



Editor's Note

ShopNotes focuses on providing practical teaching for elders of the local church. For a fuller discussion of the biblical basis for an elder form of leadership and the New Testament Church see www.newtestamentchurch.com (maintained by Jack Spender). For articles dealing with a variety of doctrinal and practical issues, see www.bible-equip.com (maintained by Chuck Gianotti).

Although most articles in ESN are aimed at elders, some may be suitable for passing on to others. For example, Jack Spender's article on decisions in the local church could be read by everyone in the fellowship, to help them understand how decisions are made. The articles on

preaching would be good for any who aspire to communicate God's word effectively.

Fred Smith's article is written to a broader audience than just the church, but much of it applies to believers in the church. The poem "Touch of the Master's Hand" is a constant reminder to never give up on any of God's believers.

As an elder, providing resources like these can extend your ministry beyond the spoken word. In fact, a very important shepherding role is not only protecting God's people from false teaching, but also providing good resources in readily understandable and usable forms.

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Practical Ministry

Excellence in Preaching (Part 3)

by Chuck Gianotti

Preaching God's word is not easy! Anyone can read God's word and make comments on it publicly. That is not the same as preaching it. Paul had something more in mind when he commanded Timothy and every preacher after him: "Preach the word." (2 Timothy 4:2 NIV). And, we might add, it should be preached well, for we are communicating "the word" which is the truth about our God, whose name is "excellent" (Ps. 8:1 NKJV).

We have seen from previous articles in this series that the preacher needs to consider his own spiritual disciplines as he prepares to preach the word. It is also clear from the example of our Lord Jesus Christ and the writers of the New Testament, that the preacher likewise needs to take into consideration his listeners.

Preaching of the word should be relevant.

The word of God is relevant. But, we need to show it's relevancy to our listeners where they are in their spiritual walk. For example, preaching a message about commitment and sacrifice for the Lord may completely miss people who are struggling with discouragement. We need to know our audience well, like Paul did on the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-23) or like Peter did with the persecuted believers scattered around the eastern Mediterranean (1 Peter 1:1).

Preaching of the word should be balanced.

In the life of the local church, there needs to be a constant flow of the "bread and butter" ministry of the word. Over time, the major truths of scripture should be covered, not just an endless succession of exposition on the finer points of doctrine. In every congregation there is a mixture of newer and more mature believers. If you target the mature believer all the time, you will lose the newer believer. Also, it is easy to assume the people know more than they really do. The preacher needs to take them from what they know, to what they do not yet know, so that there is a well

rounded understanding of God and His truth. Again, you need to know your audience.

Preaching of the word should be interesting.

Granted, the Holy Spirit is the one who stirs up the hearts, but the preacher should keep in step with the Spirit. Howard Hendricks used to say, "Nothing is worse than to bore people with God's word." This is not a matter of being witty or eloquent. You must understand the real need of the people when you are preaching the word of God to them. Resist the temptation to just throw the word out without being concerned for how the people respond. It is your job as preacher to get the people to listen. How can you do that?

A well known principle for making communication interesting is to anticipate the questions people will have in their minds concerning your subject. They have three main questions, from which should flow the major thrust of your message. Here they are:

What does it mean? We usually assume our listeners are asking this question and therefore many sermons are shaped as explanations of a passage or topic. The best way to explain something is to begin with where the listeners are in their understanding of spiritual truths. It may involve interpreting words, phrases and ideas, using words, phrases and ideas they are already familiar with.

Take, for example, the phrase "to appropriate God's grace." If you are speaking to mature Christians who have had a good deal of teaching, this brief phrase packs a large concept. Newer believers may have no clue what that means. Remember, during most preaching services, the listener can't stop and ask, "What do you mean by that?"

"If a trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle. So it is with you. Unless

*You need to know
your audience well.*

(Continued on page 4)

In order for the local church to carry out its work, there must be some dependable, consistent method for making decisions. Many churches address this need by holding a business meeting in which the members can vote and thus the majority rules. Sound harmless? Aren't we always hearing the positive side of living in a democracy from the news media? The serious Christian however, wants to know what Scripture has to say.

A Look at the Acts

When we read the book of Acts we discover that the early Christians had larger concerns than simply solving a problem and getting on with the work at hand—concerns like discerning the mind of the Lord, and preserving the unity of the body. A classic passage for study reveals the handling of the doctrinal problem by the so-called Jerusalem council in Acts 15. After much discussion and testimony on the question of the place of Moses' law in the salvation of Gentile believers, the apostles and elders reached a conclusion and wrote letters to inform the churches.

