



Practical Ministry One Minute Shepherding

by Chuck Gianotti

That's ridiculous, you may say. How can an elder be an effective shepherd in one minute? Shepherding takes far more time than that!

We must first grapple with the reality that the average elder has a limited amount of time, certainly not enough to spend extended time with every believer in the congregation in a one-on-one situation. Even in the best of situations, where regular visitation takes place, some believers may go six months to a year with out significant elder interaction. A lot can happen in that amount of time.

"One Minute Shepherding" may help fill the gap. Author Ken Blanchard coined the phrase "One Minute Manager" to refer to effective use of one minute interactions with those he manages—showing interest in their goals, listening to their struggles or providing direction when they get off track. Writer John Maxwell speaks of the "30-second rule" of influence: during the first half-minute of meeting someone, you endeavor to "add value to them" by affirming, building up or otherwise focusing on their needs or inter-

ests. By combining these two concepts, we may discover added shepherding opportunities that require little extra time out of our busy schedules—One Minute Shepherding. This is particularly true when implemented on a Sunday morning—since we are already with the sheep at that time!

The one minute shepherd uses the first one minute of any conversation to focus on the "interests" or spiritual needs of each person he meets.

Obviously, one minute by itself is not sufficient as the sum total of our efforts to look after the flock. But what can be done in one minute? Here are some ideas to make use of one minute interactions:

COMMIT wholeheartedly—to being a one minute shepherd with *everyone* using the first minute of interaction with each person you meet on Sunday morning. Paul instructed that we should, "... with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do no merely look out for you own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." (Phil 2:3b-4 NASB).

The biggest challenge to this commitment is getting over our selfish need to talk about the things that interest us! We must embrace the mind of Christ (Phil 4:5), the attitude of

sacrificing our own interests and needs for the sake of ministering to others. This is included in what Paul wrote about the challenges of ministry, "...always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body" (2 Cor 4:10).

ASK sincerely—questions that show a genuine concern for the "interests of others." How do you know what to ask? Think back to a recent prayer request he has made. Has she asked for prayer concerning witnessing to a co-worker? Is someone sick in his family? If she has children, you can be sure that is a high-interest subject. What ministry is he involved in? Even though you did not attend a specific outreach or fellowship event, you could ask those involved how it went, particularly those who provided leadership for it.

One woman, who had poured hours of planning into a ladies outreach event, said to me in confidence, "Not one elder asked me

We must sacrifice our own interests for the sake of ministering to others.

about it. I guess they are just not interested in what we are doing.

That's discouraging." The one minute shepherd could have been a huge encouragement by asking, "How did your outreach go?" A simple question shows you are interested and can be an effective way to obey what the Holy Spirit says, "Therefore, encourage one another and build up one another ..." (1 Thessalonians 5:10).

Asking good questions is a skill that can be learned. With practice, you can improve.

LISTEN intently—to what is said. When you ask questions, you must be prepared to *really* listen—beyond the words being said. We must become perceptive. I used to have a bad habit when conversing with people. While the other person talked, I would be looking at other things that were going on. My wife pointed out to me that this gave the impression to people I was not really listening. I protested that I could multi-process and pay attention to more than one thing at a time. But then I started noticing when other people did the same to me. I got the point! Listening requires 100% of our attention, blocking out other things that might interest us.

When you ask, "How are you doing," and the person responds with a listless, "Oh, all right," an elder attuned to listening hears a need. You might respond, "You don't sound

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No servant of God has made a greater impact on the Christian church than Paul the apostle. After his dramatic conversion, he devoted his life to preaching, traveling and writing—to plant and establish the churches, and the believers who would carry on the work.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to know what he would say to a group of elders as he was nearing the end of his life work? Of course we have his letters written from prison, and his correspondence with Timothy and Titus, but what about thoughts addressed specifically to church elders? Fortunately, we have just such a record in his farewell address to the elders of Ephesus preserved for us by Dr. Luke in Acts 20. Let's take a look at the high points, keeping in mind that Paul would speak urgently, knowing he would not see these men again in this life.

