



Leadership Principles Equipping the Saints

by Jack Spender

Those made alive in Christ have a desire to grow. In the Great Commission, the Lord spoke of making disciples rather than converts, until “the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:20 NKJV) To accomplish this, He provided the church of which He had spoken earlier (Matt. 16:18). Words like “nurture” and “training”, so useful in the home with children, would become just as valuable in the local church as a true spiritual family. How well is this work of training disciples being carried out in the assembly where you fellowship?

Some churches have taken a casual, passive approach to the subject; meetings are provided and the results should “just happen” – at least for those highly motivated. Others prefer a more active approach to discipleship; they would point out that the New Testament assembly is ideally suited for this work, not having the encumbrances and limitations of a professional clergy.

What steps can elders take to supply quality training for young Christians without neglecting those of all ages and stages of spiritual development? How can they guide the assembly in which they serve toward becoming an active center for discipleship? Here are five suggestions that can help. But note that in addition to constructive ideas, a few obstacles will also be mentioned, since getting serious about making disciples will inevitably bring some spiritual warfare.

1) Work Towards Excellence in Teaching and Preaching

Feeding the flock means more than just filling the calendar! Speakers and subjects should be of the best quality available. Young disciples will need a basic grasp of every book in the Bible as well as major Bible doctrines. If the current approach to Bible teaching is not providing this, consider working systematically through a book of Scripture during some part of each year. Books like Timothy and Titus are a goldmine of instructions for training believers, but longer books and the Old Testament writings should not be neglected.

Elders will need wisdom and discernment, however, as not all speakers will sympathize with their goals or methods. Messages or speakers that seem to be geared toward entertainment, or things controversial, or directed toward lost people may be less useful.

As for the hearers, it is very important for assembly leaders (elders, deacons, and people of influence) as well as those being trained, to be relieved from other duties during the ministry of the Word—this will allow them to make every effort to attend faithfully and absorb the material so that they can interact at a later time. This can be difficult given the demands of youth work and various church programs, but the rewards will make the effort worthwhile.

2) Cultivate an “Equipping Mindset” in the Assembly

The elders must make it clear to all the saints that discipleship is not optional. Young believers must be trained, some to carry on the local work, and others sent out as the Lord directs. It is of utmost importance that elders understand Ephesians 4:11–16 – gifted men (the evangelist, pastor and teacher) are given by the Lord to the churches for the stated purpose of training others! Too often these gifts are well used by those who have them, but their primary role in “the equipping of the saints” (vs. 12) is neglected.

One symptom that the younger believers are not being trained for ministry is the need to search outside the assembly for a full time worker, not to help equip the saints, but because there is no one to handle the work load. Fortunately, the importance of this truth is being grasped by many servants of the Lord today.

It will take time and hard work to change the perception of the church from a sometimes irrelevant institution where mostly older folks attend, to an actively growing school for all ages in which the Bible is the curriculum!

3) Value Opportunities for Involvement

Growing disciples must be absorbed into the life and work of the assembly. As in raising of children, the temptation to let those more experienced “just do it all” will need to be resisted. Working alongside of elders and other older servants will provide invaluable practical training. Getting involved in meetings, going along on visitations, serving in projects, both spiritual and temporal, watching how decisions are made and then participating in the decision making process can all yield helpful practical experience.

Wise elders will be constantly alert for creative ways to get young believers more involved in the workings of the assembly. This also applies to outreach into the community. Indeed, many are discovering that the best way to reach lost people for Christ is not by trying to attract them into the church, but by training workers and witnesses to go out and reach them in the world. This was, of course, how the apostles worked.

4) Encourage Feedback

Everyone knows that training involves more than just speaking truthful facts to people. Both at home and at school, training requires interaction and accountability. Smaller fellowships may be able to handle this one-on-one, but larger assemblies may find it helpful to meet more informally in small groups during the week. It is true that Scripture will guide the elders as to what the flock needs, but it is also important to monitor progress, and admittedly, most regular church services don't provide a workable setting for questions and discussion.

