



Editor's Note

As is customary with our January issues, we include an index of all past ESN articles since the beginning. Our e-mail subscribers will find the index on the archive page of our web-site at www.bible-equip.com/esn/. Also, to our regular

postal subscribers, if you have internet capability, you may find changing your subscription to the e-mail version to be more convenient and timely for you. You can make changes on our web-site if you desire. To God be the glory!



Practical Ministry

Fellowshipping With The Sick (Part 2) by Jack Spender

We have been thinking about ways to help those who are sick among us. In the previous article, we considered the advice of James the apostle to those whose infirmity kept them at home sick away from the church gathering. "Call for the elders", says James. "They will come to where you are and pray for you." But what about those who have chronic conditions that don't prevent them from assembling with the believers? Or what about those who are burdened with the care of loved ones? What can be done for them? This article will address the subject of how we can minister to the needs of those right in our fellowships.

Responsibility and Liberty

The assembly has a responsibility to care for the needs of its own people. The Lord Jesus began His work among "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15:24 KJV) both preaching and healing. He did not require a needy person to accept help for the soul before He would provide help for the body. And He often spoke out against the practices of the Pharisees that placed greater importance on tradition than on the needs of people. In one memorable passage, He blasted those who withheld resources from aging parents by saying these things were "devoted to God" (Mark 7:11). Passing into the book of Acts, it is immediately apparent that the early Christians followed Jesus' example. Beginning at chapter 2, we read one incident after another in which the needs of people became the focal point of Christian love and concern. And that became an opening for the gospel rather than being viewed as an interruption of religious services. The early church took its responsibilities in these matters seriously, and they clearly had the liberty to do so.

The Key Word: Fellowship

The general New Testament word for ministry of believers to one another is 'fellowship.'

It is one of the four things in which the early Christians continued steadfastly (Acts 2:42). Since many people have superficial or even erroneous ideas as to what fellowship is, churches must be tireless in educating young and old about the true nature of this great subject. Far from being limited to light conversation between meetings, fellow-

ship must be both vertical (with God) and horizontal (among the saints). Nor is it just an activity for individuals outside of the meetings. It can also refer to a collective function, as in the sharing of "communion", which is another word for fellowship. One example of this corporate aspect is found in Acts 11:28-30. We read of a message from the Lord spoken by the prophet Agabas concerning an approaching famine. Clearly, Agabas spoke out during a meeting of the church. Immediately the disciples working together decided on a practical plan to provide help for the poor in Judea, and the funds collected were sent to those in church leadership for distribution.

This helps us understand that fellowship need not be limited to informal settings, but can take place within the regular meeting schedule of the church. Nothing in Scripture prevents the elders from devoting some portion of the weekly activities of the church to a mutual ministry of gift, burden bearing and practical help. In fact, many have found that fellowship blossoms in small group meetings held in homes. And here is

Tradition must not relegate fellowship to a subordinate place in the life of the church.

an ideal setting for reaching out to those who are sick, or caring for sick loved ones. It is a sobering thought that in some churches it is possible for a person to "go to church" carrying a heavy burden of care, attend services, and return home carrying the same burden—alone! This should not happen.

Practical Suggestions

How can a church incorporate prayer and practical help for the sick or burdened into its regularly scheduled activities? In the first place, those who lead can resolve that tradition must not relegate fellowship to a subordinate place in the life of the church. Learning to listen to people means providing an environment for them to share needs and burdens. Testimony times can be precious opportunities to hear not only of salvation received in the past, but of the victories and trials being faced in the present. Prayer and outpourings of help and encouragement can be spontaneous and heartfelt. We must look again at spiritual gifts and be certain that the assembly is equipping people to minister to one another from the gifts they have. Those with gifts of helps, serving, showing

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Leadership Principles

When Elders Disagree

by Chuck Gianotti

Elders do disagree at times, no surprise there—unless they all put their brains in a jar and seal it until the rapture! Normal, thinking people come from different perspectives and arrive at different solutions to problems and how things should be done.

Some of the more popular ways of dealing with disagreements though are: avoidance (under the guise of “unity”), capitulation (fear of conflict) or interpersonal numbness (emotional and spiritual detachment). Proverbs 27:17 has some wisdom that may help us in dealing with this common occurrence of disagreement. “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (NKJV). Two equally “hard” objects struck against each other make each object more useful and effective in the purpose for which they are intended. By analogy, elders are “hard objects” whose interactions benefit each other. They are “hard” in the sense of not being soft—that is, spiritually strong and of solid substance. Elders are not called to be “yes” men or wishy-washy. In addition, some elders have “strong” personalities. Sometimes elders may also have “strong” shortcomings. Whatever the case, when “strong” men interact, there can be abrasion and heat. But this can be beneficial if handled well.

