

ELDERS' SHOPNOTES

MINISTRY FOR BUSY ELDERS

Leadership Principles

by Jack Spender

Elders and the Prayer Life of the Church - Pt.2

In the previous article, we looked at some ways that elders could encourage assembly prayer. The focus was mainly corporate, seeking to strengthen the prayer life of the church by encouraging prayer in the home, and by making certain the church is a healthy environment for prayer.

Another area in which elders can make an important contribution to the prayer life of the church is through mentoring younger men in their private prayer lives and ultimately in the ministry or work of prayer in the church. That will be the focus of this article.

An Important Work of Elders

Everyone knows that elders are supposed to be examples to the flock (I Pet. 5:2). But how often has it been stressed that this necessarily includes prayer? It is sometimes said that prayer is not preparation for the battle; it *is* the battle. That's probably an overstatement, but it does make an important point. Most armies going out to war are mainly young men with a few of the older, experienced soldiers leading. They became officers through years of experience, and thus they have a lot to offer.

We know that the disciples of the Lord asked Him to teach them to pray (Lk 11:1), (which He did), and we know that Paul trained Timothy in all aspects of the Lord's work and instructed him to do the same for others (II Tim 2:2). Prayer was one of the priorities of the early church (Acts 2:42). Thus it is reasonable that we should follow the example of those who went before us and whose record is preserved in Scripture. As part of discipleship, elders ought to be instructing younger men about prayer by word and example.

Foundation Truths

In order for this to happen, there are some convictions that must be embraced by those who lead. Perhaps they are obvious, but are worth stating at the outset.

In the first place, church elders must believe strongly in the need to train the next generation for the Lord's work. The classic verse (2 Tim. 2:2) has already been cited, and describes an unbroken chain of godly men to carry on the work. However hard working and gifted, any elder who thinks of himself as irreplaceable will eventually become a liability. Preparing to "pass the baton," as they say in racing events, is an integral part of good leadership.

Secondly, elders must be convinced that training younger people is by its very nature, an active work. (see ESN Nov. 2009). Just going about business as usual and hoping others will absorb practical skills by osmosis simply won't do. There must be the sacrifice of time, good communication with emphasis on listening, and plenty of practical experience in the field for mentoring to be effective.

Thirdly, both elders and young people must understand that prayer is not a spiritual gift any more than are faith or love. Learning to pray is hard work, a discipline involving sacrifice and faith. Having a mentor is not a requirement, but it will yield great dividends when help and encouragement come from one who has already learned the basics. Discipleship and accountability go together.

The Quiet Side of Mentoring

At this point, someone may feel uncomfortable because "I am not an outgoing, public speaker....." Be assured that the greater part of the exercise of prayer can be done in private, i.e., "one-on-one." The mentor is not flaunting his prayer life, but neither is he hiding it. The Lord Jesus

clearly prayed before His disciples at times—we know this because they wrote down what He said. Praying with one or two can be a training time as well as a blessing for all.

Of course elders should ensure that in their public feeding of the flock (either personally or through those they invite), important disciplines of the Christian life such as prayer are well represented. Believers must be taught about the different types of prayer available to them, the various elements of praying in the will of God and great Bible prayers. But those young in the faith also need to learn how to do it for themselves. This is where one-on-one work really shines.

Ideally, spiritual mentoring is going on in the home. But for many, the assembly is the only place of spiritual training. It is sad when the church is so concerned about a polished image that it loses the joy and freshness of the early attempts of young ones to get involved. The assembly is not a stage for actors, but a family and a school for learners.

The Public Side of Mentoring

Beyond the regular meetings on Sunday, there are opportunities for leading in prayer at visitations, in small groups, at special assembly functions and even the giving thanks for food in which training can occur. Much good can come if mentors will give those they are working with small assignments, and then meet with them to go over progress, to answer questions and to make suggestions.

Tips to Help

1. Mentors should be encouragers. Emphasize the positive. Look for small things to commend. Young believers can be very fragile and easily discouraged by sharpness or the feeling that they "can't do anything right."

2. Emphasize courtesy. Others may be waiting to pray so keep your own prayers brief and stick to the

(continued next page)

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Elders and the Prayer Life of the Church - Pt.2 (cont.)

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subject. There will be time in private later for extended prayers. Speak so that others can hear and understand, and ultimately add their "amen." (I Cor. 14:16). Avoid using public prayer to advance a personal agenda or make innuendos about assembly problems.

3. Cultivate simplicity. Prayer expresses dependence upon God. It is not a teaching opportunity or a time to impress other people. It helps to picture oneself standing in the very presence of the Lord Who is asking, "What is it you would like to say to me?"