Two points in the letter written to the churches stand out. In verse 25, the literal wording is: "It seemed good to us, becoming of one mind...." (KJV) or we might render it: "having come to one accord...." By using the verb "to become" the writers acknowledged that something now existed that had not been there before; i.e. a unanimous conviction on the matter.

Secondly, in framing a concluding application for the young churches to follow, we find in verse 28 the words: "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...." Placing the Holy Spirit first shows that this position to which all had come was God's mind in the matter from the beginning and through some

effort had now become the mind of the believers. What an uplifting perspective on problem solving! Christians working together to discover the mind of Christ.

Is it unrealistic for churches today to solve problems and decide issues this way? Not if every believer values God's will in every decision above his own. Space does not allow us to survey passages like Phil. 1:27; 2:2; 3:15; 4:2 that appeal for oneness of mind among believers.

Blessings

Consider the benefits of seeking unanimity. Elders may be wise, but they are finite in their wisdom. In depending on the Head of the church for guidance, they appeal to One who is omniscient to disclose His will in any matter. As the believers share in this process, and see it lived out in the life of the church, healthy discipleship training occurs. Then patience is learned, even when our flesh finds waiting on the Lord distasteful. Speed is not the goal. Rich spiritual protection comes from knowing and embracing both the Lord's will and His timing.

Objections to leading by unanimity

Two objections are common. Some people refer to Acts 14:23 to justify congregational voting in the church. Doesn't the Greek word there meaning "to lift the hand" support the idea of voting? Actually, it does not. The literal rendering is "And having appointed for them in every church elders...." Clearly, Paul and Barnabas are the subjects who did the appointing. William Hoste writes: "There is indeed something grotesque in the idea of Paul and Barnabas 'electing by a show of hands.'" The word used should bear its normal meaning of 'pointing out.' The apostles would recognize

and be able to point out those who were qualified as this was a return visit to this area, time having elapsed in which evidence of suitability would now be manifest.

Proponents of church voting ought to ask themselves how often in scripture or society has the majority been right? The passion of personal desires and the influence of friends or family members make the objectivity of the crowd a poor choice for the basis of determining truth.

The other objection to decision making by unanimity of the leadership is the charge that a dissenting brother can hold back the work of God. This can be a serious problem if not handled carefully. After faithfully following the process of investigation, discussion, study of the Word and prayer, elders ought to ask anyone who dissents from the proposed course of action if his objections are based on Biblical principle or personal scruple. If the former, he should be able to produce relevant scriptures rightly applied. This will indicate that oneness has not been reached and further waiting on the Lord is necessary. If the latter, he should be asked to give his blessing to the rest who are convinced that the mind of the Lord has been discovered and who desire to move forward. It is important in building any leadership team that every brother be agreed on some means of distinguishing between objections based on Biblical principle and objections that reflect personal preference. In this way, long stalemates and stagnation of the Lord's work are avoided.

It isn't easy to put aside the interests and viewpoints of self and earnestly seek together for God's thoughts on any question. But there are rich rewards to both the process and the result for those who will accept the disciplines of seeking the mind of Christ.



The Touch of the Master's Hand

by Myra B. Welch

'Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer
Thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
But he held it up with a smile.
"What am I bidden, good folk?" he cried,
"Who'll start the bidding for me?
A dollar, a dollar"—then "Two!" "Only two?"
"Two dollars, and who'll make it three?"
"Three dollars once, three dollars twice
Going for three"—but no—
From the room, far back, a gray-haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow,
Then, wiping the dust from the old violin,
And tightening the loosened strings,

He played a melody pure and sweet
As sweet a caroling angel sings.
The music ceased, and the auctioneer,
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said, "What am I bidden for the old violin?"
And he held it up with the bow.
"A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?"
Two thousand! And who'll make it three?
Three thousand, once, three thousand, twice;
And going, and gone", said he.
The people cheered, but some of them cried,
"We do not understand.
What changed its worth?" Swift came the reply.
"The touch of the master's hand."

And many a man with life out of tune,
And battered and scarred with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd,
Much like the old violin.
A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine,
A game—he travels on.
He's "going" once, and "going" twice—
He's "going"—and almost "gone."
But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
Never can quite understand
The worth of a soul and the change that's
wrought
BY THE TOUCH OF THE
MASTER'S HAND.



