



## Editor's Note

The war in Iraq continues unabated. Afghanistan has proven an unending, almost futile search for an enemy hiding in caves and underground. No country is safe from terrorism. In many of our western hemisphere countries, particularly in North America, we have rested secure (somewhat naively), but our serenity has been shattered by the reality of longer border crossings, tighter security at airports, and constant news reports and water cooler discussions about the state of the world.

Doesn't that sound parallel to the Christian life? As elders in the church, it often seems that people are living in a safe cocoon, resting secure

(somewhat naively) from the harsh realities of the spiritual life. Are they ready, are they equipped to go out and do spiritual battle?

There is not a more sinister terrorist than one who does his work without drawing attention until it is too late. Satan is just such a one. As elders we must be vigilant in guarding the flock of God under our care. It is hard work, tiring—no, exhausting—but it must be done.

"Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Corinthians 16:13-14 NASB). 

### Biblical Foundations

## Tell Me Again, Why Am I An Elder?

by Chuck Gianotti

Being an elder is one of the greatest ministries a Christian man can possibly have. But if you have been an elder for any length of time, you can probably relate to the Apostle Paul, who after recounting the litany of struggles encountered in his service for the Lord, admitted that, "*Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.*" (2 Corinthians 11:28 NASB). In light of the "pressures" you shoulder as an elder, it is a good thing to remember just why you stick with it, why you continue on. Here are twelve reasons, to name just a few:

**1. The Lord has told you to do it.** You are not doing this work because you have volunteered or have been man-appointed. God set His finger on you and delegated this task to you. "*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.*" (Acts 20:28a)

**2. The Lord has compelled you to do it.** The Apostle Paul was compelled by Christ's love to preach the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16). We don't need the scripture to prove this is also true for elders. It would seem intuitively obvious to one doing the work that a major factor in keeping going is the compelling nature of Christ's love. "*For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.*" (2 Corinthians 5:14). There is something about knowing the love of Christ for ourselves that compels us to love the people God has saved. Elders are simply Christians who carry a greater sense of duty to fulfill this.

**3. You have been motivated by those who have gone before you,** both by their lives as well as by their challenge. "*To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed...*" (1 Peter 5:1).

**4. Being an elder puts you in good company.** When Peter tells you to shepherd the flock of God that is under your care, in his next breath he speaks of the Chief Shepherd. You are apprentices to the One who infinitely and intimately cares for

His people and who has entrusted to us these same people for similar care. "*Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care ... and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*" (1 Peter 5:2, 4)

**5. Being an elder is the ultimate emulation of the Great Shepherd.** "*For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*" (1 Peter 2:25)

**6. The people of God are precious to you,** because they are blood-bought precious to the Savior. "*Be on guard ... to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*" (Acts 20:28)

**7. The Lord has given you the desire.** The desire to be an elder is not necessarily presumptuous, for Paul makes it clear, that, "*Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.*" (1 Timothy 3:1). Secondly, if the desire is there and has a godly focus, then it is God-given. "*Delight yourself in the Lord; And He will give you the desires of your heart.*" (Psalm 37:4)

**8. You care about the Lord's people.** This comes from not just imitating Christ, but having the heart of Christ. "*Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.*" (Matthew 9:36)

**9. You simply love the people of God.** Sometimes you can't explain it, you just love them. "*For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.*" (2 Co 5:14 NIV)

**10. You just will not stop at anything until you see spiritual maturity.** Like Paul, you are driven to accept struggle and difficulties when needed in order to see spiritual growth in the people you shepherd. "*My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you ...*" (Galatians 4:19)

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# The Art of Confronting People

Recently, during a discussion about church leadership, a young brother made the following statement: "It seems to me that if a man cannot confront, he cannot be an elder." I have been thinking about what he said. It interests me because we often see problems in churches that seem to drag on unresolved for long periods of time. As the end of the age approaches, Christians must be diligent to "keep short accounts" with the Lord and with our fellow believers. For one thing, the Lord is coming back; for another, blessing is linked with unity in Scripture.

The dictionary defines the term *confront* this way: "to stand face to face with." The idea is to clear the air by directly facing a person or situation. Clearly, this is both a skill and a virtue in which elders must excel.

### A willingness to confront difficulties

Looking into the Scriptures, it is not an overstatement to say that one prominent mark of godly leaders in the Bible was the willingness to confront difficult people and situations, and to get problems resolved. A shining example from the Old Testament was God's servant Moses.

