



Editor's Note

We appreciate the many kind responses sent to us about the ministry of ESN. We continue to believe that building up elders in the local church and providing short, helpful and practical articles is important. As with all ministries, encouragement is like grease that helps reduce the friction of ministry strain. It makes things go more smoothly. Thank you.

There is much to weigh down elders and servants of the Lord in general—the on-going wear and tear of ministry. The more we can encourage each other, the more we help one another in serving the Lord. Having been recently on the receiving end of such encouragement I am reminded anew of how important this ministry is.

Practical Ministry

Reaching Out Through Small Groups *by Jack Spender*

There are two ways to reach lost people with the gospel; bring them to the message or take the message to them. While both have been used throughout the church age, the Great Commission given by the Lord Jesus puts the emphasis on taking the good news to those who need to hear it (Matt 28:18-20, Mark 16:15 KJV). This was not a new idea. After Adam and Eve sinned, it was God who took the initiative and came looking for the couple. We could wish they had reasoned, "We're in trouble; let's seek the Lord," but the natural response was to hide. The history of Israel is much the same. Writing toward the close of the Old Testament, the chronicler sums up prophetic history this way: "And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending, because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling place" (II Chron. 36:15). Passing into the New Testament, we find the same priority expressed by the Lord Jesus: "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was

lost" (Luke 19:10). No wonder, then, that the operative word in the great commission is "Go!"

How then can elders encourage this mindset in the church? Not everyone can be a missionary. Here are some ideas to consider. First, elders should be sure there is a clear understanding of the mission of the church. Worship, teaching and prayer are vital, but serious questions must be asked if we are claiming to glorify the Lord and edify believers, yet have no concern for the lost.

Second, make certain participants understand that, while not all Christians are evangelists (gifted to initiate), all are witnesses (prepared to give an answer when asked—I Peter 3:15).

Third, take an active interest in those who are on the "front lines" reaching out to others with the good news of God's grace and forgiveness. It is wonderfully invigorating when a local fellowship "adopts" a missionary family to love, pray for, correspond with, and even visit. But don't forget

Who encourages the elder? Often, no one! I wish I could spend time with each of you to provide a little in that department. As this issue of ESN goes to publication, I pray the Great God and Encourager of our souls will build you up right now in whatever struggle has gripped you.

I imagine most editors wonder how many people really read their publication. This one is no different. But in case you *are* reading this, I want you to know you *are* appreciated. Not so much for reading this, but for the work you do in shepherding God's people. There awaits you the accolades of the One whose opinion truly matters. "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Matthew 25:21 (KJV)



the efforts of those in the home assembly who are reaching out to family and friends close by.

Fourth, and the focus of this article; consider small groups as a tool of outreach. Let's think about how this can work. We'll look at 1) Getting started; 2) Developing the outreach, and 3) Overcoming obstacles.

Getting Started

By now you have probably concluded that no matter how many flyers you pass out, and no matter how many attractive programs you design, lost people just don't usually seek God, and have little interest in coming to "God's house" as they call it. But they may come to the home of a friend or acquaintance in their own neighborhood. Small groups are lights shining in neighborhoods. One

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author puts it this way in the title of his book, "Your Home, a Lighthouse."

Some are critical of any meetings not held in the church building. We won't spend time on this, but you need to get beyond these arguments which sound

spiritual, but are based mostly on tradition. Stop and reflect upon the fact that although the Lord Jesus had many disciples, He chose out a "small group" of twelve to work with intensively (Luke 6:13). Being sensitive to and providing for the different needs within the flock is a principle lived out in assemblies whenever there are elders meetings or committee meetings or Sunday school classes. In any case remember that you are not holding a formal "church service," but an informal get-together of friends. The format of meetings should be simple, built around the basic idea of fellowship. For some suggestions, see the four articles on small groups in ESN beginning July, 2002 (Volume 3, Number 4).

Developing an Outreach

Turning to the specifics of outreach, the question may arise as to why unsaved people would

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Welders are called to rise above our own personal reaction to people's outward presentation of themselves and go deeper in trying to understand and minister to them. Yet, as human beings, we are so limited by the external, whether it be a person's appearance, personality, social status, financial resources or past interactions and behaviors. It is so easy for an elder to assume a pseudo-spiritual posture, "Of course I treat everyone the same." But the reality, if we are honest, is that this is sometimes not the case. Preferential treatment to *some* believers and inconsistent attention to *all* believers create an integrity issue for shepherds of God's people. I have seen it in others and I have seen it in my own life. We are so easily drawn to some people and not to others—on a superficial basis.

