

# ELDERS' SHOPNOTES

MINISTRY FOR BUSY ELDERS

*Biblical Qualifications*

*by Chuck Gianotti*

## *Confessions of a Doubting Elder*

**W**hat do you do with self-doubts as an elder? A godly elder, advanced in years asked me once, "Do you ever doubt your salvation?" My answer was youthfully quick (I was 35 years old at the time), contained a hint of self-confidence and suspicious judgmentalism. "No," I said, "my salvation was one of those 'lightning bolt out of heaven—on the road to Damascus' kind of conversions. There is not, nor has there ever been, any doubt in my mind." Curious as to why he asked, I turned it back on him. He answered, "Yes, at times I have doubted." I about fell off my ladder (we were working on a barn roof at the time). How could a highly respected, godly man who grew up in a godly church and was now in his 70's be guilty of doubting something so basic? It caused much confusion in me, how something like this could be.

I had to conclude that his honesty was disarming. The second thing to hit me was the question of how honest I was about my spiritual walk. Sure I had never doubted my salvation, but to be honest, I had doubts in other areas of my Christian walk and leadership. Could God really use someone like me, with all my faults and weaknesses (things which seemed to me to be well-covered up in public). In a sense, that seemed to be a more "spiritual" kind of doubt. But my judgment of this esteemed older brother (who is now rejoicing in the Lord's presence) was tempered.

On one level the opposite of faith is disobedience; at another level the opposite of faith is *doubt*. To the degree that a person does not walk in faith, he is walking in doubt. He is living as though something else was more worthy of his trust than God; he

doubts that Christ really is sufficient for complete and undivided loyalty and obedience. So in that sense, I was no different than my elder brother who at times doubted his salvation. Exactly how loyal was I to my Lord Jesus Christ? Which brings me to the upper room!

### **Every Disciple Doubts at Times**

Every one of the disciples had that moment of doubt concerning their loyalty to Christ. How could they not when we read, "*Jesus was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples. As they were eating, He said, 'Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me.' Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, 'Surely not I, Lord?'"* (Matthew 26:20-22). While we know from hindsight that the name Judas has gone down in history as a nefarious appellation, nonetheless the whole band of disciples were put on the defensive. Less than a week in Jerusalem and Jesus speaks of betrayal. Dinner, particularly the Passover meal, was supposed to be a happy time, remembering God's goodness and redemption of Israel. It was a celebration of their relationship with the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, a relishing in their freedom from Egyptian slavery many years previous and a fanning of the flame of hope that they would someday be freed from Roman oppression.

The disciples had been riding the wave of populism. The sights and sounds of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Zechariah's donkey—all must have reverberated in their minds, overwhelming the overtures of oppo-

sition against Him and them. Failure of Jesus' mission was simply not an option they entertained in the least. Certainly success had been the Lord's doing, but their loyal support would help fulfill the mission's destiny!

However, Jesus was not happy. In the middle of the meal, He lays a bomb. Until now His pronouncements of woe had been directed only at the religious hypocrites who opposed Him. But now He leveled His sights against one of His intimates, one of the hand-chosen disciples—better if that one had not been born! Take special note, He says, "*One of you will betray me.*" He had mentioned before that He was going to suffer and die, and they had the same reaction then, they were "deeply grieved" (Matthew 17:22-23).

In their defensiveness, they could have been reacting to the thought that Jesus would even question their allegiance to Him: "How could the Master think that of me!" Another possibility is that they could have been grieving that one of their fellow disciples could be messing up the plan for liberation. Luke recorded the interpersonal tension simmering within the group, "*... there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest.*" (Luke 22:24).

### **Fear of Exposure**

A third possibility could have been a genuine fear in each one of them, that the duplicity of their hearts was about to be exposed. Every one of them had outwardly demonstrated sacrifice, having left their homes and families to follow Christ—but they all had the secret things of the heart. It was not until after the resurrection that Thomas' doubting heart was exposed.

*(continued next page)*

JULY 2011  
VOLUME 12 NUMBER 4

*Confessions of a Doubting Elder (cont.)*

*We, as elders, need to continually go back to the child-like faith that we have been called to.*


James' weakness of resolve would shortly become evident when with the others he fell asleep on the job during the one time Jesus asked the disciples to pray. Peter stuck his foot in his mouth so many times that when Jesus shortly after said he would deny Him three times, Peter contradicted Jesus strenuously—as one does when in self-denial. They all abandoned Him within 24 hours.