Leading over a million people through the wilderness, Moses at times found the burden of the people overwhelming and cried out to the Lord. The Lord gave this instruction: "*Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people. . . . and I will take of the Spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee. . . .*" (Numbers 11:16,17 KJV). In doing this, the Lord reaffirmed not only sound leadership principles of plurality and maturity, but also upheld Moses' priority of facing and dealing with real life needs and problems as they arose. The books of Exodus and Numbers provide many examples of how this was done, and the resulting blessings.

### A willingness to confront people

Turning to the New Testament, we note how often the Lord Jesus confronted people. From the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of His ministry (John 2) to his courageous words before Pilate (John 19), Jesus faced error with truth. In Matthew 18, He laid out the simple steps by which His followers should resolve wrongs done to them. After His resurrection, He would follow this pattern in restoring a disciple who had denied Him (Luke 24:34; John 20:15-17). Incidentally, this account of Peter's denial and subsequent restoration is touching in its gentleness but forthrightness, and ought to be pondered by every elder.

With the coming of the Holy Spirit and

commencement of the church, we can trace the boldness of Spirit-filled leaders on every page. We see Peter confronting Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), Stephen facing his accusers (Acts 7), and Paul dealing directly with religious opposers throughout his travels (Acts 13-28). Scripture faithfully records them all, including Paul's face to face rebuke of Peter regarding inconsistencies in his words and actions (Galatians 2:11-14). Considering these records, we can only imagine the harm and damage that would have come to the church had these difficulties not been addressed and cleared up quickly. No wonder the first book of church history, the book of Acts, presents a picture of blessing and expansion of the work!

In the epistles, we find rich teaching for growing believers on this subject, since the apostles left written instructions about the

*Confronting is difficult where relatives or wealthy people are involved. But it must be done.*

principles by which they worked. In the world, we must "*have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*" (Ephesians 5:11). In the church, elders must be appointed to preserve order. Among other qualities, they must be men who by sound doctrine could "*exhort and refute the opposers,*" men who would stand courageously against the false teachers "*whose mouths must be stopped*" (Titus 1:9-11).

### Confronting in the right spirit

Now all of this must be carried out in the right spirit. Shepherd hearts are saddened by sin, but protective of the flock. They know that "*the servant of the Lord must not strive [argue, fight], but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose him, if God perhaps will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. . . .*" (II Tim. 2:24-26).

### Confronting must not be delayed

Admittedly, this is not easy work. Most people dislike confrontation and resist being confronted. Nevertheless, we must understand that delay in admitting and dealing with problems only makes facing them more difficult. Small sparks can become great fires with the passing of time. Memories of the facts fade over time and we may actually cross a line when restoration is no longer possible. No wonder the Scriptures warn that leaven (a picture of evil) will spread, whether

dealing with moral issues (I Corinthians 5:6) or facing doctrinal error (Galatian 5:9). Yes, the longer we wait the harder it becomes to confront. In the interim there can be stress and the work may suffer through lack of unity. King David may have appeared content before Nathan confronted him, but in Psalm 32:4 he confessed, "day and night thy hand was heavy upon me."

The assembly is a family, a place where God's grace shines. Wise elders will use wisdom in distinguishing between the normal evidences of immaturity, and dangers to the work through willful sin or error. Vigilance will discern danger signs (sometimes subtle) such as issues which keep getting "tabled" in leadership meetings, or lack of unity among elders on basic points of doctrine or practice. The old saying "We'll agree to disagree" might be tolerated in matters of personal preference, but in matters of doctrine or the direction of the assembly, it is not acceptable. One especially difficult area is in facing problems "too close for comfort," for example issues that involve relatives, or wealthy and influential people in the church.

### Pray for boldness

Do we tremble at the thought of confronting people and problems? Let us remember that the apostles both prayed for boldness (Acts 4:29, 31) and requested prayer for boldness (Ephesians 6:19; Philippians 1:19,20). What can motivate us to action when needed? The Lord said, "*I am...the truth . . .*" (John 14:6). Loving Christ means loving the truth, not only its theory, but its life application. Elders must be more interested in justice and truth than in personal comfort and popularity. 

## Tell Me Again (cont.)

**11. You desire to do that which is a noble work** (variously translated as honorable, fine or good). "*Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.*" (1 Timothy 3:1). Few things in scripture are so described. It is good and right to want that which is noble (Phil 4:8).

**12. The Great Shepherd will reward you.** The crown of glory will be the glory of Christ Himself. The Lord will share with us that unique glory related to His being the Chief Shepherd, and it will last forever. "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." (1 Peter 5:4).



