

The Noble Task

Elder Leadership In The Local Church

by
Richard A. Borg

14 Lessons

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About the Author by the Author

This is one of those, “Who are you, and what makes you think you have anything to say that I should know?” moments. Sometimes I wish I had nothing to say. As a father of three married adult children and grandfather to seven boys, there are moments I feel so strongly about something that I just have to “get it off my chest” so I can sleep better. I wrote *The Noble Task* because I love the church and a good night’s sleep. I could sound real spiritual by saying “God led me”. Perhaps He did and I wasn’t even aware of it!

Here’s My Story.

God settled my calling to career church ministry in the summer between my sophomore and junior years at Nyack College. Long before that my parents became followers of Christ in an Alliance Church (C&MA) when I was a year old. My father grew spiritually and was asked to be a Bible teacher, a Board member and then an elder. I can say without hesitation he qualified for the noble task of elder. Likewise, my father-in-law was a qualified elder in my wife’s home church (C&MA). Independently she experienced God’s call to ministry as well.

My nearly 50 years of church ministry started after graduation from Nyack. With my wife, Sharon, I served in several large churches in assistant and associate pastoral roles. Then for 20 years I served as lead pastor in two church plants, the last of which for 16 years. Following that, I spent 14 years on the leadership team of the Metropolitan District of the C&MA.

In addition to many personal relationships with my own elders, I had countless experiences with pastors and lay elders through church health and growth consultations, pastoral transitions with lay search teams, disciplinary procedures, capital campaigns for church construction and twice a month coaching appointments with 16 pastors. In all of this I witnessed firsthand the proverbial, “the good, the bad and the ugly” of church leaders. I felt the emotions of disgust, anger and sadness, as well as the sheer delights of watching Jesus Christ do amazing things through faithful pastors and lay elders in building His church. I have witnessed far more than I ever wanted, from the satanic to the Divine. Before I started writing *The Noble Task*, I listed the pastors and lay elders who either failed tragically or achieved magnificently. Fortunately, the “good” list was much longer than the “bad” and “ugly” list.

Having said all this, my credibility for writing these lessons ultimately rests with your response. If the lessons are helpful, pass them on. That would be nice! What is nice for me personally is twofold—I continue to fulfill my calling and I’m sleeping much better now! By the way, all my first-person accounts and observations are true—you can’t make up this stuff. Truth is always stranger than fiction!

Focus, Uses and Order

The **focus** of *The Noble Task* lessons is nothing less and nothing more than the character qualifications for elder leadership according to the Spirit-inspired Word of God. Wherever and whenever the church is found, the culture, language and ethnicity must bow to these Biblical standards without compromise. These lessons are not about methods or structure or administration or strategic meetings. Those are functions to be worked out locally by qualified elders. The health and growth of a local church always depends first on the **character** of elder leadership.

The Uses

I often heard pastors lament a shortage of qualified elder candidates which led me to ponder several questions.

- *Have they set the bar too high?*
- *Will they lower the bar too low?*
- *Have they thought that elders are born not made?*
- *Did their personal disciple-making include the goal of making elders?*

I'm sure it was the Apostle Paul's goal as he spent 3 years in Ephesus (Acts 19-20). No doubt he also invested much time in mentoring Timothy and Titus to prepare them for career eldership as pastors.

These Noble Task lessons could create a pathway to elder development and affirmation. Every small to large church can satisfy both their governing documents and the need of the congregation for qualified elders. For instance, a large church could have two ranks of lay elders—lead elders who with the pastor or pastors administrate the vision and mission, and associate or ministry elders who give hands-on care to the people. But all of the elders must meet the character qualifications in scripture. Think creatively!

As a third voice, these lessons are useful in one or all of the three following ways:

1. *The Noble Task* lessons will correct and deepen the understanding and calling of elders who are presently serving.
2. The lessons will also correct and deepen the understanding and calling of those who have been selected as potential elder candidates.
3. *The Noble Task* would be helpful to anyone considering a call to any career ministry.

While worthy books on Bible topics can be informative and transformative, *The Noble Task* lessons are written to usher the user into the living and powerful Word of God who, by His Spirit, illumines the humble heart.

