



## Biblical Foundations Desiring A Good Work

by Chuck Gianotti

### Studies in 1 Timothy—Part 7

Every elder wishes that there were more people who desired to serve God's people in the church! It takes no theology degree to make that observation. It seems strange, especially when God attaches such value to serving. Being an elder or a deacon is first and foremost a work of serving. As such, they are great ministries. So much so, that Paul gives these two ministries special attention in 1 Timothy 3.

#### Desire for being an elder

There are three possible reasons for desiring to be an elder: 1) personal benefit 2) pressure from others or 3) spiritual desire. While the first two reasons are clearly wrong, 1 Timothy 3 does allow for and even condones a man "aspiring" (NASB) to do the work of an elder. In studying this verse, we must be careful to note the critical facts.

1) This is one of Paul's "trustworthy statements" (see 1 Tim 1:15, 4:9, 2 Tim 2:11), which he uses to emphasize a point. In other words, you can count on this being true. While it is relatively easy to castigate anyone who desires the work of an elder as a power seeker, this Scripture cannot be ignored. I can almost hear many readers sighing, "Would that we had more men who wanted to do the actual work of shepherding."

2) Many translations render the goal of the seeking to be that of "office of bishop" or "office of overseer." But the original Greek does not include the word "office." Paul uses the word *episcopos*, which is where the institutionalized church gets its word "episcopal." The word actually emphasizes a *watching over, inspecting or observing*. It can also be used in the sense of *visiting*. These are functions, not a formal church *office*. A frequent (and better) rendering of this in English is "overseer."

3) Paul says the work of eldering is a *good work*. It follows that to seek to do that work is also a good thing. This doesn't go against the notion that it is God who raises up an elder, and not an elder raising himself up. Indeed, one of the ways God raises up a person is by planting the desire in his heart. Psalm 37:4 tells us He gives us the desires of our heart if we delight ourselves in Him. So when a man is living an obedient, devoted life to the Lord, and discovers a desire to be an elder—that is a good thing and it is placed there by God!

It does no good to pressure a man into service. Peter instructs the elders to "exercise oversight not under compulsion, but volun-

tarily, according to the will of God" (1 Peter 5:2). However, challenging men to consider being an elder by mentoring them, providing training material and giving general teaching to the church on the role and ministry of elders, can be used by the Lord to fan the flame of desire in some men—namely those in whom God's Spirit is working.

Interestingly, the word translated "good" can also be translated "beautiful." God sees the work of an elder as being of the highest order, in a sense, beautiful in His eyes. Men should serve as elders because it is a good and beautiful thing. While many times it is burdensome, the godly elder will by faith hold on to the great and wonderful calling he has in Christ to shepherd the flock of God. Some day the Chief Shepherd will appear to dispense the unfading crown of glory to His under-shepherds (1 Peter 5:4).

4) Now, this desiring to be an overseer that Paul has in mind is not just an idle wish, but literally a "stretching out to or reaching after" the work of overseeing. It is not for lazy people who want to occupy an office of privilege and power. Nothing will stretch a man more than doing the work of overseeing! Few understand the heartache, the frustration, criticism, disappointment and discouragement elders face. Little gratitude is shown, and the depths of spiritual struggle are shared only by the select minority. Is it any wonder that Paul follows this statement with *the* critical criteria for being an elder. This is not so much a list of qualifications of office, but more of a qualifier for the desiring to do this work. In other words, if you desire to oversee the spiritual life of God's people, here is what it will take! This is what you are going to need! You will need to develop the following list of spiritual character traits, or you will wipe out for sure. In a sense, this list contains the "tools" for doing the work of overseeing, the necessary characteristics that you and I need to hone, so that we can be good overseers of God's people.

5) We understand this "overseeing" (1 Tim 3:1) to be identified with those who are called "elders" (see 1 Tim 5:17, 19). The term "overseer" emphasizes the function of overseeing, while the term "elder" identifies the maturity of the one doing the overseeing, one who is "older" spiritually.