The Lord speaks directly to this and as leaders we absolutely must model this behavior *and* attitude in James 2:1-9. We are to go below the outwardly observable appearance of things, because our judgments based on the superficial will more times than not be dead wrong.

Examples from the hockey world

I was chaplain for a local professional ice hockey team for a number of years and discovered how easy it is to be fooled by the outward appearance. Ministering to them is similar to ministry in the local church. By faith, I know professional athletes have spiritual and emotional needs inwardly, but you wouldn't think that when they are on the ice banging away at each other.

Contrary to common perceptions, most pro players I have met can be gentlemen and very polite. We have had many in our home and know that firsthand. One even played classical piano music! He came to most of our chapel services.

Another was outgoing, friendly, gregarious—and a Christian. People were drawn to him for he was very likable.

Let me describe some others. One was six foot four inches tall and rugged, with a somewhat hardened look about him. The first time he came to chapel, sitting at the opposite end of the table with a scowl on his face, he asked straightforwardly, "How do you know Jesus was really God?" I figured he was just trying to nail me with an argument. My answer didn't change the look on his face, and didn't seem to convince him. I invited him to lunch one day, and discovered he had trusted Christ as a young boy, but that no one ever followed up on him when he moved away to play hockey in another town. His live-in girl friend was raised in a Christian home, where her father, who was a leader in the church,

ran off with another woman in the congregation. This young man, it turns out, was genuinely interested in learning more about the faith he once experienced.

Another player met me in the hallway one day outside the locker room. He was the "enforcer" for the team, the one who fights against the other team's enforcer to protect his own teammates. He was new to the team, I had not met him before. With chiseled body and face covered with welts from the previous game, he stopped in front of me and glared straight in my eye, about 12 inches from my face—he said nothing, not even a blink. Other players milling about stopped to watch. He was known as a trouble maker, not very well liked because of his wild, undisciplined life off and on the ice.

The atmosphere was tense. Looking down at his clenched fist raised up to stom-

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes ... have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? ... If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (James 2:1-9 NAS)

ach level, I silently prayed for help! I must have been motivated at that point by the Spirit, for without thinking I formed a fist with my hand and brought it down to hit the top of his fist playfully, just like a fellow might do with his friend. He then did the same to me, smirked, then walked off! I let out a sigh of relief. A short while later he showed up at the chapel service. He sat quietly until the end, then lingered around, obviously wanting to talk. I invited him out to lunch and for 90 minutes, he told me about his life, failed marriage and a six year old son he hadn't seen in 2 years. He was hurting. And he said he was tired of making a living by fighting. Underneath the unlikable, hardened fighter image was a man who was struggling with deeper things of life.

Another player, was clearly the sort who was the "big man on campus" in his college days. He carried this into the pro ranks, strut-

ting around, flirting with the women (he was married). He had a way of making you feel he was doing you a favor by talking with you. He wouldn't let me get past the exterior, so I don't know the real person underneath. Something in me wanted to write him off because of the arrogant attitude. But, like the others, I am sure there is a story behind the face, a human heart and a soul.

Hockey players are humans who struggle with real issues in their lives, which is often covered over by the surface things. We may be drawn to some, but not to others, and in the process miss out on the real person underneath each one. The same is true in the church.

Application to the church

Despite external appearances, most people struggle with various issues of life—and the Great Shepherd wants to minister to them. As under-shepherds, we need to get below the

surface with people to find out where they are in their spiritual life and walk. We simply cannot settle for increasing the volume of doctrinal teaching or pounding the pulpit harder and expect profound, real change in people's lives by some sort of spiritual symbiosis. We need to get to really know them.

To put it another way, we cannot afford to allow ourselves to be drawn to some people to the neglect of others, based on external criteria. Some are wealthy, some are poor; some are great conversationalists, some stutter; some handle themselves well in social settings, others do not. Some are of a "higher" social status, others of a "lower" status in society. Some may have "grated" you wrong at some point in the past, others may have always complimented you. Some pray in a very flowery way using

all the "right" words, others stumble along awkwardly. As elders, we are called to shepherd them all, even ones we don't personally "like."