The Order

Keep in mind that Paul's Spirit-inspired letters to the Ephesians, Timothy and Titus are also personal letters, not copies of a "white paper". So his order of elder qualifications seems somewhat random. In addition, the lists are not identical. Therefore, while *The Noble Task* lessons have a distinctive flow, they don't strictly match either Biblical list in Paul's letters. You'll also notice some qualifications are grouped together as nuances of a similar issue. I also include some character qualities found in Paul's letter to the Galatians, namely—the fruit of the Spirit. Emotional and spiritual maturity are inseparable for every follower of Christ, but especially those called to leadership in His church.

Introduction

A Reality Check and First Assignment

The Noble Task will correct and deepen your understanding of elder leadership. Whether you presently serve or been asked to consider serving, these lessons will challenge you to "...think of yourself with sober judgment..." (Romans 12:3). So come to God's Word honestly and humbly to receive a spiritual and emotional reality check. My hope is that the Application questions will help you and your wife to "think soberly". Occasionally my real-life stories may frighten you, but hopefully God's Word and God's Spirit will confirm your calling to elder leadership.

Three Corrections

To start with, this reality check consists of three major corrections. I make no assumptions regarding your present understanding of eldership for the local church.

The first major correction is the style of elder leadership. The style of all leadership in the church is quite different from the style and skills used in a secular or godless environment. No matter how successful you are in leading people outside the church, that style and those skills may be inappropriate or even destructive inside the church. In the church, authority is never achieved through the power of position, but through the humility of servitude. Lesson 2 will examine the unique Biblical style required of elders.

The second major correction is the character of elder leadership. When leading successfully in secular environments, a leader's character outside that environment is not that important. What a person does in "private" usually does not conflict with how they perform in "public", so say the godless. But followers of Christ know better. The elder's life must not be compartmentalized. *The Noble Task* calls you to a singleness of Christ-like character so that what you are and do when no one is looking is what you are and do when everyone is looking!

The third major correction is a multiple elder leadership. Moses, the apostles and early church leaders all shared the same overwhelming stress of solo leadership. Moses was so exhausted by solo leadership that he cried out to God "...put me to death right now..." (Numbers 11:15). God directed him to appoint 70 judges. The only remedy to the stress of solo eldership in the church is the multiplication of elders. Even for the small church of 50-80 people, multiple elder leadership is a must. In one church plant, I started with three lay elders for the 65 attendees. When I left 16 years later, we had four career pastoral staff and ten lay elders to lead 400 people. The noble task was quite manageable. I never asked God to "...put me to death...", but I came close several times!

Your First Assignment

The inspired scriptures all have a cultural and historical context. The early church developed in a pre-Christian world. There was nothing to compare the church to. So the qualifications for elder leadership were inspired by the Holy Spirit and seemingly written "on-the-fly". Nevertheless, what we have is ever-relevant and timeless.

While the chronological dating of the New Testament gospels and letters is difficult, the following short reading assignment is a good estimate of the order. The Apostle Paul planted the church in Ephesus (Acts 19 and 20), then appointed Timothy as their pastor (I Timothy), then wrote his letter to the church (Ephesians), then wrote to Timothy again (II Timothy), and finally Paul wrote to Titus, the pastor on Crete.

In one uninterrupted sitting, read the following 21 chapters of scripture for the big picture of elder leadership in the local church. You will appreciate this later on. If you reject this assignment, you are not ready for eldership. Yes, this is a test!

1. Acts 19:1 – 20:38
2. I Timothy 1 - 6
3. Ephesians 1 – 6
4. II Timothy 1 – 4
5. Titus 1 – 3

Block out 2 – 3 hours and read slowly. Go for it!

Lesson 1

The Church

Uniquely Divine

Any consideration of elder-leadership in the local church must begin with a “spot-on”, rock solid understanding of the uniqueness of the church. Because of the divine nature of the church, I make no assumptions of what you know or understand. This lesson is foundational for all the lessons that follow. Get this right and what follows should resonate deeply in your spirit and soul.

Hopefully you will conclude, as I do, from your study of God’s written Word that the church is unique and unlike all other social institutions, organizations and for-profit or non-profit corporations. The church remains in a category all to itself. Why? At its very beginning when Jesus said, “I will build my church and the gates of hell will never defeat it” (Matthew 16:18), the church was, and still is, a spiritual and mysterious entity. Jesus said, “Where two or three gather in my name, I am in their midst” (Matthew 18:19-20). Jesus shows up when the church gathers. In the Revelation John saw Jesus, the Living One, (Revelation 1:18ff) walking among the lampstands or churches. No doubt he does today as well.

