be ready to listen should the sick person express the need to confess what is on his or her heart. God alone can forgive sins and confession is always made first to God, but His servants are authorized to speak words of assurance of forgiveness in His Name when public confession is made.

### Practical Suggestions

Here are a few suggestions:

1) Elders should respond with a visit when called, scheduled as soon as convenient for all concerned parties.

2) Make it clear that the visit will be brief—not for food or lengthy conversations, but for prayer.

3) When gathered around the chair or bedside, brief conversation to greet, encourage and listen to the person are helpful. A short scripture may be read such as a Psalm.

4) Before prayer, anoint the sick person with oil. A small bottle of oil such as olive oil inverted over the index finger provides a small amount which can be applied to the forehead. As symbolic, there is no need to pour out the whole bottle.

5) Elders may want to lay hands on the person. There is much Biblical support for this act of identification, and it can be a real encouragement to the person in need. Be gentle, tactful and brief.

6) Each elder should pray as he is led, bringing before the Lord specifics of family, medical, supportive concerns.

7) Prayer is the central activity. No demands should be placed before the Lord, no incidents involving the person's past rehearsed; it is a time to make request to God "with thanksgiving."

8) Avoid discussing the needs or problems of the local assembly with the person. Elders should refrain from telling of their own medical problems. Maintaining simplicity allows the Lord to speak to quiet and thoughtful hearts concerning the situation.

Many, including this writer can testify to the blessing of following the instructions of James 5. Often it marks a turning point in a serious medical situa-

tion. Of course we believe in instant divine healing, but we follow the directions given by the Great Physician as to how to proceed, and trust the Lord to accomplish His will in each individual life.

In the next issue, we'll consider another opportunity to pray for the sick in the assembly fellowship time. 

## A Humble Man

Probably the most influential man in determining the outcome of World War II, was George C. Marshall. He is not nearly as well known as Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Patton or MacArthur. As the top ranking general in the US Army, Marshall was the obvious choice when it came time to appoint a supreme commander of the allied forces. This ultimate "field" assignment was the path to glory and would have been the greatest ambition of any military man.

Yet, when President Roosevelt asked him for his recommendation for the position, Marshall refused to put himself forward for the position. Instead, he recommended one of his protégés, Dwight D. Eisenhower who went on to make a great name for himself in history books.

It was said of Marshall that he held to "...the fading nineteenth-century precept that the office sought the man, not the man the office." This reserve "denied him the rightful place in history" according to biographer, Ed Cray.

While others promoted themselves, Marshall promoted others. And the allies won the war! 

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