Mentoring Women: Characteristics of a Mentor (Part 2)

by Mary Gianotti

One of the greatest privileges of being a Christian woman in the local church today is the opportunity to teach and train younger women. In the last issue we discussed, why mentoring should be a part of our ministry. In the past the thought of meeting with a younger woman to teach and train her would have struck terror in my heart. Thoughts like, "I may not know all the answers" or "what do I have to offer," would loom like an ugly giant and paralyze me from doing anything. I'm thankful that God's Word provides a short list of qualities in Titus 2:3-5 that should characterize the mentor.

The first characteristic is living in a reverent way that honors and respects God, His Word and His people. We should not compartmentalize our lives. By that I mean preparing the evening meal is just as reverent an activity as preparing a Sunday School lesson. God wants all aspects of life to be surrendered to Him. Another aspect of reverence is to value all people equally. In our church we have women who are single moms, doctors, homemakers and educators. God calls me to treat each with respect and love and have no favorites.

The second requirement is that a mentor

should not slander others. What we say is so important. Encouraging and building others up should be second nature to us. The woman who gossips and speaks negatively is settling for a counterfeit intimacy in her relationships with others. The root word for slander is *diabolus* or *devil*. God takes what

A mentor lives in a reverent way that honors and respects God, His word and His people.

we say about others seriously, we should too.

For years I would skip over the third point thinking it didn't apply to me. "Do not be addicted to much wine" was not a problem in my life. I was too quick to write it off. This verse indicates how not to cope with the problems of life. Many Christian women escape reality by doing a variety of things. Racking up the credit card, excessive reading, undisciplined eating, watching soap operas and unnecessary sleeping are just a few ways we drown out the problems and

pain in life. Instead of depending on the Lord's strength we are in effect "addicted to much wine." The woman who teaches and trains younger women should be characterized by turning to the Lord in her times of need.

Lastly we should be known for teaching what is good. This is assuming we are reading, and studying God's Word. As mentioned earlier, not knowing how to answer a question or where to find just the right verse made me fearful. It seemed better to not get involved than to look dumb. The problem with this is God has commanded me to be teaching and training young women. I have learned to accept the fact that there are many times when I do not know the answer to a question or my mind draws a blank on an appropriate verse. That's okay, I simply say "I don't know the answer, but I will find out." It is such a relief to be honest and it drives me back to the Word for some self-study, which is always rewarding.

As an elder's wife and a Christian woman seeking to obey the command to mentor women it's good to be reminded what God expects. Consider these four things, are they reflected in your life?



Leadership Principles

Motivation or Manipulation?

by Fred Smith, Sr.

It has been said the difference between motivation and manipulation is the quenching of thirst. If so, the key for leaders is to look for thirsty people and identify their thirst. Effective motivators ask themselves, *What kind of water do I have to satisfy that kind of thirst?* How can we bring out the best in people?

1. Establish a friendly atmosphere.

When we've genuinely motivated someone, we can look that person in the eye and know we have an honest, friendly relationship between us.

2. Enjoy people's uniqueness. Being friends is beneficial, but having the same tastes is not necessary. We need to share in our workers' excitement and appreciate their work for the beauty in it. Workers will sense our appreciation and be motivated by it.

3. Know a person's capabilities. We should objectively evaluate a volunteer's skills, potential capacities, level of commitment, ability to be motivated, discipline, and intensity. This is necessary if we are to nurture volunteers in

their natural abilities without pushing them beyond their real limitations.

4. Know how much responsibility a person can take. Good leaders know if their people work best when given assignments

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.
2 Timothy 2:15

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.
Hebrews 13:17-18

that detail what is to be done or when given responsibility that leaves the initiative up to them.

5. Look for mutual benefits. We should look for individuals who want to develop skills from which the church can also bene-

fit. If a person has potential, a good question to ask is: "You have a lot more talent than you've been able to put to use. How much effort are you willing to exert if we give you the opportunity to develop that talent?"

6. Give a person a reputation to uphold.

Public recognition as well as knowledgeable compliments motivate volunteers, when done with integrity. For example, I know of a boss who had a way of saying nice-and-true-things about his workers that eventually got back to them. The workers appreciated it and worked hard to uphold their good reputation.

7. Enjoy working, and let it show.

When people see we are truly grateful for the work we are privileged to do, they intuit that they can enjoy their work as well.

As we honestly and openly offer water to parched people, we are not manipulating but motivating.

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Excellence (cont. from page 1)

you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying?" (1 Cor 14:8-9). To speak unintelligibly is kind of like non-charismatic speaking in "tongues." We may be using English, but many don't understand us!