It is possible that a person can do much of the work of an elder (in the sense of overseeing God's people) without being recognized as an elder. In fact, all Christians should watch out for one another at some level (see

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# Leadership Principles

## A Men's Meeting

by Jack Spender

**B**efore He went back to the Father, the Lord Jesus gave His followers a stirring assignment; Go disciple the nations! In other words, do for them what I have done for you; make them into disciples. This work would need to continue until the end of the age (Matt. 28:20 KJV). Later (see Acts 20), Paul said it in different words, but it amounted to the same thing (see for example, 2 Timothy 2:2). Christians are to work hard at making intelligent, committed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In order for this to happen, the local church must be a suitable environment for disciple making. The church is not an option; it is God's workplace for life change. And this calls for good leadership. What can elders do? Among other things, delegate! They can involve younger believers by delegating work to them, just like the apostles did in Acts chapter 6.

One way some assemblies do this is by holding regular men's meetings (also called brother's meetings), to care for the ongoing needs, concerns and decisions of the church family. In our assembly (Waterbury Christian Fellowship in Waterbury Connecticut), men's meetings have been a solid part of the life of the church since the work began in 1997.

Let's explore the idea of a regular time for men to gather to care for practical issues that must be addressed. Since this is a "Here's how we do it" article, I'll draw freely on methods we have used, lessons learned, and some of the benefits and dangers.

### Biblical Basis

First we should inquire about the Biblical basis for such a practice. As already mentioned, Acts 6 provides some helpful guidance. Three principles stand out:

1) As the church grew, it became evident that some *structure* was needed that was not necessary when it was smaller.

2) Those in spiritual leadership had a clear sense of *priorities* for the use of their time, and did not want to compromise in this.

3) Some of the administrative type work of the church could be *delegated* to other, qualified men.

Note that the idea of a men's meeting to care for assembly matters is built around the three key words from the above list: *structure*, *priorities*, and *delegate*. I hesitate to use the term "business meeting," because that puts the emphasis in the wrong place as we shall see.

### Making It Work

Essentially a men's meeting has two major parts: time with the Lord as the Head of the church, and caring for assembly decisions in response to His direction. Here are some general guidelines that we use for each of these.

Spending time with the Lord as the Head of the church is essential. Beware of compromising this time! It needs to be first in the schedule and it should be substantial, i.e., of substance. I am not talking about "Opening the meeting in prayer" or scheduling a five minute "devotional thought," but a serious time for all the men to pray and fellowship around the Word. In our meetings, this usually takes up the first hour. In fact, it is not unusual for our time in the Word (with accompanying discussion) and prayer to occupy more than half the entire meeting. Remember, we are making disciples first, and then tending to assembly concerns. The needs of the church become a tool to gather men for fellowship and spiritual growth.

For this to work, some brother must come prepared with a relevant, challenging portion from Scripture. Interaction may be natural and immediate, but if it is not, a designated chairman can ask some questions to draw out the men. He must never be in a hurry to get to the business part of the meeting. Time spent in listening to one another, being honest with one another, and interacting about the Scriptures presented will pave the way for a harmonious time when the decision making part of the meeting does come.

The "business" part is simple and orderly. The chairman (hopefully a brother with some administrative gift) collects items for an agenda during the week, and at the start of this time. It helps to address any urgent situations right at the outset. The goal for each item throughout the meeting is a consensus as to what action would be pleasing to the Lord, and helpful to the church.

We do not vote, and the elders learn to practice restraint in their participation so that the younger or less experienced men can interact. Records are kept by a secretary, and decisions must be clearly understood by all and recorded in the minutes. When a matter cannot be resolved, it is tabled until a future meeting to allow time for prayer, further research, and private discussion. At some point in each meeting, we check the previous minutes for tabled items or items needing to be followed up on. Occasionally, the men refer a matter to the elders to resolve.

Meetings can be convened as needed. For us, two per month works out well. Having no building of our own, we rotate among homes which adds a touch of warmth. After the meeting, we often find some refreshments awaiting us in the kitchen!

### Strengths and Difficulties

As we near the ten year mark for our assembly, we thank the Lord for this profitable discipleship tool. Others could add to the list, but here are some benefits I have come to appreciate.

- The men are being disciplined by each other; learning to lead, and learning how the Word and prayer are part of the normal Christian life.

- The elders (who also meet separately at other times) can devote more time to the Word and prayer, to shepherding and visitation, being relieved of much routine decision making.

- Children in the homes where we meet are sometimes listening in other rooms. Hearing the Scriptures discussed and the way in which godly men relate to one another forms a healthy contribution to their spiritual training.

- Human relationships work more smoothly when time is first spent in Scripture and prayer. This is a valuable lesson for young married couples.