How can we do that? Here are some steps to consider:

Honest self evaluation

First of all, some self-evaluation is in order. As an elder, ask yourself the following:

- Do those with money in my local church get preferential treatment over others?
- Do some voices carry more weight with me because they are louder or more repetitious?
- Do I look for "good pray-ers" (eloquent of speech) to pray at important events?
- Do I spend more time on Sunday mornings (or any other meeting times) with certain people in my social-economic level?
- Do I ever meet with others for lunch or cof-

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Summer Distractions

by Mary Gianotti

How can a woman navigate through summer and come out the other end with fresh wind in her sails? Many of our regular activities come to an end but often the summer schedule seems busier than ever, leaving us anything but refreshed.

In sailing much of the sport seems to be above water: the boat, riggings, sails, and myriad ropes. As we all know the rudder is essential to staying on course—it is not seen but is absolutely necessary. You and I have a rudder to keep us on course, our heart. Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life” (NASB). A broken rudder is of no use to the ship on a stormy or calm sea.

It is important during the summer months to keep our heart in good repair. There are unique distractions this time of year that can draw us away from the Lord. Having children at home, gardening, VBS or camp preparations, packing for vacation and inviting people over for a BBQ are just a few of the things that distract us from spending time with the Lord. Being in the Word and communing with Him

will keep our hearts in good repair.

The story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42 is familiar and loved. Mary had a devoted heart and Martha had a distracted heart. Most of us relate to Martha and long to be a Mary. It is interesting to me that Martha’s heart was not initially distracted. She started out well. We read “Martha welcomed him (the Lord) into her home.”

Most of us relate to Martha and long to be a Mary.

Somewhere along the line her heart was no longer welcoming. She became distracted. A distracted heart is one that is drawn apart, and diverted from its original purpose. As Proverbs says that we are to keep our heart with “all diligence”. It takes work to stay on course.

Mary’s heart was devoted. She was whole-heartedly dedicated to her purpose of getting to know the Lord and spending time with Him. Her diligence was rewarded. C.I.

Scotfield comments: “Mary of Bethany, alone of our Lord’s followers, comprehended His thrice-repeated announcement of His coming death and resurrection.” We read in Matthew 26:12-13, “When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. I tell you the truth, wherever this Gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

Centuries later, during the summer of 2004, we remember Mary and her devoted heart.

“Lord, this summer keep me from being distracted by many things. May I daily spend time at Your feet. I know there will be days that it will take discipline to do this. Please remind me and give me the help I will need to follow through. I long for special glimpses of You that will fill my sails with the fresh wind of Your Holy Spirit. Lord, give me a devoted heart. Amen”



Leadership Principles

What I Want To Be When I Grow Up

by Chuck Swindoll

There we sat, a cluster of six. A stubby, orange candle burned at the center of our table, flickering eerie shadows across our faces. One spoke; five listened.

Every question was handled with such grace, such effortless ease. Each answer was drawn from deep wells of wisdom, shaped by tough decisions, and nurtured by time. And pain. Mistakes and mistreatment. Like forty years in the same church. And seasoned by travel. Like having ministered around the world. And honed by tests, risks, heartbreaks, and failures.

Had those years been spent in the military, he would have had a chest full of medals.

His age? Seventy-two. His face? Rugged as fifty miles of bad road. His eyes? Ah, those eyes. Piercing, as if they penetrated to the back of your cranium. He had seen it all, weathered it all—the flak and delights of a flock. Outlasted all the fads and gimmicks of gullible and greedy generations, known the ecstasy of seeing lives revolutionized, the agony of lives ruined, and the monotony of lives unchanged. He had paid his dues—and had the scars to prove it.

There we sat for well over three hours, hearing his stories, pondering his principles, questioning his conclusions, and responding to his ideas. The evening was punctuated with periodic outbursts of laughter followed by pro-

tracted periods of quiet talk.

As I participated, I was suddenly 26 years old again. A young seminarian and pastoral intern, existing in a no-man’s land between a heart full of desire and head full of dreams. Long on theological theories but short on practical experience. I had answers to questions no one was asking, but a lack of understanding on the things that really mattered. In momentary flashbacks, I saw

When I saw him, I knew.

myself in the same room with this man thirty years earlier, drinking at the same well, soaking up the same spirit. Back then, however, I was merely impressed; this time I was deeply moved. Thirty years ago he had been a model; now he had become a mentor. Thoroughly human and absolutely authentic, he had emerged a well-worn vessel of honor fit for the Master’s use. And I found myself profoundly grateful that Ray Stedman’s shadow had crossed my life.

In a day of tarnished leaders, fallen heroes, busy parents, frantic coaches, arro-

gant authority figures, and eggheaded geniuses, we need mentors like never before—we need guides, not gods. Approachable, caring souls who help us negotiate our way through life’s labyrinth.