The first half of his address is devoted to personal testimony concerning past labors (vss 18-21) and his coming imprisonment (vss 22-27). Then in the second part, he gives some strong charges to the elders (vss 28-35).

Thinking back over years of service for the Lord, he reminds the elders of his testimony and labor among them. The opening words are "Ye know..." (KJV). This is not a time to convince his hearers; his record is in the book, and he appeals to their conscience. He has served the Lord, and refers only to humility, tears and trials. Interestingly he makes no mention of impressive miracles, great sermons or personal authority. His manner has been that of a servant, and as to content, he has withheld nothing of value, speaking to the disciples both in public places and in private homes. To those in the world, he brought a simple message of "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs.21).

How important it is for elders to look beyond the details of church administration once in awhile, and think about what they will really be remembered for when the time comes to depart this life. Has there been a humble attitude? Is our approach to ministry one that holds back nothing that will edify God's people? Has there been any effort to bring good news to those who are

without hope? Every servant of Christ should evaluate what he is really living for—and it's not a bad idea to discuss such questions from time to time with our fellow elders.

Next, Paul looks ahead and assures the elders that he has not only received and accepted God's message passed on through fellow believers, foretelling imprisonment, but in consequence he now goes forward "bound in the spirit." Nothing will move him from following the example of the Lord Jesus, and life itself can be surrendered to God if only he might finish his course, complete the ministry assigned to him, and do it with joy! Everything can be summarized in a short phrase: life for Paul is about good news of grace—God's grace!

Finally, this means goodbye, but it's more than just a sentimental farewell. It is a confident assurance that no one can accuse Paul of keeping back anything God wanted to make known. He has faithfully declared "all the counsel of God" (vs. 27).

Such bold confidence is not only vitally important for elders today serving in a world filled with fear, but it actually forms the basis on which the next section of warnings is built. Paul would soon be warning a younger servant that days would come when men would not be able to stand sound or healthy teaching, and so they would promote teachers who could "tickle their ears" (II Tim. 4:3). Many believe we are living in those very days. The church today needs to hear the whole counsel of God.

It seems to some a mark of spirituality to take no thought for what will be preached, leaving everything to "the leading of the Holy Spirit." Yet the Spirit has given clear instructions that man needs every word of God, the whole counsel, not just those favorite themes of our favorite preachers, presented under the guise of being Spirit led. What steps are the elders taking in your assembly to make certain that adults, young Christians, and children are being systematically instructed in every section, every doctrine of God's Word?

In the second part of his farewell, Paul gives some pointed charges to the Ephesian elders. It is most interesting to note the four verbs of action he employs

("take heed," "watch," "remember," "support"), and then to ponder all the things he didn't say!

First the elders must *take heed* to themselves and their relationships with one another (vs. 28). Without a loving unity, attempts to shepherd people will be worthless. They must always remember that it is God's flock, purchased with precious blood.

Next he warns them to *watch* out for dangers from outside, wolves that would tear up the flock. Even worse, evil men could arise from among the elders themselves. It seems unbelievable, but there are men in leadership who would compete with the Lord, seeking to "draw away disciples" after themselves. The charge is to vigilance (*watch*) and remember the message Paul has brought from the Lord.

In closing, Paul commends the elders "to God and to the word of his grace" (vs. 32). Only the Word of God has the power to build up the saints (those being set apart to God). Money and material things never motivated Paul. He was glad to work hard to provide not only for his own needs but also for his fellow workers as occasion required. He *remembered*, and charges the elders to remember the word of the Lord that giving brings greater blessing than receiving, so there must be some time and energy given to *supporting* the weak (vs. 35).

Elders are busy men, with families, jobs and the care of the church. Pressures and urgent things can swallow up all available time. But according to this passage, elders must make time to take heed to relationships, watch for dangers that threaten the flock, spend time in the Word, remembering things that must have top priority in life, and then going about the work in such a way that the lowly, the weak and the hurting are supported and not forgotten.