Now look at three other Biblical images describing the uniqueness of the church that calls for the unique style of elder leadership described in Lesson 2.

S.O.A.P. 1 – The House and the Household

Before the fall of mankind into sin, marriage and family was God’s ideal institution or social structure for the propagation of his creation. While flawed by sin it still remains as man’s best hope for procreation and the nurture of children. The church as the home and household of God is the dwelling place and family of God. The church is family because God the Father is “at home” in us. Furthermore, the scriptures exhort us to refer to each other as brothers (Hebrews 13:1) and sisters (I Timothy 5:2).

S.cripture – Read John 14:20-23; I Peter 2:4-10; Ephesians 2:19-22

O.bservations

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, how radical was Christ’s image of God and Himself being “at home” (John 14) in these Jewish disciples who grew up with the Temple and synagogues? Circle one:
Not Radical 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Radical
2. In what ways do you think the images Peter used resonated with the Jewish Christ-followers who read his letter?

3. Write down the construction terms Paul uses in Ephesians 2 and what they illustrate regarding the spiritual mystery of God's household.

A.plications

1. How does God as "father" make you feel? Explain here:
2. How does the reality of "at home" impact your understanding and experience of God's desire for fellowship with you?
3. If the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit are "at home" in you and building a spiritual house and household, what does this tell you about the church when it gathers?
4. Is there anything about your natural family of origin that distorts or diminishes your idea or feelings about God's "family"? If so, describe here:

P.rayer – Ask God to renew or restore your awareness of His desire to be "at home" in you and when the church gathers together.

S.O.A.P. 2 – The Bride and the Bridegroom

The God-ordained institution of marriage is yet another image that unravels the mysterious nature of the church. The church is unique because it is the bride of Christ, the bridegroom. This image speaks of his love, his sacrifice and his devotion. Christ is wedded to the church and accomplishes his purposes and glory through her. His purpose and passion is the salvation of all who have and will be saved to enjoy his loving presence eternally. The church is the glory of Christ on earth. And as flawed as she is now, He will make her his radiant and pure bride.

S.cripture – Read Ephesians 5:21-33_____

O.bservations

1. What does it mean that Christ "...gave up himself for her..." (Ephesians 5)?
2. How is Christ fulfilling his purpose to make His church "radiant" (Ephesians 5)?
3. How does "free from accusation" and "hope" (Colossians 1) make the church "radiant"?
"...free from accusation..." –

"...hope..." -

A.pplications

1. In what ways do you feel Christ is making your local church radiant?
Describe here:
2. Where might there be room for improving your church's radiance, and how would Christ affect that?
3. What role or roles do church leaders play to fulfill Christ's purpose of "cleansing" his bride?
4. Is there anything in your life presently that you need to be cleansed from?
If yes, what is it?

P.rayer – Ask the Lord Jesus Christ to expose to you anything he desires to cleanse you from.

S.O.A.P. 3 - The Head and the Body

From creation another image unpacks the mysterious nature of the church—that of the Head, who is Christ, and his Body, the church. The image is easily understood since we all have a physical head and body. The church as the Body of Christ must respond to the Head which is Christ. Therein lies the need for Spirit-filled, Christ-like leaders and followers through whom the impulses are received from the Head. Let's take a look at two of several Biblical references to this image.

S.cripture – Read Ephesians 4:1-16; Colossians 1:15-23

O.bservations

1. Write down several unique and vital ways you see in Ephesians 4 that Christ the head is building up the church his “body”.
2. According to I Corinthians 12, how are the parts unique and diverse in the body of Christ? Explain here:
3. Describe how you think the body of Christ, the church, is unique to all other social institutions known to mankind.

A.pPLICATIONS

1. In what ways do you feel the “gifts of the Spirit” are unique to the body of Christ?
2. Why is it important for every follower of Christ to both know and intentionally use their Spirit-given gifts for the benefit of all in the body of Christ?
3. Do you know your own spiritual gift? Check one: Yes _____ No _____
If no, why not?
If yes, how are you using it?

4. As a “part” in the body of Christ, describe how you add health and vitality to the other parts.

P.rayer – Ask the Holy Spirit to make it clear to you what your gift or gifts are and how they can be best used to edify or build up the body of Christ.

Further Thoughts

“I will build my church...” Not you!