Learning to ask good questions and being

(Continued on page 4)

Practical Application

Elders and Their Children

by Chuck Gianotti

One of the most important ministries for an elder has to do with his own children. This is seen in three ways. **First**, as a father, an elder has been assigned the prior responsibility of training up his children (Deut 6:4-7 NASB). From the mouth of God who is our Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), elders are to shepherd the flock of God—and that includes their own families, first and foremost! **Second**, the spiritual tenor of an elder's household is identified as a critical qualification for being an elder in God's household of faith (1 Tim 4:3, Titus 1:6). **Third** (and this arises from the second) an elder's shepherding of his family is a kind of proving ground for his ability to shepherd the family of God in the local church. This would be similar to a deacon being first tested before serving as a deacon (1 Tim 3:10). If a man fails the test of shepherding his own family toward godly living, what makes us think he will be able to provide genuine influence toward godliness for others in the church? If he does not do well with his own family, one can almost hear the echo, "Physician, heal thy own household." Children don't automatically become spiritual because they are born into an elder's family. And they don't become holy through osmosis!

When our children were small my wife and I began a life-long project interviewing others who had gone before us, seeking their wise counsel about raising children. After quizzing each set of parents, we compared three things: their perspective on Scriptural teaching relative to child raising, the practical advice they gave and the spiritual condition of their children (who were older than ours). Admittedly, this isn't a perfect method—evaluating the spiritual condition of others' children can be problematic, but the maxim, "you shall know them by their fruits," seemed to make sense.

Even now with our own children grown (ages 31 and 28) we still seek insight from those who have already been through this stage of life. Here are some things we have learned so far.

Spend time with your family

Frequently, we received counsel similar to Deut 6:7, "*You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.*"

Don't miss the most obvious in this passage—obeying God here means spend-

ing time with our children—and lots of it! We heard some men intimate they wish they had spent more time with their children. Conversely, we lost count of the number of parents reflecting on their own childhood who have said *their* fathers spent more time at church meetings than with them. We often heard a sad refrain similar to this, "My father was constantly on the road preaching, but never came to my ball games." A note of exasperation or "loss of heart" (Col 3:21) was evident. To be sure, some use their parents' mistakes as an excuse for their own behavior, but that does not excuse absentee fatherhood! The world calls that "dead-beat" fatherhood. Men, we must spend time with our families—lots of it! Doing good in one area does not justify neglect in another.

Be involved in teaching your children

Notice the passage doesn't say, "You should make sure your wife has daily devotions with the children while you are doing more important things." Blessed is the man whose wife builds spiritual values into the children, but fathers are to be involved. Deut 6 was written to all Israel, including and probably specifically fathers.

Notice further that this training involves "teaching diligently," implying a plan and a purpose—not just random Bible stories here and there. This can be particularly challenging with teenagers. If I could change one thing, I would have spent more time in systematic *study* with my children.

Training also involves "talking" about spiritual things during the normal activities of life—that includes conversations on the way to school plays or recitals as well as on the way home for Sunday meetings. Children need to see in their fathers that the things of the Lord permeate all of life in a natural way, not just the formal sit down times of family devotions or at Sunday services when people are "supposed to talk spiritual."

For example, when your child sees you return the extra change a store clerk erroneously gave you—this speaks volumes about integrity. When you soothe your daughter's disappointment over meager playing time in the soccer game, you are modeling the tender compassion of her Heavenly Father. When you have wronged your child and you ask his forgiveness, he learns volumes about humility. Some of my closest times with my children have come when I have had to apologize for something. When my son's school was

scheduled to have a government mandated sex-education in health class (the subject was how to use a condom!), I made a lunch appointment with my 15-year old son for that class period, during which we had our own discussion on that subject from God's point of view—one of many we have had over the years. The other kids told him the class was dumb and they wished they could have gone for pizza with their dads! These things draw together the hearts of fathers and children. But they take time!