Solemn responsibility this matter of shepherding, but it will bring the crown of glory one day from the Chief Shepherd! (1 Peter 5:4). In the meantime, it will also result in a happier, healthier and more fruitful assembly. 

Low Tide Times—Encouraging Your Husband

by Mary Gianotti

At the beginning of the summer we vacationed by the ocean. I love to walk barefoot in the sand with a warm breeze blowing. It fascinates me that the Lord of all creation has set the boundaries of the tides. Sometimes the tides are high and other times they are low—and the tides, whether low or high, are predictable.

I think working in the local church is much like the ocean tides. There will be an ebb and flow in our ministry. Sometimes things are going really well—there is peace and love is abounding in our fellowship—high tide. At other times tensions grow, disagreement creeps in and we can feel the low tide of discouragement rise.

We have the privilege of encouraging our husbands whether the tide is high or low. When things are going well it isn't difficult being a positive influence. It is during the low tide times that encouraging our men becomes more of a challenge.

The word *encourage* means to “inspire with courage, spirit or hope.” Stormie Omartian writes that at the first sign of discouragement remember, “God is a God of encouragement. That’s because He is a good God. His encouragement comes through His Word. It comes when we pray. It come through His presence when we are with Him in worship and praise.”

To be in a position to support our

husbands during rough times we need to first be encouraging ourselves in the Lord. We do this by believing that God is good at all times, looking to His Word for guidance, praying about the situation at hand and remembering to worship and praise Him in everything. Doing these things first will put us in the right frame of mind to be helpful when our husbands are down or discouraged.

Lack of supporting my husband when the tide is low comes from my own fear, discouragement and possibly the lack of trusting that God is in control. When walking on the beach you often see crabs out nervously feeding. But the minute the tide comes or they sense your foot steps they head for their holes, burying themselves until the seeming danger passes. Let’s not be like the crabs. God is in control and allows all sorts of things to happen in our fellowships. We need to stand firm, believing the circumstances will be for the good. We know Romans 8:28, but sometimes we don’t apply it to our own lives when the pressure is on.

When your husband comes home from an elders meeting, you probably know if it went well or not. Some men will discretely share concerns with their wives; others will not. In either case it is our privilege to encourage them.

Here are some practical things I

have discovered that help during low tide times:

Actively **listen** with the goal of understanding your husband and the others involved in the situation.

Pray before you speak. Ask the Lord to give you His wisdom to encourage and build up your husband.

Resist the temptation to come to a quick conclusion. We rarely have all the information we need to come to a definite evaluation. Don’t use this time to subtly bring up your husband’s shortcomings.

We are often quick to want to influence control. That is not our job. Eve, in Genesis 3:16, was told by God that “your desire (control) will be for your husband” (NIV). Part of the curse in the garden was that women would want to control and lead their husbands. Whether passively or directly we need to stay as far away from this sin as possible. Your husband may ask for your insights and Godly wisdom but that is an entirely different thing.

Next time the tides are high remember part of our God-given role is to come along side of, help and encourage our husbands who have this high calling to shepherd the people of God.

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (1Thess. 5:11). 

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too convincing, what’s happening that’s got you down?” Even if the person doesn’t want to open up, they will know you are a caring shepherd, and that you will be ready to listen when they are ready to share.

COMMENT knowingly—about a ministry or action you observed in a person. For example, “Good morning, Joe. Thanks for your comments at the Lord’s Supper. That really helped me worship.” Comments like this can transform one ordinary minute into an extraordinary minute.

My favorite is what I call the *behind-the-back-compliment*. For example, “Hi, Joe. Judy mentioned to me how encouraged she was by your comments at the Lord’s supper this morning.” What this

communicates to Joe is that people are talking behind his back—and saying good things about him!

Each of these comments, in your own words, will take less than one minute, but they will powerfully convey that you really care for people.