I have served with weak elders and with strong elders (that could be said by some elders who have worked with me as well!). The latter group are much more uncomfortable for me personally, because they challenge my thinking. Working with strong elders makes me face up to shortcomings in my character as listed in the elders’ qualification lists of Timothy and Titus. In fact, it is not too much to say that working with other elders is a crucible for spiritual growth. And, as you know, spiritual growth is never comfortable. So while I personally don’t like disagreements, I value much more highly those elder relationships where men are not afraid to disagree. That means growth for all of us, including myself.

Having that view point, however, doesn’t mean disagreement is a cakewalk. It helps to understand some common causes for disputes among elders (and Christians in general for that matter):

1) Honest differences of opinion. Many things contribute to our seeing things differently: differing life and ministry experiences, the most recent book we have read on church life, people we’ve been influenced by, our temperament and spiritual gifting. Wise are the elders who recognize these things relate to wisdom, knowledge and giftedness—and

are not on the same level as Biblical truth.

2) Pride. My self-image takes a hit when others disagree with me. Why is this? Either I might be wrong (I don’t like to be wrong or at least don’t like to be *seen* to be wrong) or the others don’t respect me enough to accede to my “wisdom” and “insight”. Another word for this is “insecurity”. Some people just have a hard time with disagreement.

3) Self-protection. My turf is being threatened, maybe areas of leadership or ministry into which I have poured days, months and years are being threatened.

4) Tunnel vision. We each have different experiences in our relationships with the whole flock. My decisions can easily be swayed by a few of the believers who have bent my ear and I fall for the old but false

Disagreements can be the means of spiritual growth, whether through humility, adjustments to character, or strengthening of courage.

adage, “For everyone who speaks out, there are probably ten others who feel the same way.” I may listen a little more closely when a complaint resonates with me. The problem with this is that other people may be bending the ear of other elders with a different message. Plus, some people just don’t speak up readily. Not all elders will see and evaluate things the same was I do.

5) Thick-headedness. Just plain stubbornness. Arrogance. Refusing to consider that I might possibly be wrong. Assuming others should be able to see as I see. Assuming that I am more spiritual or smarter than the other elders.

So how can we deal with all this so that our disagreements are constructive rather than destructive? Here are a few ideas:

1) Humility must be foremost in our arsenal of “weapons” for disagreements. Peter, the aged apostle, finishes addressing elders directly, then continues, “... all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5b). This weapon is mighty, not against each other, but against the enemy of God’s leadership team, the devil himself (1 Peter 5:8-9).

2) Frequently remind yourselves as a group of the qualifications for your position. Take particular note of the following elder charac-

terizations (found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1): temperate, prudent, respectable, not pugnacious, gentle, peaceable, not accused of rebellion, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, loving what is good, sensible, self-controlled. Major failure in any of these areas will hamstring the effective working of an elder group. And, of course, “holding fast the faithful word ... so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.” This qualification, in Titus 1:9, includes knowing the difference between sound doctrine on one hand versus practical applications and personal opinions on the other.

3) Identify carefully the cause of the disagreement. What is at stake? It is too easy to deal with the symptoms rather than the causes.

4) Discuss the problems openly and acceptingly. This involves listening, real listening.

Sometimes certain words or phrases can trigger negative emotional responses and invoke unresolved conflicts from the past. People, including elders, don’t always deal with the essential issues, particularly when they are wrestling with pride, fear or unresolved issues. Elders should find opportunity to discuss these things in an open

and accepting environment. This does not mean we accept the other’s thinking and deny our own. What this means is that it is OK to talk about our fears, our being offended or being hurt. This can sometimes be hard for us men to do, but it takes both courage and humility to be on both sides of this coin, we must allow others to be real about their thinking and feelings as well as to be real about our own thinking and feeling.

Having a disagreement is not a competition with winners and losers. Though my view point may be wrong on an issue, I am not a failure, nor are the others. The stronger the disagreement, the more deeply held the issues. In other contexts we would use the words “conviction”, “integrity” and “character”. These make for strong disagreements at times. But precisely at that level, “iron sharpens iron.” For some elders’ groups, these words may sound like pie in the sky, but such an environment can and does exist in other elders’ groups. I have been in both kinds.

5) Accept disagreement. Sometimes conviction leads two or more elders to strongly disagree without attaining resolution. Abraham and Lot had to separate their entourages because of insurmountable practical issues. Paul and Barnabas separated because of strong convictions on what it takes to be a missionary.

