



Editor's Note

As I read through the articles in this issue, it struck me that we seem frequently to be presenting lists of suggestions or steps on how to proceed. Is this too much of a good thing? I don't think so! The very name of our publication, "Elders ShopNotes" was designed to emphasize the "shop" or "workshop" aspect of eldering. As much as I enjoy reading theories of design and function of mechanical things, in my own workshop, I want tools and shop manuals that give step by step instructions about building or repairing things.

Thus we seek to find writers that have been doing these various tasks over many years, and can distill them into brief lists of steps on how to proceed. Those who relish philosophy and debate may enjoy such things, but our publication is not the best place to look for them. May the Lord encourage you in your practical approach to the "good work" of being an overseer (1 Tim. 3:1).



Practical Ministry **Moving Beyond Mediocrity**

by Mark Kolchin

Helpful Reminders For Revitalizing the Elders' Meeting

The scene is a far too familiar one: the regularly scheduled elders' meeting begins with a brief, but generalized time of prayer. It is then followed by the usual routine of going around the table, each elder being asked what he would like to discuss. What usually follows ranges from the urgent to the trivial – and everything in between. It may be punctuated with a passionate exchange of differing opinions or it may simply proceed in the typical, unexciting "business as usual" format. A few important items may be discussed at length, but by the end of the meeting, it resembles more of an administrative task force than a spiritual strategic planning and implementation think tank. Unfortunately, the minutia of assembly life often wins the day – the withering details that cause the heads and hands to droop even lower than when the meeting first began as it comes to a rushed and nebulous conclusion.

If this has been your experience in the meetings in which you serve as an elder, take heart - you are not alone! Too many elders' meetings are characterized by such a routine, a routine that needs to be adjusted, if not radically overhauled, if the local church is to make a difference in the world. Considering the gravity of the present decline in our culture, it is incumbent upon all elders to maximize their time, sharpen their focus, and identify and address the significant spiritual issues affecting congregational life. True, there will always be minor "housekeeping" details that need to be addressed, but without excluding the more serious issues that require deeper spiritual dredging. They need to

be brought up, prayerfully examined, discussed and properly dealt with. The vitality and well being of the congregation is at stake, a condition for which the elders will one day have to give an account, Heb. 13:17. If the elders don't do the job, who will?

With this in mind, I would like to offer some helpful suggestions to revitalize and improve the elders' meetings. Here they are:

Prepare Your Heart

Prior to the elders' meeting, each elder should privately commit this meeting to the Lord in prayer. As undershepherds of God's heritage, prayer for everything affecting the local assembly should be the regular exercise of every elder anyway. Since this position was one that was desired (1 Tim 3:1), there should be a readiness to bathe their responsibility in prayer. Done regularly, this can only help to elevate the tone of the meeting and steer it away from the mundane. In so doing, elders can practically demonstrate what Paul exhorted the Philippians to do, to "approve the things that are excellent", Phil. 1:10.

Establish An Agenda

Another helpful reminder for effective elders' meetings is to be prepared with an agenda ahead of time - not *your* agenda, but the elders'! The temptation can arise to come to this meeting without adequate preparation and simply react to the items that are put on the table. Without thoughtful planning on each one's part, elders' meetings will struggle to stay afloat. To facilitate this, elders in some fellowships arrange in advance to collect agenda items in order to assemble and prioritize a master list. This can be done through

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Leadership Principles

Encouraging Evangelists

by Jack Spender

Assembly elders are called "stewards of God" (Tit. 1:7), which means that part of their work is to manage the resources entrusted to them. One of those resources is the spiritual gifts resident in the Lord's people. Gifts are given for service, and the church grows as the believer-priests function using their particular gifts.

One valuable gift, (literally 'gifted person') the evangelist, is referred to in Eph. 4:11 along with the 'pastor,' and the 'teacher,' and describes one who is sent out with good news to share. Although any believer might "do the work of an evangelist," (II Tim. 4:5), not all believers are gifted evangelists.