KNOW insightfully—the people you shepherd. Jesus said, “I am the good Shepherd, and I know My own...” (John 10:11a). Knowing and listening go hand in hand. How can one elder know *all* the believers in his church well? If the congregation is small, you should be able to know them all at least by name and some rudimentary things about them. I have found it helpful to make notes next to my church phone list. A quick review on

Sunday morning before meetings can refresh the mind about the more serious issues that people are facing. For larger churches, the elders can divide the load so that everyone is ministered to.

PRAY appropriately—for the genuine needs. Then you can give a one minute encouragement, “Hi Joe, I’ve been praying for you since you gave that request last week.”

But, you don’t have to wait until Monday to pray for people. Nothing communicates that elders *really* do care for the individual believers in the congregation more than when people see the elders spontaneously taking someone aside to pray concerning some need. Sunday mornings before, between and after meet-

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ings can spawn impromptu times of bringing someone “before the throne of God.” If appropriate, you could invite some others nearby to join you.

“On the spot” praying is particularly helpful when the person specifically requests you to pray. We have all had the experience of forgetting to pray, only to be reminded the following Sunday, “Thanks for praying for me!” So spontaneous praying is a good thing!

Of course, the quality of the elders’ prayer life *between* Sundays affects their propensity to pray spontaneously *on* Sunday morning. In fact, the work of spiritual leadership involves first and foremost—prayer (Acts 6:4). I am convicted as I write. Like so many other elders, this is a constant struggle for me. Yet, if we take our elder responsibilities seriously, we will continue to wrestle in prayer for those whom we are called to shepherd.

LAUGH heartily—with them. Being a one minute shepherd does not mean all interactions are serious. Just noticing or acknowledging people can be affirmative. Many interactions will be light and short. Sometimes a good laugh can be spiritually cathartic.

One older woman I know suffers greatly from a variety of medical conditions. For financial reasons she must hold down two low-paying jobs. Her unsaved family is unsupportive. Our fellowship helps out with financial gifts from time to time. But life for her is hard, not much to laugh about. I find on Sunday mornings it is relatively easily to engage her in talk-

ing about the difficulties of her life—this is no problem, because she had so many problems. But to my surprise, we started bantering back and forth in a light-hearted way. I discovered that she also needed a good laugh once in a while, to help combat the gloominess of the constant struggle with pain. Laughter is one of the human touches that can help bring people through hard times. Indeed, it is good medicine. And for this dear woman, it is a highlight of her week!

A few final thoughts

You may have already thought by now, “One minute can easily uncover concerns that will take far more than one minute of time.” This is true, but often, one minute will suffice. Other times, you may want to make an appointment so that you can spend more time with the individual away from the busyness of Sunday morning.

In some churches, where there is a lack of older men who are biblically qualified, the elders may be younger men who have young families. They have very real family responsibilities on Sunday morning, particularly if their wives have a heart to shepherd other women. Some couples have adopted the practice of alternating Sundays looking after the children before, between and after meetings. This frees one or the other up to do “one minute shepherding.”

Sometimes it is tempting to have quick elders’ meetings on Sunday morn-

ings. This of course, may be necessary from time to time, because of emergencies. However, I recommend that these should normally be avoided, so that the elders can get maximum shepherding leverage out of Sunday morning times when the whole fellowship is together.

One church has a “half-hour” rule, namely—no one cleans up or has other “meetings” during the first 30 minutes after the Sunday meetings. That way there is plenty of time for people to talk and minister to one another and to get acquainted with visitors.

Conclusion

Here’s what happens when you strive to become a One Minute Shepherd:

- You will be able to minister in small ways to many people on a Sunday morning.
- Your one-minute may turn into five minutes or more, or it may spawn a visit or a burden to pray more specifically.
- People will be encouraged that you spent even a short period of time focused on them as individuals.
- People will eventually come to know that you are an elder who really cares for them—and they will feel much more comfortable coming to you for spiritual counsel or questions.
- You will be emulating the Good shepherd who had a habit of engaging people one-on-one. “I [Jesus] gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you” (John 13:15).



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