As we said goodbye to Ray that evening, I walked a little slower. I thought about the things he had taught me without directly instructing me, about the courage he had given me without deliberately exhorting me. I wondered how it had happened. I wondered why I had been so privileged.

A knot formed in my throat as I forced myself to realize that, at age 72, he didn’t have many more years left in the world. I found myself wanting to run back to his car and tell him again how much I loved and admired him.

But it was late, and after all, I was a 55-year-old man. A husband. A father. A grandfather. A pastor. To some, a leader.

But as I stood there alone in the cold night air, I suddenly realized what I wanted to be when I grew up.

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seek the Lord in a home when they wouldn't in a church building. And of course, they probably won't. For this reason, small group meetings must not be simply religious services on a smaller scale. In fact, it's wise not to begin the group with a focus on lost people at all. Rather, spend the first few months developing closeness among the believers so that there is a family spirit. Seek to establish a smoothly functioning group marked in its fellowship by harmony, supportiveness and yes, fun. Not silliness, but the joy of looking forward to being with true friends to share in the pursuits of practical Christianity. Once this environment begins to develop, and it takes time, visitors can simply "look in on" a spiritual family in action, loving and caring for one another.

Begin by praying by name for 2 or 3 people that each person in the group would like to win to the Lord. Have each person share how they are reaching out to these individually. The small group in some ways is like a family expecting a baby. Getting the nursery ready is part of the work. When someone does bring a friend to the meeting, carry on as usual, being careful not to single out or embarrass the visitor by undue questions.

Overcoming Obstacles

Most problems a group may encounter can be solved through prayer, study of the word, and good leadership and communication. A few problems need particular mention.

Churches that have been small for many years can be so hungry for growth, that it's all but impossible for them to resist smothering (or preaching at) outsiders that may visit a group. Keep in mind that the Holy Spirit will work best if we leave the work of conviction to Him. The love of Christ is contagious; people are drawn to the source, and whenever

someone draws nearer to God, they become more aware of their own condition. Once visitors begin coming, resist the temptation to divide the group mentally into "saved" and "lost." God alone knows the heart. We may have our discernments, but in an informal setting all are accepted as friends (in the sense Jesus was a friend of sinners) who are seeking to know the Lord better.

Other problems have to do with formality and dwindling of the group. Studies from the Bible, prayer times, and group discussions should be down to earth, encouraging participation from all who attend regularly. If the needs of people are being met, it won't be hard to maintain a faithful attendance. Allow time for open hearted conversations, prayer and help for those facing special needs, attractive refreshments, and even the occasional creative project. When there is good leadership and challenging content, people will place this time high on their list of personal commitments for the week. The goal is to enjoy the freedoms received under grace, and learn to reach out to others--first those in the immediate small fellowship, and then to "strangers."

Finally, pray for fruit and expect God to answer. When people come to Christ and are saved, begin immediately to pray for their contacts of family and friends. When the group gets too large, consider starting some other groups in other neighborhoods or even forming a new assembly! There is a tremendous joy and satisfaction in seeing new believers and new assemblies begin through practicing the principle that fellowship is an important key to evangelism. 

fee, or visit in their homes just to find out how they are doing?

- Do I secretly feel that my status in the world translates into status in the church?
- Do I cover up my partiality with biblical-sounding rationale?
- Do I delegate ministry responsibilities based on externals, rather than on spiritual-giftedness?

Personal Visits

In one local church the elders regularly visit believers in their homes, dividing up the congregation between them (see *Knowing the Flock Through Visitation*, ESN Vol 1 No 4).

During meetings of the Church

In one church, the deacons took the initiative to relieve the elders of their Sunday morning "service oriented" duties in order to free them to shepherd the flock, greeting, talking, praying with, and just spending time with the people. Nothing is more encouraging to the believers than to see an elder off to the side praying with someone.

Small Group Ministry

Consider small group ministry, following the example of the early church, as a way to get to know the believers on a more personal level. Small groups give elders an opportunity to get to know others below the surface (see *Small Group Ministry*, Vol. 3 Nos. 3-6). Indeed, it is difficult to know them when the only contact comes from casual interaction in large group settings.

The bottom line is that to shepherd God's people, we *must* go deeper. This takes time, energy and sacrifice. Otherwise, we are left with evaluating their spiritual needs based on the superficial. But the effort to reach deeper with people is rewarded with the joy of ministering to them in their real need. 

ELDERS' SHOPNOTES

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