Living in a world filled with bad news, the church must equip believers who will devote their lives to bringing God's message of love and forgiveness to darkened souls everywhere. Believers must be trained and encouraged, and God has provided gifted evangelists to help with this task. Accordingly, elders must know how to recognize, utilize, and when appropriate, send out evangelists to carry on this important work for the Lord.

Here are some simple suggestions that may help elders succeed:

Some Basics about Evangelists

Identify them: Like all the gifts, evangelists tend to manifest the characteristics of their gift. They show more than ordinary interest in open doors, and bring extra blessing when they function through God's enablement. Elders can help young believers discover their gifts by pointing out the insights gained through watching them, praying for them, and seeking to involve them in the work of the assembly. No single act which results in blessing guarantees a gift, but over time, gift will become more and more evident. (see Prov. 18:16)

Shepherd them: Evangelists are sheep, and need the shepherd care of elders as much as any other saint. Good spiritual food through quality Bible ministry will ground them in the truths of the gospel, the needs of people, the development of a Biblical world view, and methods that allow them to be relevant,

without compromising Scriptural principles. Pray for them. When visiting them, ask them questions about how they see themselves in the life of the assembly, and encourage them. In a word, they need oversight.

Be ready to release them: Believers must be committed to the sovereignty of God in any call to special service. In Acts 13, we read of a number of gifted men laboring together for the Lord as a team. The Lord called two of them to leave their place in the home assembly and go out in a new direction. Presumably, the others were able to carry on the work, thus making room for younger men coming along.

Beyond the Basics

The Bible is full of similarities; things that look the same at first glance, but are different. This is the case with the words "witness" and "evangelist." Much harm can be done by implying that all believers must be evangelists. Quiet saints with 'behind the scenes' gifts, must not be made to feel like 'second class citizens' in God's kingdom.

The fact is, all believers are not evangelists, but all are witnesses. That is, every Christian has a unique, personal story or testimony of how they came to know the Lord, and they should be ready to give an answer about this when asked, (I Pet. 3:15). As in modern day courts of law, the witness responds when questioned.

The evangelist, by contrast, is one who initiates conversations, being divinely enabled to do so. I remember many years ago, going out into the streets one afternoon with a gifted evangelist in a distant country, culturally very different from mine. Knocking at the door of a ramshackle house, we were greeted by a man with a can of beer in his hand and an angry countenance, who threatened us with bodily harm if we didn't leave immediately. You can guess my immediate instinct! But you cannot guess my amazement when seconds later, we found ourselves inside the man's home explaining the things of the Lord. I missed exactly how it happened, but it impressed upon me the truth that spiritual gifts truly are divine enablements.

It is encouraging for the evangelist to understand that God has not only placed each gift in the body with special functions that require special abilities, but that God will, by His Spirit, provide the grace and strength to make the gift effective in accomplishing His purposes.

One essential ingredient in the training of evangelists is given in Eph. 4:11,12. There we read of God's mandate to gifted men, that they are "for the equipping of the saints." Strange as it seems, there are evangelists who apparently have not been taught this! Making a circuit around well established assemblies, they dutifully preach the gospel to congregations filled with believers, but when they move on, the saints are no better equipped to be leading their friends and neighbors to the Lord. One dear older saint observed, "I would not want to say something to confuse them, and make them more lost than they already are." How the saints need to be equipped!

It is a good reminder that no one is irreplaceable; we are all to be "passing the baton" to younger ones coming along. Elders must not allow any believer, no matter how gifted, to have a monopoly on a spiritual gift. In the New Testament assembly, no one can be "the teacher," or "the evangelist," or "the pastor." As the equipping of the saints takes place, God brings to the surface wonderful gifts for the blessing of the body, and it is one of the most important works of elders to ensure that everyone shares in the vision for this. Moreover, evangelists are encouraged when they sense they are valued for training others rather than just doing it all themselves.

When should evangelists be pioneers, and when trainers? A careful study of the book of Acts discloses the interesting fact that there is no record of Paul evangelizing places on return visits! Over and over we read of his team "strengthening the believers," or "strengthening the churches" that were already established. How can this encourage the evangelist?