Another example, on the conceptual level, is: what does it mean that God does not change (Malachi 3:6) and does no wrong, but the scripture says "God repented..." (Amos 7:6)? Especially, when Numbers 23:19 makes it clear that God does not repent. This needs some explaining! You can be sure that your listener's are wondering the same thing.

In preparing to speak, when you initially read your scripture passage, imagine your audience hearing it for the first time. What questions of meaning surface? Will they know what a Pharisee is? Is Hades the same as hell? Why the different words?

Is it true? Often the meaning of the passage or the topic is quite clear to everyone. Your listeners may be dealing with a very different question: "Is it true?" You may say, of course believers know that Bible is true. They may even accept the biblicalness of your message but not believe it is true in their everyday life. They may be wondering if the message is credible and truly relevant to them.

For example, all things work to the good for those that love God and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). True, in fact. Factually, that is what the inspired word of God says, so it must be true. Most Christians know about this truth. But, is your audience struggling to really believe this in their situation? What about the man who just lost his job, he has heard this all his life. How, as the preacher, can you help him see the truth of this in his situation, other than just repeating the words of scripture which he can read for himself? True the word of God stands on it's own, but the preacher's role is to help the lis-

tener understand the truth of it.

A message that deals with this kind of question might draw on biblical examples, in this instance, from the captivity of Joseph in the OT (Genesis 37-50) or the imprisonment of Paul in the NT (Phil 1:12-20). You might also draw on anecdotal material of those who have struggled and found this truth to be true.

How does it work? This can be the most easily neglected aspect of communicating God's word. Some call this the "So what?" question. "What difference does this truth make in my life and how do I implement it." To end a message with "May these thoughts bless your heart" comes up short.

Jesus gave clear examples of this kind of communication: "Turn the other cheek" in the Sermon on the Mount is an example where Jesus uses "examples" to communicate the need for application. So also are the many parables that illustrate how God's truth is to be applied—for instance, the good Samaritan. Jesus frequently finished a parable with a call to action: "Go and do likewise" (Lk 10:37).

If, for example, you are preaching on the passage, "If we ask anything according to his will, he will hear us" (1 John 5:14), a big question people will have is "How do we do that?" You might use Jesus' interaction with His father in Gethsemane as an example of "how to." Often we preachers exhort people to share their faith—they have been told that endless times. The real question of interest may be not *whether* to do it, but *how* to do it. Study, for example, Jesus' interchange with the woman at the well (John 4). What principles can we draw from this story which will help the listener know how to witness better?

These three questions are like mental crow bars that help focus a message to meet the audience where they are at. Not all three questions will necessarily be pertinent in

every message or with every passage. I have them written out and sitting in front of me when studying to preach the word of God.

Conclusion

Next time you go to prepare a message for God's people, consider how you can make it relevant, balanced and interesting.



From the Q-File

"Put it before them briefly so they read it; clearly so they will appreciate it; picturesquely so they will remember it; and above all, accurately so they will be guided by its light." *Joseph Pulitzer*

"I do not seek unpopularity as a badge of honor. But sometimes it is the price of leadership. And the cost of conviction."

Tony Blair, prime minister of Great Britain, in a speech defending his stance on his government's role in the war with Iraq. 2003.

"This officer is well qualified to command a division, with the rank of major general, in time of war, and I would like very much to serve under his command."

Concerning the effect that General George C. Marshall (chief of staff for Army during World War II) had on his superiors when he was a junior officer, Lieutenant Colonel Johnson Hagood wrote on an efficiency report for Captain-to-be Marshall: We should work to live up to this kind of standard, that even our superiors praise us. When we lead others, we should lead as though our Superior, Jesus Christ were following us! Ed Cray, General of the Army: George C. Marshall, Soldier and Statesman, (W.W. Norton & Company, New York) 1990, p. 47.

ELDERS' SHOPNOTES

Editor: Chuck Gianotti
Editorial Assistance:
Jason Gianotti, Jim Mayer

HOW TO REACH US

Elders' SHOPNOTES
c/o 27 Watchman Court
Rochester, N.Y. 14624 U.S.A.
E-mail: elderssn@rochester.rr.com
Voice: 585.429.5435
FAX: 413.581.8535
Web site: www.bible-equip.com/esn

CONTRIBUTORS

Jack Spender
Bible teacher

Mary Gianotti
Elder's wife, Women's ministry

Chuck Gianotti
Bible teacher

Fred Smith, Sr.
Author

Scripture versions are noted in the first reference in each article.

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Feedback & comments are welcomed along with suggestions for future articles.

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers ..." 1 Peter 5:2a NIV