# Listening and Responding With Godly Advice

by Ruth Rodger

*“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.” (Colossians 4:6 NASB).*

One of the greatest privileges of being an elder’s wife is that of being a listening ear and giving godly advice. It is also one of the greatest responsibilities. Whether planned or not, each situation calls for some forethought and planning. Our words have the power to encourage, comfort, admonish and instruct. Conversely they can also wound and discourage and, once said, cannot be retracted. Like King David, we must ask the Lord to “set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.” (Psalm 141:3). As we start our day our prayer should be for wisdom, sensitivity and guidance in our dealings with those whom the Lord brings into our lives. Expect the Lord to give you opportunities to interact with others, knowing that He is at work in those around you and wants to use you. And then as you meet people and begin to talk with them, again ask the Lord for His words, spoken with His wisdom and communicated with His love.

As women we tend to have no problem talking with others. Listening well, however, is another matter. We have all experienced speaking with someone whose mind is elsewhere. It leaves us feeling second-class and unimportant. So the first step in listening well is to give undivided attention. If the situation dictates, select a quiet place in which to converse where

distractions are at a minimum. Maintain eye contact and don’t look around. Stay focused so that the person with whom you are speaking has your full attention. You will both benefit. You will better understand what is said and she will know that you care enough to listen well.

Proverbs 18:13 cautions, “*He who gives an answer before he hears, it is a folly and a shame to him.*” Don’t assume that you know why a person has come to you. Listen without pre-conceived ideas or judgments, putting away everything you’ve heard about a given situation or problem. There is usually more to any story than is common knowledge and what has been gossiped about may well be biased, exaggerated or

*As women we tend to have no problem talking with others. Listening well, however, is another matter.*

simply wrong. You will miss the mark with your counsel unless you listen with a clean slate. Ask questions, restate what you’re hearing, validate facts. Is there another side to the problem? Ask the Lord to give you understanding as you listen.

Pray for discernment as you listen. Is this person hurt from a broken relationship or grieving the loss of a loved one? Have you been in her shoes? Don’t pretend to understand how she feels if you haven’t, your words will sound hollow. One of the greatest comforts after my husband went to be with the Lord was a dear friend who had

also lost her husband several years earlier. She fully understood each step of my grief, weeping with me and assuring me of God’s love and faithfulness. She was II Corinthians 1:3-4 in action. We can and should gently sympathize with what others are experiencing, but we cannot empathize if we haven’t been there. Even our honesty will be a comfort.

We will also deal differently with those who are unsaved or new to the faith than with those who are more mature in the Lord. But again, we must not assume. Some may have made professions of faith many years earlier but have not grown or become knowledgeable in the Word and God’s ways. Ask pertinent questions that will give you clues to where a person is spiritually.

Sometimes as we listen it becomes clear that the person already knows the answer to her situation. What she really needs is just to talk it out with someone who will affirm her convictions and help her formulate a solution to the problem. Ask how she came to that answer. Was it a principle from Scripture? Conviction of the Holy Spirit? Reinforce with her how her answer follows scriptural guidelines, especially if following through will be difficult. Commit to pray with her about it.

As we learn to listen well and pray for God’s help as we listen, we are preparing for the next step, responding with godly advice.



## Leadership Principles Accepting Criticism

by Chuck Gianotti

Criticism is one of the sharpest tools God uses in molding us into humble and effective servants of His. How we handle the negative feedback of others can affect our character growth and our credibility. In fact, it can also affect how others follow our leadership.

Prior to World War II, George C. Marshall was profoundly influenced by his superior, General John J. Pershing. When he risked his career by bringing a strong disagreement to Pershing, it proved to be a pivotal encounter. According to Marshall’s biographer, “Pershing had found an officer who would tell him the truth rather than attempt to gloss inadequacies. Marshall himself was to discover that the general was capable of bearing criticism impersonally, of weighing it without taking offense. Pershing expected Marshall to speak out, to advise, and, if he thought it necessary, to criticize. Marshall did so, discovering in the Allied Expeditionary Forces commander a rare personal objectivity. ‘I have

never seen a man who could listen to as much criticism . . . You could say what you pleased as long as it was straight, constructive criticism.’ Other men had influenced him but in Pershing, Marshall found a personal model.” (*General of the Army: George C. Marshall, Soldier and Statesman*, by Ed Cray).

Marshall himself went on to earn high regard by all who knew him, even President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Such historical military leaders as Eisenhower and Patton owed their success to Marshall. So on the subject of leadership, he has a proven track record.

At the core of receiving criticism is the desire to gain knowledge about oneself and one’s decisions rather than the attempt to “gloss inadequacies.” Rarely is criticism given in the “right way”, but as another great leader (my mother, I think it was) used to say, “In every criticism, there is a kernel

of truth.” The key is to look past the “offense” of the criticism which is really a reaction of our pride and look for the beneficial medicine that is contained therein.