- There is an increased sense of "ownership" in the church among those who are not elders or deacons, as they become more involved.

- It is gratifying to see a pool of leaders coming along from which elders might arise in the future.

Are there problems? Of course! But they have been remarkably few over the

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# Harvest Time—In Our Lives

by Mary Gianotti

The words 'harvest time' conjure a lot of different images in our minds. The farmer bringing in his crops, leaves turning colors, Indian corn, the market teeming with squash of every kind and, of course, Thanksgiving Day. God has also designed seasons in each of our lives, to bring about a harvest in us. It is a wonderful time that the writer of Hebrews describes as producing in us a harvest of righteousness and peace. Each of us would love to have this kind of fruit in our lives—to be right before God, more like His son Jesus and have that calm assurance that He is in control.

Just as the farmer during the early spring months plans his crops, so God plans His work in our lives. We are told He has the "race marked out for us" (Heb 12:1). What is happening to you and me right now is not an accident or coinci-

dence; rather it is predetermined by God. Grabbing hold of this truth will prepare the soil of our minds for the difficulties we will face.

As God begins to break up the soil of our hearts, to sow seeds that are un-

unkind thoughts, wrong ways of thinking, bad reactions to situations, (the list goes on) is never a pleasant experience. God does this with the perfect love of a Father—it is always for our good. Rather than give in to the temptation to grumble,

whine and complain, we are called to "submit to the Father of our spirits and live!" (Heb 12:9). When we submit to God's correction it always brings spiritual growth and life.

What is going on in your life right now? Are you facing illness, family challenges, relational tensions or discontentment? Remember, this is God's race set out for you. If you accept His correction it will not be enjoyable and it will hurt. You will never regret it, though, because He never breaks a promise. We submit to His discipline and He promises righteousness and peace.

*No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*

Hebrews 12:11 (NIV)

comfortable for us and to bring storms and heat, it is all with the harvest in mind. His way of dealing with us is called discipline. The word *discipline* means instruction and education. In Hebrews chapter twelve the instruction and education are given by means of correction. To be shown our mistakes,

remember, this is God's race set out for you. If you accept His correction it will not be enjoyable and it will hurt. You will never regret it, though, because He never breaks a promise. We submit to His discipline and He promises righteousness and peace.



## Men's Meeting(cont.)

years. Things to watch for are; lack of clear communication of decisions by the men with their wives and others in the assembly; need for the displaying of grace when items overlap areas where elders or deacons may also be at work; making sure that all matters are brought to closure and not left hanging; and convincing those men in the assembly who tend to remain uninvolved that even though they are not elders or deacons, their participation is needed and valued.

Concerns often raised by outsiders such as novice brothers wanting to run things, or breaches in matters of confidentiality have not been much of a problem for us. Rather, we have found both blessing and refreshment by getting the younger men to take up the challenges of the church. Although the elders remain the final authority under Christ for all assembly decisions, we had found no strong Biblical support for the tradition that all decisions of the assembly are made by elders behind closed doors. Rather, elders appreciate this practical help to prevent them from becoming busy administrators rather than shepherds of people and families.



## Wives or Women Deacons?

A single verse about women (NASB) or wives (KJV, NIV) is included in 1 Timothy 3:11, as part of Paul's teaching about leadership in the church. The original word *gunaikos* can be translated either way as wife or woman. Normally, the context makes clear which meaning is in view, but here the meaning is debated. Some suggest it refers to women who were to be counted among the deacons or a separate group of deaconesses. Proponents for these ideas find support by referring to Romans 16:1 where Phoebe is called *diakonos* ("servant"). This is not convincing because we could argue just as easily that Phoebe was simply a "servant" who happened to be well known for her service.

On the other hand, when Paul refers to the *gunaikos* in 1 Timothy 3:11, he uses the same word in the next verse in relationship to the deacons' marital status, namely the "husband of only one wife." Clearly, wives are in view, and not women deacons.

Yet, in most local churches, you will find women's ministries of various kinds, which need to be conducted

decently and in order. And these require godly women to lead and influence other women. We would suggest that when women serve in any such leadership role, that qualifications be encouraged similar to those of elders and deacons, and that they function under the leadership and authority of the elders and deacons. CRG



## From the Q-Files

In Jim Collins' book "Good to Great," he talks about leadership at the highest level. Those who make the greatest leaders have "... a compelling modesty, are self-effacing and understated...[they] look out the window to attribute success to factors other than themselves. When things go poorly, however, they look in the mirror and blame themselves, taking full responsibility." By comparison, less than great leaders "... looked in the mirror to take credit for success, but out the window to assign blame for disappointing results" (HarperCollins Publisher, p. 39).