If the images and spiritual realities of “household”, “bride” and “body” are not unique enough, let me add one more. “I will build my church...” is a simple yet profound summary from the lips of Jesus Christ as to the uniqueness of his church. His vision, his work and his ownership all point to a Divine mystery revealed (Ephesians 5:32). It is a great blessing to be known and to belong to the gathered community of God’s children under the absolute authority of Christ who suffered for our sin, rose from the grave and now lives within us.

It is also a great and heavy responsibility to serve Christ and his church by giving elder leadership. As daunting as it was at times, I never looked back and neither will you if you have sensed God’s call to eldership. Early in the life of one of the new church plants I pastored I was asked by a visitor on a Sunday morning, “So pastor, how big do you want your church to grow?” I had never been asked that question before, but I quickly answered to my own surprise, “I don’t know what Christ has in mind here, but if I can help it, I won’t get in His way!” As it turned out that man would become an elder several years later. And as it turned out the church grew numerically, in part, on the spiritual strength and emotional maturity of the elders and their families. Together Christ created the loving culture that marked the church.

I was also asked by other pastors, “What are you doing to make your church grow?” I could never point to anything we were doing. I could only say, “We love Christ and each other very much, and people notice it when they come.”

This takes us to the unique style of elder leadership. If Jesus said, “The oppressive style of the Gentile leaders must not be so among you...” (Matthew 20:25), then we must ask, “So what kind of leadership should be so among us?” What images in scripture best capture the leadership style Christ has in mind for His church? The next lesson will take you there.

Lesson 2

The Elder

Unique Leadership Style

There are two extreme godless styles of leadership to avoid. In the Old Testament we find the repeated warning against a passive style that leaves a leadership vacuum in which “...everyone did what was right in their own eyes...” (Deuteronomy 12:8). On the other hand, Jesus warned his disciples against the opposite style the Gentile leaders used to oppress the people (Matthew 20:25). Jesus went on to say “this should not be so among you” which begs the question, what should be so among us? Both secular styles are evil and eventually destructive.

Of all the images used in scripture to describe the uniqueness of the church, (Lesson 1), there is one more and it captures the unique and required style of elder leadership—**the sheep of God’s flock need shepherds**. While this image seems too antiquated for modern thinking, no secular or godless style of leadership comes close to replicating the shepherding of sheep. It is neither permissive nor oppressive—it is protective. You’ll see in Lesson 3, “A Trustworthy Saying” that Paul’s description of the elder perfectly fits the shepherding style of leadership.

A Christ-like Style of Leadership

The church as a spiritual community, held together by a common love for Jesus Christ, requires a Christ-like style of shepherding leadership. Furthermore, Christ is not only the model for this style, but he himself, by his indwelling Holy Spirit, is the very empowerment for such a leadership style. We’ll look at this empowerment in Lesson 4, “Life in the Spirit”.

After the resurrection of Christ and before his ascension, he commissioned his followers, “As you are going on your way make disciples of me and teach them how to obey everything I have asked of them” (Matthew 28:19-20, my paraphrase). Disciples of Jesus are best made under a Christ-like shepherding style of elder leadership.

Let’s look now at the shepherding model in the nature of God himself that he desires to impart to elders who lead his flock.

S.O.A.P. 1 – The Flock of God

Like an earthly shepherd, God has paid a great price for his flock. God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, was sent and came willingly for the express purpose to pay the debt of man’s sin. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 2 & Luke 2). God’s love for his flock cannot be measured. Because we are like sheep, God’s care and devotion to us goes unnoticed much of the time.

S.cripture – Read Jeremiah 23:1-4; Ezekiel 34:6-17

O.bservations

1. What words or phrases in Jeremiah’s prophecy does God use in describing his own shepherd’s heart toward Israel, his flock?

2. As you read Ezekiel 34, what were the shepherding images of God’s heart that captured your understanding of him?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. Can you remember a significant time when you felt lost or alone and God rescued you? Briefly tell your story here:

2. Can you remember a time of significant decision when God led you in the right direction? Briefly tell your story here:

3. Can you remember a time of material need when God faithfully provided? Briefly tell your story here:

P.rayer – Thank God for his shepherd’s heart faithfully expressed toward you.
Praise him for his love and peace.