No wonder that every one of them asked, "Surely not I, Lord?" The question begs for relief in each heart, relief from self-doubting assertions masking an unsure heart! Fear strikes deep. What a conflict of emotions and will. Like they were really saying, "Please tell me it is not me that You see as a betrayer!" Which of any of us does not harbor secret, hidden places of the heart where our loyalty wavers. Which of us can say with absolute assurance that we are loyal and would remain loyal even to death?

When Judas asked his hypocritical question, mimicking the others, "Surely it is not I?" he added "Rabbi" instead of "Lord." Jesus may have been a rabbi, but was not at all Judas' master! The Lord responded by simply pointing out the sourness of those words in the betrayer's mouth. And as we know from John 13, that despite his later remorse, this pseudo-disciple did not wrestle with his conscience at that time, but immediately departed after this exposure in the

eyes of Jesus. The others apparently did not notice, wrapped up as they were in their own fears. Peter's heart must have been horror struck when Jesus later told him he would deny Jesus three times.

**Like Babes in Faith Again**

So what do we do with our doubts about ourselves, whether concerning our assurance of salvation or our loyalty to Christ? What do we do with the exposure in Christ's eyes of our shortcomings and failures, and even our sins? Do they disqualify us as elders? The answer is as simple as what we teach to new believers. We, as elders, need to continually go back to the child-like faith that we have been called to: "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude" (Col 2:6-7). We have been forgiven, set apart, and rooted in Christ. He is building us up and we must never forget that we are a "work-in-progress." Even elders need to be reminded of that truth and walk in Christ! 



*Chuck Gianotti  
Rochester, NY*

*Leadership Principles* *by Jack Spender*  
***Elders and the Prayer Life of the Church***

*Given the great needs of our present world, we might have expected to find the same urgency in prayer in the church today. But such is not the case.*

One cannot read the book of Acts without being impressed by the prominent place given to prayer in the early church. On almost every page, we find some record of the apostles or the church affirming their dependence on the Lord through prayer. Not surprisingly, there are also numerous indicators of blessing as souls were saved, and the power of the Lord was displayed in the lives of ordinary people. No wonder the church grew!

Given the great needs of our present world, we might have expected to find the same urgency in prayer in the church today. But such is not the case. In most places, there is a noticeable decline in both the quality and quantity in the prayer life of the church. We hear leaders lamenting that few are being saved, and there is little power to resolve the problems that assail us. When we take a look at the average church prayer meeting, it is frequently brief and mechanical; often a sort of "PS" on other meetings; a watered down token time that can hardly pass for "The church at prayer." Of course there are

bright exceptions to this, but they are certainly not the rule.

Over the years, many have written convincingly on the important place prayer should have in the life of the individual believer. The special emphasis of this article will be to consider how church elders can encourage the assemblies in which they labor to become praying communities.

**A Starting Point**

"Square One," we might say, is the conviction that prayer is Biblical. The Lord Jesus prayed often, commanded His followers to pray and told them that apart from Him they could accomplish nothing (John 15:5) He built such a strong resolve to pray into His disciples that prayer became one of the four activities in which the early Christians "continued steadfastly" (Acts 2:42) Subsequent Scriptures tell us to come with boldness to the throne of grace, (Heb. 4:16), and warn that if we lack something, it is probably because we do not ask,

*(continued next page)*

## *Elders and the Prayer Life of a Church (cont.)*

(James 4:2), as our God rewards those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). Every elder should ask himself if he thoroughly believes these things and is committed to modeling them in his own life, and teaching them to the saints.

If any real progress is to be made in reviving the assembly prayer meeting, serious thought must be given to the place of prayer in the private lives of families and individuals. The elders as mature believers must set a good example. They must be known as praying men who place strong emphasis on prayer in homes and in private devotions.

Some simple questions are appropriate. Are the Christians beginning each day with the Lord? Are times in the Word and prayer a regular part of family devotions in the home? Does family attendance at the prayer meeting carry the same degree of commitment as attending the Lord's Supper or other meetings?