4. Reverence for God is always in order. We do not speak to One on *our* level, as to a peer, as we would address a fellow student or work mate.

5. The prayers recorded in Scripture are there to help us. We gain depth in our prayer life when we learn to pray for things spiritual and eternal rather than just temporal and temporary. Am I interceding for others in areas of spiritual maturity and godly character?

Once More on the Environment

I am always amazed at the reaction I sometimes get when addressing elders and I mention the word "environment." For example, "The assembly must provide a healthy environment for young men to pray." Why the problem? Maybe it's just the normal suspicion of anything new or different. The dictionary defines environment as the setting in which something takes place. We can certainly understand how the church is

necessarily the setting for certain things, e.g., for its meetings and functions. Elders must face the fact that God gives us the responsibility to be sure things which honor Him may in fact take place unhindered by senseless traditions or a critical spirit.

Are the believers supporting the elders as they provide mentoring for the younger ones by sharing words of encouragement? An environment of thankfulness and appreciation is a healthy setting. Are schedules planned to involve young men as appropriate? Sure, it may be quicker for the meeting chairman to open the meeting in prayer himself. But here is a valuable opportunity to use a young brother. How often do elders take a young man along when visiting a sick person or shut-in, and then ask him to give a brief report at the prayer meeting?

There are many creative ways to foster a training environment. And it won't do to simply hope all this will happen! God has entrusted

good things to His people and told them to "Occupy until I come." One of those resources is youth. We dare not wrap His gifts in a napkin and hide them away, but with planning and diligence, we can present to Him what He entrusted to us - with interest!



*Jack Spender
Bethany, CT*

Qualifications

by Ian Taylor

Elders and their Children

We need to remember that our children are even more important than next Sunday's message.

“He[an elder] must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)” (1 Timothy 3:4-5).

One of the qualifications of an elder is to have his family in order which can, inadvertently, produce unwanted results in an "Elder's Kid." Sometimes the parents reinforce this standard, not necessarily because of a spiritual conviction, but because the behavior of the child may tarnish the father's "image" as a spiritual leader. This becomes an overshadowing motivation to "legally" force spirituality into the child and, especially in the teen years, can cause rebellion in the child and a rejection of all that the father represents.

Hijme Stoffels in a lecture entitled "Preachers' Kids are the Worst" made this interesting observation: "Rebellion against the imposed role-model and the struggle for a personal identity

have led many clergy children astray/far from home, both geographically and mentally... Rebellious behavior in the teenage years often was a cry for attention. More than other working fathers the minister had the opportunity to work at home, but the door to his study often was impenetrable for his children."

While we understand there is a great difference between a clergyman and an elder, some of the attitudes and principles involved can run parallel. Our children are living in a world that is changing as fast as the technology they are forced to use for their education, relaxation and relationships. While the internet is a useful tool for their school research, they also have texting, computer games and a seemingly limitless quantity of apps and websites, all vying for their attention. All these easily draw them into a web of worldliness that can destroy any spiritual appreciation.

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Elders and their Children (cont.)

We as parents need to recognize the signs and make sure that we give quality time to our children because they are a primary part of our ministry. It is hard when we are in the middle of message preparation with our thoughts flowing, to be interrupted by a child who wants dad to come and throw a baseball or kick a soccer ball. We need to remember that our children are even more important than next Sunday's message. When we see them as not *only* family, but an integral part of our ministry, we will make time for them so that as they mature, they will seek to follow the example we have set for them.

The Apostle Paul reminded Timothy to follow what he had learned from those who set examples for him, "*Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures*" (2 Tim. 3:14-15). He was referring to Timothy's grandmother Lois, his mother Eunice, and Paul himself as Timothy's spiritual father.

Every child is different and we need to help each one according to the specific needs of that child. I am not seeking to give a formula for raising a perfect child, but there are four steps in the Lord Jesus' formation that we can use as a guide to help us train our children. "*And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men*" (Luke 2:52).

1. Jesus grew in wisdom.

The book of Proverbs gives some sound practical advice regarding growth in wisdom which of course begins with the "fear of God." "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding*" (Prov. 9:10).

As part of character building we should focus on helping the child to have a teachable spirit, (Prov. 1:5); a hate of wickedness, (8:7-8); a need for humility, (11:12); obedience, (13:1); clear thinking, (14:8); and emotional health. (19:8). Learning these will result in happiness, (3:13-17); spiritual growth, (15:24); and future joy to the parents (10:1; 29:3).