There is an old saying: "Give a man a fish; feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish; feed him for a lifetime." To imitate the Biblical pattern, the evangelist acts as a pioneer when he is among those who

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Moving Beyond Mediocrity (continued from page 1)

emails or by phone by a designated elder who collects all agenda items. This will help keep the meeting on track and effectively move it along at an even pace. Each elder should certainly be encouraged to keep an ongoing list between meetings so there is not a frantic last minute attempt to quickly put together an agenda.

Budget Your Time

Another important element of effective elders' meetings, and a must if they are to be revitalized, is to adequately budget the time allotted. The length of elders' meetings may vary among local congregations, but one thing is usually the same – items brought up first on the agenda have the luxury of being given a lot more consideration time, while items that come up at the end are time-deprived. This is accentuated when the typical order is routinely followed and the elder who unfortunately is last in line has only minutes to talk about what is on his list. This is why a pre-arranged and prioritized list is so important – it avoids a -sided agenda and keeps the discussion balanced. It is also the reason why the order of discussion should be varied. If this is the format followed, try switching it up and changing the order. In the same vein, also try alternating who leads the discussion each month, quarter or year. It will go a long way toward keeping things fresh.

Keep on Track

Staying on track is also an imperative for effective elders' meetings. We have all experienced the curse of getting off course. The question is asked, "How is brother so and so doing after his surgery?" "Well, he's fine. He is out of rehab but his car is in the shop". To which another elder replies, "Maybe we need to arrange rides for him. *By the way*, have we serviced the church van lately?" Another elder replies, "No, not lately. Who is responsible anyway for servicing the van and why don't we get a maintenance schedule established? This is a problem and we need to fix it". And off the discussion goes into orbit, requiring a lasso a mile long to bring it back. A simple question asking how a person in the assembly is doing ends up going in a completely different direction. And we wonder why we run out of time by the end of the meeting? If we are to make progress on what really needs to get accomplished, it will require disciplined thinking and planning and bringing the discussion back to center. Not easy to do, but critical! It is standard operating procedure in the business world. Why not do it even better in the house of God, which is the "pillar and ground of truth," 1 Tim. 3:15?

Keep Good Notes

Finally, there is a need to record items discussed and decisions rendered if we are to have effective elders' meet-

ings. We so easily forget and need our memories jogged as to the details surrounding certain decisions, especially in the months afterwards. Notes should be taken, duplicated, and stored for easy retrieval. Copies should be promptly provided to each of the elders. A collective "To Do" list with specifics included and a date in which items on the list should be completed should be assembled. Furthermore, efforts should be taken to employ every elder for the tasks at hand. It helps avoid the "armchair elder" syndrome that can characterize many elders' meetings – a lot of talk, but little or no action.

Effective elders' meetings are definitely needed if we are to make any spiritual headway for Christ. These are just a few suggestions for elders to help things run more smoothly in a job that receives very little thanks and can be excruciatingly difficult at times. Regardless, it is a position that should draw from every member of the local church an attitude of acknowledgement, submission and loving respect for those who serve the Lord in this way, Heb. 13:7; 17; 24. Anything that can be done to make it more efficient and more effective will help foster admiration and appreciation for the challenging work in which they are engaged. And for those who faithfully serve in this capacity, keep in mind that through the tears and through the years, the Lord holds out a special reward, a crown of glory that will not fade away, 1 Peter 5:4.



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have not heard and have no preacher. Once there is a nucleus of believers, they must be equipped to do this part of the work of the ministry, and he can become a trainer or coach to help them. Thus, Paul could state: "Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation." (Rom. 15:20).

Conclusion

Encouragement is greatly needed by all who serve the Lord, and to be truly encouraging, words must be more than kindly sentiments; they must have substance. Elders should not be alone in encouraging evangelists. Everyone in the

assembly can get to know them, pray for them, share materially with them, and rejoice with them when fruit comes.

The special encouragement of collaborating with assembly elders in the training of the believers, resulting in an increased love for the lost, cannot be underestimated. It is a valuable contribution that elders can make to the Lord's work, locally, and in the body as a whole, and it is most easily done in an environment where the Lord's work is carried on by ordinary people, where there are no religious "professionals."