Be aware of misconceptions

Some men erroneously believe that if they sacrifice huge amounts of time away from family for the sake of the Lord's work, God will look after the children. This is based on an inadequate understanding of passages like Mark 10:29 (leaving our families to follow Christ) and Matt 10:37 (loving Christ more than our families). If they refuse to follow Christ, we still must. In Luke 14:26 Jesus ramps it up by speaking of *hating* our family in comparison with our devotion for Him. Clearly, the Lord presents the truth in the most absolute, black and white terms, hyperbole if you will, to emphasize His point, namely, our relationship with our loved ones comes a distant second to our relationship with Christ. Jesus also proclaimed the 2nd greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves—but who is the closest of all our neighbors but our own family?

To be sure, by God's grace some children neglected by their "spiritually committed fathers" will "turn out" OK, but I suspect that may be *despite* their fathers rather than *because* of their fathers. It has nothing to do with responsible fathering.

The question is not, "Which is more important, family or ministry?" The issue is whether I as an elder really believe my children are my first order of ministry, my discipleship group with the highest priority!

Live a life of grace

Mature Christian living, which we want our children to eventually embrace, includes learning to live by grace. This includes walking increasingly in God's grace and being a conduit of His grace toward others. When our children are young, however, they need to first learn the law and the consequences of breaking it. In other words, they need to grow in their ability to distinguish right from wrong, in their hearts as well as in practice. All would agree. This is the maturing process of which Hebrews 5:13-14

Continued on page 3

Elders and Their Children (cont. from page 2)

speaks. I had to learn these things as an adult, being converted at the age of 21, but children raised in Christian homes have the great opportunity of learning maturity from a young age with godly parents.

As our children become teenagers and older, we fathers need to help them transition to living by grace. This is the analogy of the Law training people until Christ comes (Gal 3:24-25), and moving from walking by law to walking in and by grace. However, all too commonly children raised in Christian homes do *not* make this transition. When it happens, they either 1) reject their parents' convictions as repressive and lacking grace or 2) superficially embrace their parents' convictions but do so legalistically. This may involve the very things the parents hold with firm biblical convictions or even the core truth of the gospel itself.

Children learn what grace looks like from (us) parents or they learn from us how to live without grace. They hear how we speak about the sins of others in the church, particularly when they involve ethical, so-called "grey issues" or personality clashes. They listen as we speak of other Christians who hold to different convictions from Scripture. They pick up on our derogatory innuendoes. They sense what one person called "the pride of doctrine" (i.e. being arrogant about our "correct" position on some point of doctrine or practice). Our children pick up on subtle, judgmental attitudes when we speak in a demeaning way of churches that practice their ecclesiology differently than ours. They sense a disingenuous mind when we denounce denominationalism and sectarianism but then use the phrase "the assemblies" in a sectarian or denominational way.

When raised in such an atmosphere, the deck is stacked against our children freely arriving at our wonderful convictions for themselves. Sort of like pounding the drums so loud we eventually drive them away. In other words, do our children fear "stepping into the line of fire" if they even consider the open inquiry of other view points? We need to allow them, as they get older, the opportunity "to fail" so that they can discover the convictions for themselves and not in order to comply with their parental doctrinal line.

A test of our grace and wisdom comes when our children do not embrace or at least practice one or more of the important things we embrace. I have seen parents alienate their children because they have not given the same emphasis on certain Biblical principles. Certain topics of discus-

sion become taboo between parents and grown children because they have the potential for developing into an argument.

This does not mean we should treat our convictions and principles as casual or unimportant. What speaks volumes to an adult child is knowing that he or she has the freedom to follow God's leading with integrity and good conscience, even if it means disagreeing with Dad (even if we think they are wrong).