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Edification: A Positive Method of Mentorship by Maria Forcucci

In recent months we have looked into the issue of mentoring. We might have different methods, approaches, personalities, and convictions to share with younger women, but one thing that remains constant is the Lord's command to edify each other. 1 Thessalonians 5:11- "Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing." (NKJV)

We can explore the Greek root, *oikodome* which literally means "to build a house". A solid structure which should be a refuge for people, or as one comedian put it, a place to put one's stuff, accurately describes what the Lord is building with Christians (1 Peter 2:5). So, we should not hesitate to think of ourselves and those with whom we work as a refuge from the hardness of the world and a place to put "His Precious Stuff".

I pray I am not too presumptuous to offer my own definition, which I have derived from my experience and observation of how older Christians have mentored me. "To edify" means "to see each Christian for their full potential in the Lord, and to treat them as if they've already arrived." This is a principle which has brought fruit in my life as older Christians point out the positives in my walk rather than the negatives.

Look what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:4, "I thank my God always concerning you for the *grace of God* which was given to you by Christ Jesus." Sounds simple, but consider at

least one thing Paul is saying.

He thanks God for the *grace* He has shown the believers in Corinth. I have to admit that there are too many times when I neglect to thank God for His grace on my brothers and sisters. Rather, I ask Him why He has given so much grace to some who, in my estimation, should be called on the carpet for their behavior. It's hard admitting that I have much more patience and com-

To edify, means to see each Christian for their full potential in the Lord.

passion for non-believers who are less than perfect than I do for those in God's own family.

Paul's attitude toward the Corinthians, who were noted for immorality and carnality, was one of thanksgiving. That's not to say that he hadn't the nerve to also confront the Corinthians about their sin and boldly exhort them, but in so doing, he never displayed a self-righteous attitude or tried to "play the Holy Spirit". 1 Corinthians teaches us how to share truth without picking on or beating up our younger siblings, spiritually speaking. It helps us to remember where we were or where we would be with-

out God's grace. Not that we should overlook sin, but perhaps we should be reminded that there are none that are "less worthy" of God's grace simply because they have not yet achieved *our* level of understanding.

I remember a time when a believer had just backed into another believer's car: I called him "Mario Andretti". A sister in the Lord rebuked me harshly, insisting I had offended him although he laughed when I said it and never treated me differently after the incident. I carried the weight of guilt for weeks and apologized profusely only to be repeatedly reassured that no offense was taken. My walk had been affected unnecessarily. The opposite is true of another time when I actually did offend someone and a friend held my hand and assured me that God was not finished with me. She bore with me the anguish of guilty feelings and actually wept with me. That day I began the spiritual project of seasoning my words with salt. I can say with confidence that though I have not arrived, I keep striving toward the goal.

I am so thankful for the saints in my life who have made me feel free to be myself in the process of spiritual growth. I am also thankful for Paul's example in God's Word to think of my brothers and sisters in their own growth process who need my encouragement and edification. It is not in the *perfection* as much as the *perfecting* that we are called to meet each other, and give thanks.



Practical Ministry Inspiring Others

by Rick Ezell

"I'm no orator," Theodore Roosevelt once said, "and in writing I'm afraid I'm not gifted at all. ... If I have anything at all resembling genius it is the gift for leadership."

There was nothing attractive about Roosevelt. He stood no taller than five feet, nine inches, and was built like a barrel. His blue eyes squinted out nearsightedly through pince-nez, and his brown mustache framed teeth so large and white they sometimes frightened friends as well as enemies. His voice was high-pitched, even squeaky.

Yet, the vivid force of his character and personality, his unabashed, contagious joy in taking charge made the difference. He was a leader of monumental proportions. A political foe called him "a steam-engine in trousers." A British visitor thought him comparable only to Niagara Falls among the natural wonders of the New World. His ability to lead—and the rugged, restless, constitution that went along with it—was not really a gift at all, but a hard-won achievement. To an extraordinary degree,

Teddy Roosevelt was his own creation.

Elected as U.S. President at age 42, he was just 50 when he left the White House, and only 61 when he died. As the pallbearers carried his coffin through the snow-covered trees to a hilltop grave at Oyster Bay, and the family followed along behind it, a New York police captain said to his sister, "Do you remember the fun of him, Mrs. Robinson? It was not only that he was a great man, but, oh, there was such fun in being led by him."

I would like to be a leader like that: one whom my constituents would have fun in following. As I have studied leadership—the common denominator of organizations, churches, and families living on the cutting edge—I have discovered that being an effective leader is neither easy nor accidental. Effective leaders are made not born. They are those rare individuals who know where they are going, communicate that purpose to others, and fuel the fires that bring others

alongside of them. They are a true joy to follow.

The people who make an impact on the world are not necessarily geniuses, or the best looking, or the most talented, but those who can inspire others to action. Nehemiah had that remarkable ability to influence and inspire and rally people to action: "But now I told them, 'You know full well the tragedy of our city; it lies in ruins and its gates are burned. Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and rid ourselves of this disgrace!'"