## Desiring (cont.)

for example, Gal 6:1-2); yet some people obviously have a greater burden for this. The NT thrust is that the healthy church will identify those individuals and encourage them to work together. For example, Paul's normal pattern was to appoint multiple elders in each church he established (Acts 14:23). And he desired them to work together as a group; that is why he met with the identifiable *group* of elders from the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:17). Further, he specifically refers to the elders in Philippi as an identifiable group (Phil 1:1). The fact that Scripture includes qualifications (1 Tim 3) and describes the work of elders (1 Pet 5:1-3), supports the idea that there are men who are recognized as elders and men who are not.

Since we have written elsewhere in ESN about the qualifications for elders, we will not comment on them here (see ESN Index on our web-site).

### The work of deacons

In the same context as elders, Paul speaks about deacons (1 Tim 3:8).

1) By identifying criteria for the functioning of deacons and by referring to them in Phil 1:1, we can surmise that deacons are a recognized group of individuals. As the history of the church unfolded in Scripture, what had been a rather common term (*diakonos*) for servant or waiter, came to be used in a specialized sense, as we used the word *deacon*. This is one of two words that Paul was fond of using to refer to himself (the other is *doulos* which means *servant* or *slave*). This probably came from wanting to be an imitator of Christ who became a servant (see Rom 15:8, Phil 2:7). While all Christians are called to serve, certain ones are identified as *servants* or *deacons*

in a specialized sense.

If any men desire to be deacons, they "must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons" (1 Tim 3:10). People could serve in a general way without the deacon qualifications, but they could not serve *as deacons*. Criteria must be met before the designation *deacon* applies.

2) Following a list of deacon characteristics, Paul lists two results (3:13) of serving *well* as a deacon. This first is that he attains a high standing. The same word "well" is found here that was used earlier, that is, serving well is something beautiful in God's eyes. Such a deacon ascends to a place of *high standing*! The paradoxical nature of this verse is obvious. The path to exaltation is through humility, not through self-promotion. While the culture around them saw a *diakonos* as a lower person, the early Christians saw it as a description to be coveted. One song writer spoke of "ascending to the height of the bended knee." To be known as a true servant was the height of Christian ambition. Not a false humility, but a genuine servant who sacrifices in service to others.

O that more of us would ascend to such great heights, that we would take our towel and wash each other's feet, in imitation of our Lord! This reflects the example of Christ in Phil 2:9-10, that exaltation follows humility. Would there be any greater accolade than for the Master to say to one of his followers, "Well done, good and faithful servant"?

4) The other result of serving well as a deacon is great confidence in faith. Indeed, it takes great faith to serve well, believing that your self-denial, sweat and tears has eternal value. Indeed, serving well means great sacrifice, most of

which is never seen by human eyes. Yet faith exercised is faith strengthened. So the greater the sacrifice, when done in faith, the more one's confidence in Christ, the true Servant, is strengthened.

The word *confidence* actually carries the sense in the original language of "freedom of speech." In other words, a true servant can speak confidently, he knows whereof he speaks, as it were. Great is the man who actually gives his life to serving others, particularly in the church. He has truly shared the mantle of servanthood, a title that honored Christ Himself.

5) The functioning of deacons is sparsely described in Scripture. The closest thing we have is found in Acts 6:1-6. In the early church the division of responsibility found expression in a group of men being appointed to organize the serving of daily food rations to the needy. While the term *diakonos* is not used as a descriptive title in Acts 6, their work was more of the physical sort, rather than the ministry of the word or prayer. It seems reasonable to see this as a sort of prototype of a developing deacon ministry, which eventually found its way into Paul's teaching (1 Tim 3 and Phil 1:1).

However, since direct teaching about the function of deacons is lacking in Scripture, we do well to not be overly dogmatic in our application. Could it be that in God's wisdom He gave little information so as to leave the church free to implement the role of deacons with considerable freedom? Suffice it to say that it seems the deacons were to be involved in the physical, earthly aspects of serving the body of believers, while the elders were to oversee the overall ministry of the church.



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