Do we honestly believe we are correct in *every* aspect of our theology and practice, which is what we are saying if we insist their complete agreement in *every* area of theology and practice? Wise is the man who discerns the truly important from the less important. Many children are won over or lost at precisely this juncture—I can't stress this point enough. We need to turn them over to the Lord and trust that the integrity and grace with which we raised our children will stand them in good stead as they become adults and make their own decisions.

Major in the majors

I have heard this admonition since I became a believer 38 years ago! Yet we need to constantly remind ourselves of its pertinence—for *ourselves* not just for others! This point follows from the previous one. Paul reflected this principle in Phil 1:12-18 when he rejoiced that the gospel was being preached even when done with sub-spiritual motivation. He kept the main thing clear and kept it "the main thing." The church down the road is preaching the gospel and people are being saved. We can praise the Lord rather than spending time measuring the decibels or depth of their music.

Children pick up on the shallowness of our imbalances. Once I was asked by some elders what they could do to prevent their young people from leaving and going to another, larger church of a different traditional background. I posed the question, "Which would you rather see, those young people going off to the world, or going to that other church and growing spiritually." Granted, we would all like to see our children embrace every detail of our convictions and theological persuasions, but the reality is that we may not be providing something that is essential for Christian life—and they are finding it elsewhere. We might be wise to ask how are we failing our children? What are we missing? Maybe we need to listen with understanding to what they are telling us.

Research shows that a large number of

children depart from the faith altogether when they leave home, so it is important to keep our priorities in line. We may win some doctrinal points but lose our children. Enter grace and humility.

Consider your reputation (or not)

There is pressure on our children because we as elders are looked up to as spiritually mature (whether we accept that assessment from others or not). People notice (and probably talk) when an elder's child misbehaves. I was shocked when my grown son admitted one day that he had struggled at times when he was younger with being an "elder's son." He knows we tried to counter that inherent pressure from others, but it was there none-the-less. It left me wondering if I had inadvertently added to that stress because of my pride.

Men, we need to work on communicating to our children a high standard that has *nothing to do with our personal status in the church*, but has everything to do with the high calling of their Lord Jesus Christ. Sentiments like, "Son, we have a high standard for you because I am an elder" should be struck from any conversation—it will surely provoke a child to anger (Col 3:22, Eph 6:4). Rather, we should encourage our children with thoughts like this, "Son, we have a high standard for you, and it is the same standard we are trying live up to, because that is what the Lord Jesus Christ has called all Christians to."

These are just a few things I have picked up from others over the years and have adapted to our family life. Both my children are walking with the Lord by grace through faith despite my imperfect parenting. They don't give as much weight to one or two of my convictions as I do—but they have developed convictions for some areas of the Christian life that I give less emphasis to. We have discussed these things at various levels – now as adults and *in grace*. I rejoice that they stand before the Lord in their convictions which they fully embrace as their own before the Lord. And I rejoice in the Lord!



From the Q-File

The great battles, the battles that decide our destiny and the destiny of generations yet unborn, are not fought on public platforms, but in the lonely hours of the night and in moments of agony. "Portrait of a Prophet" quoted by Gordon MacDonald in "Rebuilding Your Broken World."

Equipping the Saints *(cont. from page 1)*

good listeners is the first step in follow-up. Are there questions? Is the material being taught being understood? Is it clear how the information can be applied practically? Are there significant obstacles to learning and/or living out the truth? Are there tangible ways the leadership can offer help? These and other questions can help elders “know the state of your [their] flocks” (Proverbs 27:23). Whatever the method, make sure feedback from the people is highly valued.

5) Protect the Process

As with any good thing, blessings do not come by “letting nature take its course.” Good leadership is essential! As mentioned earlier, the adversary will never welcome a decision to become active in training disciples. Some problems will arise in just getting

started. Older saints can find change unsettling. Individuals with special interests (sometimes for good causes) may resent having teaching take a different focus.