Such questions lead naturally to similar questions about the prayer life of the church. When needs and problems arise in the home and in the church is there an immediate desire to "Take it to the Lord in prayer?" Does the church consult the Lord about its decisions and problems? Are younger believers learning to pray? Is there a balance of requests for spiritual as well as temporal needs?

It is futile to expect the church prayer meeting to move the heavens if the believers themselves have no heart for prayer. If the leaders of the church take the subject lightly, then only the most mature saints will have disciplined prayer lives,.

### **Practical Thinking**

Assuming the above concerns are being addressed, what can elders do to make prayer a solid part of the life of the church? This is no place for gimmicks and superficial appeals to the carnal nature. Prayer is work and, rightly done, it is hard work. But let the work of prayer derive from the spiritual warfare that attends it; not from neglect of good planning and consideration for the needs and constraints of the flock. In this, elders can play a major role by providing good leadership. Here are some basic suggestions:

Choose a time and a place that is workable for the believers. There is no special virtue attached to being uncomfortable. In keeping with other meetings of the assembly (see Acts 2:42), the goal should be frequent, if possible weekly prayer. If the desire is to involve younger believers and even children, it can pay large dividends to meet at times in a home. In some places, a brief meditation from the Scripture is given. But this should be brief. The goal of the meeting is prayer, not another Bible study with a few prayers at the end.

Requests can be submitted orally or written down. It is a great help if all will make notes of the requests, and continue to pray for them throughout the week. If the meeting is to move along without getting bogged down, it will help to have an elder or some brother with administrative abilities guide things along. Allow plenty of time for covering the needed ground, but stick to the schedule you have chosen. It also helps if people learn that the meeting will not be closed until all the requests have been brought before the Lord.

One sometimes overlooked item is the importance of publicly acknowledging answered prayer. Few things encourage prayer like answered prayer, so time should be made for praise and giving of thanks. Some have found it helpful to begin prayer meetings with a time of thanksgiving and praise for blessings received. For "milestone blessings," a special evening of praise and fellowship can be appropriate. Remember, one goal is to edify the church, and that means prodding those still skeptical about the value of prayer to be willing to learn.

### **Abounding**

Once it is becoming established in the minds of the people that serious prayer is a regular and dynamic part of their own local assembly, there are a number of things the elders can do to keep the fire burning. The church is not only a place of prayer; it is a place to learn to pray as a part of discipleship. Young believers should be encouraged and given opportunity to pray. Some churches have found small groups meeting in homes a useful tool for this, since people will open up among a few close friends when they may not make an attempt in a large group.

Another good work is to gently lead toward prayer that has some spiritual depth. Too often, prayers are devoted to temporal needs such as healing or possessions. Reading the great prayers in the New Testament will show the kinds of things we ought to be praying for one another. Paul's prayers in Ephesians 1 and 3 are examples worth emulating.

Attention should also be given to a well-rounded prayer life. In 1 Timothy 2:1, Paul mentions some of the different types of prayers and the context shows that this includes the church at prayer. Every believer should understand and practice the giving of thanks and making intercession for one another in addition to making personal requests.

Finally, an evening devoted to prayer can be a wonderful time for friendship and relationship building. In our assembly, we share a meal planned by several families after the prayer meeting, so that prayer is never

*If any real progress is to be made in reviving the prayer meeting, serious thought must be given to the place of prayer in the private lives of families and individuals..*


*Every believer should understand and practice the giving of thanks and making intercession for one another in addition to making personal requests.*

*(continued next page)*

perceived by the young people as an unpleasant task but as a time to enjoy communication with the Lord and good friends.

Special Benefits for Shepherds

Nothing can outweigh the assurance that we have pleased the Lord. But elders can derive personal joy from the knowledge that they are working together in a healthy, growing assembly to which prayer is a major contributor. There are other benefits, too. The prayer meeting can be a time when elders tune in to the felt needs of the people. It is a time when they prove they are not heads of the church but truly under shepherds dependent upon the Chief Shepherd for everything.

As a fellowship of believers lifts its gaze from the mundane cares and problems of this world, and begins to really pray for one another with the concerns of "the heavens," there will be a growing sense that the church is pursuing that to which it has been called. And of course, this will likely be marked by increased spiritual warfare. But that's a subject for another day! 