S.O.A.P. 2 – The Good Shepherd

The analogy of shepherds and sheep takes a magnificent twist when Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb of God, (Isaiah 53) becomes the shepherd of all who believe in him for salvation from sin. Furthermore, on every page of the gospel records you’ll see the shepherd’s heart as Christ gently and compassionately reaches out to touch the needs of unhealthy and broken people. Tirelessly he ends each day exhausted by the crowds who saw him as their best hope for a better tomorrow.

S.cripture – Read John 10:1-21; I Peter 2:23-25

O.bservations

1. What does the image of the “gate” (John 10) add to Christ’s own description of his shepherd’s heart?

2. What comes to mind when you read Peter’s title of Christ as “...overseer of your souls”?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. Describe how safe and secure you feel as a sheep of the Good Shepherd.

2. What most often threatens the peace and security you have in Jesus Christ?

3. In your past have any elders in the church, career or lay, ever threatened the peace or security of the flock of God? If so, describe here:

P.rayer – Thank Jesus for his individual devotion and attention to you as your gentle and Good Shepherd.

S.O.A.P. 3 – Leading With a Shepherd’s Heart

The elder, whether career or lay, is an extension of the shepherding heart of God the Father revealed in Jesus Christ. As an elder you must be like Christ to lead like he leads. Every qualification required of you is perfectly fulfilled by Christ. He alone, no one else, is both your model and empowerment for shepherding and leading. You are his under-shepherd and his hireling. To lead like Jesus in Christ-likeness is your calling. What he calls you to do he enables you to do.

S.cripture – Read John 21:7-19; Acts 20:25-31, 38

O.bservations

1. In your own words describe how Jesus, following his resurrection, both restores and commissions Peter (John 21).
2. Paul uses the image of the steward’s heart and style of leadership to warn the early elders in Ephesus (Acts 20) of the false teachers! What does this tell you about the mentality of a shepherd?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. What do you know of Peter’s past that would have disqualified him for leadership in the church?
2. What are some of the misunderstandings or mental images of shepherds you may have held before this lesson?
3. How or why does the shepherding style of leadership fit the unique nature of the church as “family”, “bride” and “body”? Write down several thoughts.
“family”

“bride”

“body”

P.rayer – Ask God by His Spirit to expose any unhealthy emotions or tendencies you have to lead oppressively or passively or passive-aggressively.

Further Thoughts

The Nature of Sheep

The Biblical analogy of sheep rightly follows that of the shepherd. What is it about the nature of sheep that informs us about the spiritual and emotional nature of God's people that elders are called to shepherd? To start with, you may want to re-read Psalm 23. This beloved psalm, written by David the shepherd, gives us a remarkable picture of God's heart and our dependence on Him. "The Lord is my shepherd..." has given comfort to every generation of believers. But it also deepens your understanding of the call of God to give spiritual leadership. Consider a few insights that real sheep give us about God's people—His flock.

1. Sheep are not predators, but rather defenseless prey that need to be guarded.
2. They are easily frightened and will scatter when threatened.
3. Sheep are best led rather than driven.
4. They are easily led by their shepherd's voice who speaks their name.
5. Sheep are most secure in the herd even though they bite each other.
6. They will wander off while grazing for greener grass.
7. New-born lambs need to be carried to protect them from being trampled by adult sheep.
8. Sheep need careful and constant attention to detect disease or injury.

Sounds a lot like church people—right?

One more insight—sheep stink most of the time due to the thick wool on their hind quarters. Every flock of God has sheep that stink with pride. Help the herd to love them and show a better way for, "We all like sheep have gone astray..." (Isaiah 53:6). The calling of God to eldership is a call to love and care for his flock unconditionally. In the lessons that follow the image of shepherd and sheep will reappear to remind and sharpen your understanding of the unique style of leadership required of elders. Leading with a shepherd's heart is not easy, but it is possible. You need the heart of a shepherd as the sheep will test your character.

In Psalm 78, Asaph finished his summary of Israel's spiritual history with this:

*He chose David his servant
and took him from the sheep pens;
from tending the sheep he brought him
to be the shepherd of his people Jacob,
of Israel his inheritance.
And David shepherded them with integrity of heart;
with skillful hands he led them.*

The nature of the human soul and spirit is best led by the "skillful hands" of a shepherd with a "heart of integrity". This noble task of the overseer must begin with the character of Jesus, the good and great shepherd.