Be prepared for mistakes when giving a trainee opportunity to ministry; rare is the person who gets things perfect on the first attempt. A positive and thankful outlook will accomplish more than calling attention to short comings. In addition, it will take time to train the people to accept ministry from those within the assembly that may be new to using their gift.

Don't be afraid to try new ideas that will better serve the needs of the people.

Conclusion

Occasionally we hear the old saying that in most churches, 10% of the people do

90% of the work. Achieving quality involvement by 100% of those in fellowship probably won't happen in a fallen world. But with good leadership, hard work, much love and prayer, the Lord will be glorified in changing those numbers dramatically for the better.

The apostle John put it this way: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” (III John 4). His joy was not that they know truth, but that they were walking in it. That's the heart of discipleship and any church that has a reputation for helping Christians along that road will usually become a place where they will want to be. Imagine a place where the Christian growth in faith of every member really matters to the people who go there. Few things in this life can be more satisfying! 

Wives' Corner

Enjoying True Peace

by Ruth Spender

Many Christian women today admit to dealing with fear and anxiety as a regular part of daily living. It is easy to be overwhelmed as the world becomes a dangerous, perilous place to live. We often hear political leaders speak about the need for peace, ironically in a world that has rejected the Prince of Peace. In this world, peace is defined as the absence of conflict. True peace, however, is seen in the person who enjoys an inner tranquility of soul, a calmness not destroyed by outside forces. Our Lord modeled this serenity when He was here on earth. We need to exercise discipline if we desire to enjoy the same inner peace He knew.

An undisciplined mind that races and wanders at will is filled with anxious thoughts. Scripture commands us to “fear not,” “be anxious for nothing,” to “gird up the loins of our mind.” How is this to be accomplished? Philippians 2:5 exhorts us to

“let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” We need to make His mindset our own. As we study His life we realize our Lord came not to do His own will and neither should we. Isaiah 23:6 tells us that the person who keeps his mind on the Lord will enjoy perfect peace. What a promise! Complete peace! How are we doing at making these truths our own?

God wants us to enjoy His peace regardless of the circumstances in which we may find ourselves. As believers, we know we received peace with God [our positional standing before Him] when we accepted Christ as our Savior. Are we, however, experiencing the peace of God spoken of in Philippians 4:6-9? Reading, meditating and applying these verses will allow true peace to grow in our hearts. When negative thoughts surface, we need to identify and isolate them immediately. If we don't, the enemy of our soul will use wrong thinking

to steal away our peace. Give these thoughts over to the Lord in earnest prayer, giving thanks to God that help is on the way. The key to achieving victory is taking our thoughts captive and thinking on those things which are virtuous and praiseworthy.

As mature women, we should not only be enjoying this wonderful peace promised to us by the Lord Himself before He left this world (John 14:27 KJV), but also we should be helping others to understand how they can experience this in their daily lives. May we all strive to become more like our Master so we can reflect Him better to a very needy world.

In our assembly, the ladies recently completed a very practical book by Linda Dillow entitled “Calm My Anxious Heart.” We commend it to you for your personal enrichment and blessing. It will give you more practical advice on how to see this peace take root and grow in your own life. 

ELDERS' SHOPNOTES

Editor: Chuck Gianotti
Editorial Assistance:
Ruth Rodger

HOW TO REACH US

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

CONTRIBUTORS

Jack Spender
Bible teacher
Ruth Spender
Women's ministry
Chuck Gianotti
Bible Teacher

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

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Elders' SHOPNOTES is published bi-monthly as the Lord provides. To subscribe, write us at the address to the left or e-mail us. Or you can visit our web site at: www.bible-equip.org/esn to subscribe. ESN is also available in Spanish, go to www.apuntes-para-ancianos.org.

There is no subscription fee, but if you would like to support this ministry, please mail your gifts payable to: C.R. Gianotti. \$12 would help cover the cost for a year's subscription.

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