2. Jesus grew in stature.

Physical development is an important part of the child's life which can take some of our precious time. It could mean working out with a child as he prepares for a sporting event at school. When the event or game takes place we should make every effort to be there to watch and encourage him, showing interest in this aspect of the child's life. I know of elders or commended workers who have not allowed their children to participate in school sports, quoting the verse "*For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things*" (1 Tim.

4:8). Children growing up need physical activity to help them toward maturity. Knowing how to work with others as a team is a real help when elders are discussing problems. A strong body is a tremendous advantage when trekking as a missionary through the jungle, as well as providing stamina for serving the local church many hours a week.


3. Jesus increased in favor with God.

Growing spiritually is obviously one of the most important of these four steps. Every child is different and so we need to know the character of our children along with their strengths and weaknesses so that we can help them. Some will be headstrong and we will need patience as we seek to instruct them; others will be tolerant and will be ready to follow a Bible reading plan; some may be apathetic and will need some sort of stimulation to spike their interest. The best teaching tool is your own example. Don't try to force a daily Bible reading plan if they don't see you in the Word every day. Above all, be the same Christian example at home that you are at the chapel.

4. Jesus increased in favor with man.

This relates to social development. Daniel was a young man who suffered captivity and estrangement from his family, but his early years had taught him faith and the importance of social skills. He was courteous but firm in his beliefs, (Dan 1:8); he related well to his superiors, (1:8-10); he was forthright and respectful, (2:14-18); he did not refrain from speaking the truth, (5:17-28); and he enjoyed true friendships, (2:17-18, 49).

We are responsible to provide a happy, stable home as we build our families on the Rock (Matt. 7:24). We establish good family relationships through wisdom and understanding (Prov. 24:3-5). We strengthen our relationships with love and respect, (Psalm 128), as we seek to stand together in unity, (Matt.12:25).

Our love for our children should be unconditional, avoiding favoritism that will ultimately cause pain and suffering as it did in the family of Isaac and Jacob. 

Ian Taylor, originally from Australia, served as a missionary in Colombia, S. America, from 1968. Later he move to Florida and helped start a Spanish assembly, and presently serves as a commended worker and on a number of Christian ministry boards

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Do Not Become Weary

PUBLISHING INFORMATION

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“Don't be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. **Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up**” Galatians 6:6-9 (emphasis added).

As elders' wives at times we can feel “weary in doing good.” From our perspective there may be little to show for years of service. Like a heavy fog from the ocean enveloping the land, a dull discouragement can seep slowly into our souls.

Whether in small or large ways we throw up our hands in despair, sometimes privately giving up. The verses above clearly teach us how to avoid being caught in the trap of deception, discouragement and destruction.

There is a warning here: “Don't be deceived.” We may not always see the change of heart in those we work with or the desired results in our service. The deception has to do with not believing a principle upon which God's work is based. Sowing and reaping. We simply sow (serve) in the Spirit, and then we will reap in God's time. He is never mocked.

Sowing and reaping is the analogy used. It reminds me of a beautiful maple tree that was planted in our front yard twenty years ago. This summer the leaves were thin and sickly, and prematurely began to drop. We called in a tree doctor who declared our tree to be dying. Why would an otherwise healthy tree die in one season? The answer went back twenty years to the day the tree was planted. The roots of the young tree were tightly wrapped for transporting from the nursery. No one took the time to loosen the roots. Years later the twisted roots grew back onto the lower part of the trunk of the tree, choking and restricting the life-giving sap from flowing to limbs.

How I sow (serve) is important. God's servant Elijah said, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty... I am the only one left...” 1Kings 19:14. We can sow self-centered pity along with our service for God by doubting that God is good or by being angry at a person or situation. This is sowing to please our sinful nature. We feel justified and comfortable with these attitudes. It may even feel good at the moment to ride the wave of discouragement but we always reap what we sow, and pride, self-pity and anger are seedlings that will grow deep roots around our souls choking the life of the Spirit in us.

Emotional reactions to serving God must be intentional in order to be fruitful. First, we need to resist the roots of sinful thoughts and attitudes by relying on God's strength and forgiveness, and by yielding to His truth. Then, like Joshua's challenge, we must choose whom we will serve, God or the sinful nature. Then by faith, taking God at His Word, there will be a harvest in His time.



Mary Gianotti

Dear sister, do not become weary in serving our Lord.



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E-mail: esn@bible-equip.org
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Voice: (905) 294-2679

Publisher/Editor: Chuck Gianotti
Editorial assistance: Ruth Rodger
Spanish Translation: John Field
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“Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers ...”

1 Peter 5:2a NIV