Lesson 3

Elder Selection

A Trustworthy Saying

In his first letter to young Pastor Timothy in Ephesus, Paul uses three times the expression "...a trustworthy saying..." Twice Paul adds, "...that deserves full acceptance..." (I Timothy 3:1). The expression simply means, "a faithful word". In other words the saying is true and completely reliable. While every inspired Word of God is trustworthy, Paul adds emphasis to the saying he is about to give. That saying explains the uniqueness of elder leadership in the church and the standard used to select them. Before we consider the specific qualifications for elders, let's not miss the trustworthy saying given by Paul:

If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. (I Timothy 3:1)

If you understand this trustworthy saying, the qualifications that follow make sense on both spiritual and practical levels.

I think also that Paul used the expression "trustworthy saying" to make sure that Timothy does not compromise the standard applied in selecting elder-leaders. Given Timothy's youth (I Timothy 4:12), as well as the pressure of the false teachers he was facing in Ephesus (I Timothy 1:3), the standard must be maintained at all costs. This in itself is a good lesson for every local church. I might add that friendship, vocational success, wealth or influence should never dilute or compromise the standard for any one's selection. It is neither a personality contest nor an IQ test.

Now let's take a look at the trustworthy saying. This is one of those, "more to it than you think" moments.

S.O.A.P. 1 - "Aspire"

"Sets his heart" in the Greek means "**to aspire**". In my experience as a career pastor, the only men who suggested, "I want to be an elder" were unqualified or ignorant of what eldership requires. Ambition and volunteerism have many unhealthy motives as we'll see in the scriptures below. Almost always "aspiration" surfaced after a qualified man had been observed and vetted and asked to consider prayerfully with their wife, the calling of God to elder leadership. You see, there will be stressful times for the elder when the only answer to "Why did I sign up for this?" is a deep sense of God's calling to shepherding-leadership.

S.cripture – Matthew 20:20-28; Acts 9:1-17

Observations

1. In Matthew 20, what do you think James, John and their mother were aspiring to when Jesus mentions “the cup”?

What do you think Jesus meant by “the cup”?

2. What made Saul’s [Paul] conversion so life-changing that Jesus would dare tell him “all he [Paul] would suffer for “my name”?

Applications

1. If Christ’s call to serve includes suffering, what do you feel makes his calling so compelling? Explain here:

2. Have you ever served and suffered for the name of Christ? Yes _____
No _____ If yes, what’s your story?

3. What kinds of sufferings for the name of Christ can you think of between the extremes of inconvenience and martyrdom? List here:

Inconvenience

Martyrdom

4. Are you ready to “aspire” to elder leadership knowing that Christ’s call includes suffering? Yes _____ Not Sure _____ No _____

P.rayer – Are you ready to tell Christ in prayer that you are willing to suffer for His name? If so, tell Him now.

S.O.A.P. 2 – “Overseer”

The word “overseer” in the trustworthy saying means, “**to look upon with care**”. This could be a deal-breaker. For the career or lay elder, there is no “romance” in shepherding God’s flock. The call of God “to look upon with care” is exhausting. For the lay elder it means that Sundays are the best opportunity to look after those who need spiritual and emotional care. Shepherds must have a real presence when God’s flock gathers. What was once an option is now an obligation of your calling. Casual fellowship is replaced with attentive care.

S.cripture – Read I Peter 5:1-4; Matthew 9:35-37

O.bservations

1. Peter embeds in the image (style) of shepherd-like leadership the role, work and reward of “overseer”. Reinforce them by writing them down:

Role:

Work:

Reward:

2. Matthew captures the shepherd’s heart in Jesus by his emotion and plan. What did he feel and what is his plan? In your own words explain here:

His feelings:

His plan of action:

A.pPLICATIONS

1. Why do you feel that followers of Jesus respond well to shepherd-like leadership?

2. How would you describe your compassion for people based on your feelings and actions? Check one:

_____ compassion but no action

_____ action but no compassion

_____ occasional compassion and occasional action

_____ always compassionate and always action

_____ other _____

3. Evaluate your usual disposition in/for leadership situations. Circle a word or number that fits you.

Passive 1 2 3 4 5 Protective 6 7 8 9 10 Oppressive

4. Ask your wife to circle a word or number that she believes fits you.

Passive 1 2 3 4 5 Protective 6 7 8 9 10 Oppressive

5. What fruit or fruits of the Spirit would improve a protective shepherd-like style of leadership in you? Check one or more:

Love Joy Peace
 Patience Kindness Goodness
 Faithfulness Gentleness Self-Control

P.rayer – Ask God to help you increase your honest self-awareness to understand your motives and ability to care for others.