If it is true that leaders are to be learners, then negative feedback (to put it another way) is a necessary source of information that we need to consider carefully. The reality of the matter is that we cannot grow unless we can see ourselves objectively. We cannot see ourselves objectively unless we have accurate feedback. We cannot hear the accurate feedback if we are insecure or defensive about ourselves.

The leader who weighs the criticism carefully without being personally offended has the opportunity to add truth to his working knowledge of himself and his leadership. That just seems to be a wise thing for a leader to do.



# What Is Spiritual Leadership

by Henry and Richard Blackaby

**W**hat is Spiritual Leadership? It differs from plain, ol' leadership.

While spiritual leadership involves many of the same principles as general leadership, spiritual leadership has certain distinctive qualities that must be understood and practiced if spiritual leaders are to be successful.

*The spiritual leader's task is to move people from where they are to where God wants them to be.* This is influence. Once spiritual leaders understand God's will, they make every effort to move their followers from following their own agendas to pursuing God's purposes. People who fail to move people to God's agenda have not led. They may have exhorted, cajoled, pleaded, or bullied, but they will not have led until their people have adjusted their lives to God's will. *Spiritual leaders depend on the Holy Spirit.* Spiritual leaders work within a paradox, for God

calls them to do something that, in fact, only God can do. Ultimately, spiritual leaders cannot produce spiritual change in people; only the Holy Spirit can accomplish this. Yet the Spirit often uses people to bring about spiritual growth in others.

*Spiritual leaders are accountable to God.* Spiritual leadership necessitates an acute sense of accountability. Just as a teacher has not taught until students have learned, leaders don't blame their followers when they don't do what they should do. Leaders don't make excuses. They assume their responsibility is to move people to do God's will.

*Spiritual leaders can influence all people, not just God's people.* God's agenda applies to the marketplace as well as the meeting place. Although spiritual leaders

will generally move God's people to achieve God's purposes, God can use them to exert significant godly influence upon unbelievers.

*Spiritual leaders work from God's agenda.* The greatest obstacle to effective spiritual leadership is people pursuing their own agendas rather than seeking God's will.

Too often, people assume that along with the role of leader comes the responsibility of determining what should be done. They develop aggressive goals. They dream grandiose dreams. They cast grand visions. Then they pray and ask God to join them in their agenda and bless their efforts. That's not what spiritual leaders do. (They) seek God's will, then marshal their people to pursue God's plan.

—from *Spiritual Leadership* by Henry and Richard Blackaby (Broadman & Holman, 2001). Used by permission from *Christianity Today*, 2004.



## Getting Them To Come Back

**H**ow do you get visitors to come back? It all depends on how you treat them.

**Preach the Word.** You show no greater respect for people than to provide what they really need, and that is the Word of God. The Bible contains answers to what ever problem them have. As the Holy Spirit applies the Word to their hearts, they will be drawn back to hear more. It's touches them deeply.

**Exalt Jesus Christ.** Ultimately, we want people to see Jesus Christ, and in seeing Him, come back to learn more about Him. Talk about Him at every meeting where you have visitors.

**Speak normal English.** As Christians our language can become "insider's jargon". By using normal English, we will not only communicate better to the visitor, but surprisingly the regular attenders will also understand better. Some preaching isn't necessarily deep, it is just

using language that people don't understand. When in doubt, keep it clear.

**Love the brotherhood of believers.** When people see genuine love in the church, this will undercut the world's stereotype that church is full of conflict. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35 NIV). That kind of community is attractive.

**Talk to them.** My wife and I have been in many churches and are impressed by those who make an effort to be friendly *before* they know that I am the visiting speaker!

**Don't take an offering.** When visitors ask where the collection plate is, tell them, "We don't pass one. You are our guest!" Another favorite criticism is neutralized, namely, that "all the church wants is your money." We put a small unmarked box in the

back of the room—regulars know where it is.

**Give them something.** At the end of our main teaching service, where we usually have visitors, we give people an opportunity to fill out a comment card on which they can indicate their desire for either a "Jesus" video or a Bible. We will then see that they get a copy.

**Give them food.** Many churches serve refreshments before the service (or in between). We serve them also after the main service. This encourages visitors (as well as regulars) to stay after and "fellowship" with each other. Our standing "rule" is that there is to be no cleaning up for 30 minutes after the service—the focus is for everyone to focus on our visitors. In this way, those who are heavily involved with serving on Sunday mornings also have time to speak with visitors.



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