Helpful Links

www.apuntes-para-ancianos.org

Apuntes para Ancianos
The Spanish Version of ESN

Have you ever stopped to think about the men and women who have gone before us and the part they played in giving us Holy Scripture? In thinking about some of these great Old Testament saints, I have a yearning to know what propelled them to greatness in God's eyes. They may have had little understanding of what the Lord was doing in their lives at the time. Isn't that often true for us today?

Elkhana and Hannah (1 Sam. 1 - 3) were a godly couple who sought to follow God's law, but sorrow entered their lives when Hannah realized she could not bear children. It looked as if the Lord had not heard Hannah's cry for a child. The Scripture says that Hannah was in great bitterness of soul over the matter. She did not even want to eat! The text tells us that it was the Lord who closed her womb. She desired to have a child of her own more than anything else in the world.

Elkhana was a caring husband who gave a double portion of all he had to his beloved wife. He truly loved her as his own flesh, but there were limitations to what one could do. Finally, in desperation to build a family, Elkhana took Peninnah as his second wife. One can only imagine what family life was like under their roof! Peninnah was jealous because she knew Hannah was the favored wife, one who possessed that meek and quiet spirit that is in the sight of God of great price. Thus, we hear of Hannah being provoked by her rival. John MacArthur notes in his study Bible that Peninnah would "thunder against" Hannah on a regular basis.

These were very dark days for Hannah, as well as for the country at large. Although

the nation of Israel was now in a weakened state, and the judges were corrupt and the priesthood without integrity, each year the family would leave their home in the hills of Ephraim and faithfully make the required trip to Jerusalem, bringing their offerings to the temple. These journeys must have been trying times for Hannah. Imagine how difficult it was for her to see other families going up to the feast surrounded by their children.

Once at the temple, Hannah made a vow to the Lord. She brought her case to the only One who could do anything about her situation. Eli the high priest thought that Hannah was an intoxicated woman, when in reality, she was drowning in her sorrow of heart. Hannah let Eli know she was not enflamed with wine, but rather she was a woman overwhelmed with sadness. We do not know if her husband knew about her vow, but once the priest spoke words of hope and promise to her, she probably shared everything with him.

So Hannah went her way and ate, and was no longer sad. Something had changed! True faith is evidence enough (Heb. 11:1). Rising up early and worshipping the Lord, they began the journey back to their home in Ramah. But now there was a sense of expectancy in the air! Hannah was joyful! They knew as they walked home that the Lord had heard their prayer! In time a son was born. She had asked the Lord for a special child and the Lord answered the prayer of her heart. Samuel was not only a gift to his family, but a blessing to the entire nation whom he served so faithfully for many years. Scripture will bear his name

for all eternity in 1 and 2 Samuel.

Hannah did not go up to the temple again until young Samuel was weaned. Then she took three bullocks, perhaps one to represent each year of Samuel's young life. She brought him to the temple and placed him in the care of Eli. Eli's sons were not good role models for Samuel; the Lord called them wicked. Yet Samuel's parents had great confidence that the Lord was protecting their young lad. They returned home to Ramah while the boy ministered to the Lord in the presence of Eli.

Perhaps the woman in Scripture who best defines motherhood is Hannah. As a diligent mother, she was gifted in using a thread and needle. Each year, she made a new coat to bring him, and she watched with pride as he filled it out. It is interesting to note that Hannah went on to have three sons and two daughters.

As we think about Hannah, we remember some of the other women in Scripture like Sarah, Rachel, Elisabeth and Rebekah who had difficulty bearing children. Oh, the sorrow of the barren womb for those who desire children! Having many children in Scripture was seen as a gift from God. When the Lord gives us children, we should welcome them as His gift, and prize the potential of the next generation!

It is likely that Hannah was a role model for Mary, the mother of our Lord. Could Mary's Magnificat have been inspired by Hannah? Was her song of triumph known and loved by Mary? The humble local gathering of believers is the place where a mighty heritage of heroes of faith is quietly being formed.



THE SMALL PRINT

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