Jack Spender  
Bethany, CT

Nothing can outweigh the assurance that we have pleased the Lord.

Wives' Corner


by Ruth Spender

Under Construction

My husband and I undertook a renovation project in our home earlier this year. We contacted a reputable contractor who had been highly recommended. We told him what we were hoping to do and gave him an idea of the time frame in which we needed to have the work done. After three months with not much movement, we realized this man was not really listening to us. Since the clock was ticking and we were not sure what we should do, we went back to the Lord in prayer. Did He want us to move ahead or not? To our amazement the answer was forthcoming. Yes, we were to move ahead, but under a new contractor.

Work quickly began. Our lives were turned upside down as we started to tear down walls and discard the old rubbish, replacing it with new materials. What a mess we had for several weeks. At times we grew weary and just wanted to wave a magic wand and have everything instantaneously put right. But since things like that don't happen in the real world, patience was required to see the plans on the blueprint unfold at the right time. This process seemed slow and arduous.

In thinking about this, I began to see the parallels between the physical work going on in our home and the spiritual work the Lord is doing in each of our lives. As the divine Contractor, God truly knows our needs and He cares deeply about our spiritual well being. He is committed to seeing us conformed to the image of His Son. This journey has its ups and downs. The chipping, the chiseling and the sanding of our rough edges hurt, but it is a necessary part of reconstruction. He wants to see us steadily growing from glory to glory as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18. As we persevere in this calling ourselves, do we exercise patience in our interaction with others when they may be going through difficult times? We need to encourage one another and so much the more as we see the day approaching.

Unlike our earthly dwelling, this remodeling project will benefit us for all eternity. One day we will praise Him for His work in our lives. Wouldn't it be nice if we could give Him the sacrifice of praise even as we pass through this reconstruction here and now? 



Ruth Spender

As the divine Contractor, God truly knows our needs and He cares deeply about our spiritual well being.

Elders' SHOPNOTES is published bi-monthly in English and Spanish. We exist to serve elders, for whom time is at a premium. These short articles can be read in brief "sittings" and are intended to provide foundational and practical teaching from a biblical perspective.

E-mail subscriptions: visit our web site at: [www.bible-equip.org/esn](http://www.bible-equip.org/esn). Issues will be sent via e-mail as an attachment which can be printed down or read online. Feel free to pass ESN on to others. E-mail subscriptions (as opposed to "postal-mail") help us reduce the costs in publishing ESN.

Postal-mail subscriptions: If you are unable to access the internet conveniently, write us at the address below and we will send it via postal-mail.

Group subscriptions are available via postal-mail. Please indicate how many your group wishes to receive.

For Spanish subscriptions, go to [www.apuntes-para-ancianos.org](http://www.apuntes-para-ancianos.org).

Subscription fee. We trust the Lord for the funds to publish ESN. If you would like to be one of the instruments God uses to support this ministry, please mail your gifts to the address below, payable to: C.R. Gianotti. Feedback/comments are welcomed.

Back issues of ESN can be found on our web-site archives.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Elders' ShopNotes  
c/o 27 Watchman Court  
Rochester, N.Y. 14624 U.S.A.  
[www.bible-equip.org/esn](http://www.bible-equip.org/esn)

For English version:

E-mail: [esn@bible-equip.org](mailto:esn@bible-equip.org)  
Voice: (585) 350-9276

For Spanish version:

E-mail: [dmasuello@sympatico.ca](mailto:dmasuello@sympatico.ca)  
Voice: (905) 294-2679

Publisher/Editor: Chuck Gianotti  
Editorial assistance: Ruth Rodger  
Spanish Translation: John Field  
Spanish Editor: Daniel Masuello  
Layout, Technical Asst: Sherri Jason

The specific Scripture versions used in ESN articles are indicated at the first bible quotation in each article.

Note: All words referring to God have the initial letter capitalized. While the original languages of the Bible do not use capitalization, this is the convention in some translations but not in others. So at times there may be inconsistencies in usage in ESN articles.

© Copyright Bible Equip Ministries, 2011. Permission is freely granted for making copies of ESN articles provided no changes are made to the content.

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers ..."

1 Peter 5:2a NIV