"Then I told them about the desire God had put into my heart, and of my conversation with the king, and the plan to which he had agreed.

"They replied at once, 'Good! Let's rebuild the wall!' And so the work began" (Neh. 2:17-18 LB).

Remember these people in a difficult situation. The only difference was one man with God's vision who motivated others to put their hearts into the work. Nehemiah possessed the quality that brought out the best in others.

Fellowshipping With The Sick *(cont. from page 1)*

of mercy and pastoring will have abundant work to do! When health needs come to light, the church should commit to initiating practical steps that can hopefully be carried forward into the week ahead. Often a warm hug, the working out of transportation, meal assistance or child care needs, even the reading of an encouraging Scripture passage, can have a greater impact than a

whole sermon!

None of this is to minimize the quiet ministries of individuals working on their own behind the scenes. But a skillful coordination of needs and helping hands can add another whole dimension to care, and prevent “hurting” ones from “falling through the cracks,” i.e., being overlooked.

Finally, one of the heart warming benefits of this practice will be outreach. People are hungry for a family spirit that goes beyond cold religious formality. Truly, faith without works is dead, and works that “adorn the doctrine of God...” (Titus 2:10) can be started right in the context of the gathered church!



When Elders Disagree *(cont. from page 2)*

The scripture doesn't make a judgment as to who was right or wrong. They simply parted company—no doctrine was at stake. Of course, where doctrine *is* involved, we cannot agree to disagree, a stand must be taken. Yet humble is the elder who does not try to use “sound doctrine” as a whip to lash out at those who hold differing opinions on matters of application or opinion.

6) Courage. Where sound doctrine is in question

or a hypocritical lifestyle brings sound doctrine into question, then confrontation cannot be avoided. There must be a bottom line or you can never be certain you are standing firm on the right things. However, as my old friend and mentor, Harvey Rodger used to say, “Plant your flag on the right hill!” Paul's confrontation of Peter, in Galatians 2:11-16, falls into this category. Unbridled pride of leadership is another situation that calls for strong measures, such as was the case for Diotre-

phes, “who loves to be first among them... I will call attention to his deeds...” (3 John 9-10).

Disagreement is unavoidable—and sometimes desirable—for it can be the means of spiritual growth whether through humility, adjustments to our character or the strengthening of our courage.



Inspiring Others *(cont. from page 3)*

Have you ever wondered at the way certain people bring out the best in others? We have all known them—coaches, teachers, parents, bosses. They seem to possess a knack for inspiring people. But how do they do it? How do they inspire and motivate people?

Here are four actions Nehemiah took in rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem.

1. Identify with the people. Nehemiah didn't say, “Look at the terrible situation you are in,” but, “look at the terrible situation we are in.” If you want to get someone to look at a problem from your point of view, you don't stand across from him and yell, you go to his side and identify with him and then gently guide him to your side.

2. Acknowledge the seriousness of the situation. Nehemiah didn't hide anything from

the people or try to sugarcoat the problem. He honestly faced the facts.

3. Appeal for action. Nehemiah challenged the people to specific action: “Let us rebuild the wall.” He had pondered and discussed and investigated and planned and prayed long enough. It was time for action.

4. Assign the tasks. Now the people were ready to hear the plan God had placed in his heart. Nehemiah knew that a few people working alone could not rebuild it. But together, united in force, the task could be accomplished. The effective leader has the ability to cut the problems down to size. This is what Nehemiah did. He assigned each family a task that they could manage.

The Green Bay Packers had been hapless

for twelve years before the arrival of Vince Lombardi. The legendary coach turned his team into the dominant NFL team of the 1960s. Why such a phenomenal turnaround? Frank Gifford says it was not Lombardi's knowledge, since several coaches knew as much about strategy and tactics. Rather, it was his ability to motivate the players. “He could get that extra ten percent out of an individual,” Gifford says. “Multiply ten percent times forty men on the team times fourteen games a season—and you're going to win.”

By Rick Ezell, Naperville Baptist Church in Naperville, Ill. This article is excerpted from Strengthening the Pastor's Soul (c) 2003 Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Reprinted from Leadership Magazine with permission.



ELDERS' SHOPNOTES

Editor: Chuck Gianotti
Editorial Assistance:
Jason Gianotti, Ruth Rodger

HOW TO REACH US

Elders' SHOPNOTES
c/o 27 Watchman Court
Rochester, N.Y. 14624 U.S.A.
E-mail: elderssn@rochester.rr.com
Voice: 585.429.5435
Web site: www.bible-equip.com/esn

CONTRIBUTORS

Jack Spender
Bible teacher

Maria Forcucci
Elder's wife, Women's ministry

Rick Ezell
Naperville Baptist Church

Chuck Gianotti
Bible teacher

Scripture versions are noted in the first reference in each article.

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