S.O.A.P. 3 – “Noble Task”

Whatever comes to your mind when you hear the word “noble” most likely does not apply to elders. If noble suggests to you a soft position of rank, it is dead wrong here. For the noble task Paul is referring to means, **“a heavy responsibility that requires consecration void of pride”**. This consecration is a deep commitment to respond most of all to unpleasant things. The shepherd looks upon with care to meet heavy responsibilities. Jesus nailed the noble task when he said, “I have not come to be served but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

S.cripture – Philippians 2:5-11; Romans 12:1-3, 14-16

O.bservations

1. In his Spirit-inspired letter to the Philippian Christians, Paul captures the essence of the “noble task” Jesus faced. In your own words describe how Jesus fulfilled his noble task.

2. In Romans 12, Paul exhorts the followers of Jesus to think of themselves with “sober judgment” or clear and honest. Describe why this is difficult to do – here:

problem-solving and decision-making, meetings are the tip of the iceberg. Second, many responsibilities of eldership are both regular and occasional and require availability and wisdom. And third, when you love and care for the sheep of God's flock, they will look for you and trust your leadership.

Extreme Care

The qualification that best illustrates both the care given by an "overseer" and a heavy responsibility of "the noble task" is "...hospitable..." (Titus 1:8). In the Greek this word does not mean light-hearted entertaining or fellowship (Acts 2), but rather to offer lodging to those who are traveling or fleeing! In other words to open your home as a safe place to meet an extreme need by extreme care born out of generosity (agape` love) and compassion.

The warning of Jesus that his followers would be hated and persecuted (John 15) has been and will be a constant reality in every generation since the empty tomb. In Peter and Paul's day "the Way" (Acts 19:9) was a threat to Jews and Gentiles alike often resulting in the dislodgement of Christ-followers from their occupations and homes.

Are you and your wife "hospitable"? Are you willing to risk your safety for the safety of others and the sake of Christ? If you are, you can make any adjustment in your present life-style to care for the sheep of God's flock. Like Jesus, would you lay down your life in small and large ways?

Adjusting Your Lifestyle

Shepherding God's flock requires change. Two changes come to mind. First, the pleasures and past-times that consume a lot of your time, talent and treasure may lose their attraction. And second, you will no doubt need to release lesser things for greater things in your service to Christ. If someone else can do what you are presently committed to, release it for the fulfillment of your calling to eldership. Don't pile your plate. Shepherd well!

Assigned Households

Elders and their wives who love and care well have households assigned to them. In one church plant the three elders and I formed "care groups" that met regularly. Suddenly my incoming phone calls declined as people turned to their elder first. I told the elders, "You are responsible for the 'skinned knees' and I'll be there for the 'broken necks'". Each group had their own "prayer chain" for immediate access to prayer support. Little did we know back in 1981 that this care would be a strong foundation for the health and growth of the church. It also led to my long tenure as their lead pastor.

Lesson 4

Life In The Spirit

Growing A Shepherd's Heart

The fulfillment of every qualification for elder leadership begins with your character. What you are becoming on the inside determines your responses to the sheep and the actions you take on their behalf. Only by living in the Spirit of Christ will you maintain the shepherd's heart. I would guess you have never shepherded real sheep as described in Lesson 2. The closest you may have come is parenting a group of your own one to five year old children. My wife and I had three kids under 5 years old. Now there's a test of character—right? We joined the ranks of parents who said, "I thought I was patient till I had children of my own."

God Appointed Leaders

The scriptures are filled with examples of God-appointed leaders who were made, not born. All needed to be transformed to fulfill God's calling on their lives. God transformed proud Joseph through mistreatment by his brothers and Pharaoh. God transformed the hot-tempered Moses into a meek man through shepherding his father-in-law's sheep. God transformed "little" David through years of shepherding his father's flocks. Surely, God needs to transform your character for his calling. Every effective career or lay elder has their story of transformation. Each one will also tell you their story is not over with.

Reborn to be Transformed

When you were "born again" by God's Spirit (John 3:3), you became a child of God's eternal family (John 1:12). Like natural infants grow to resemble their parents in many ways, God expects and provides a way for his children to resemble him in many ways. God desires every follower of Jesus to be transformed in their character—to grow in the likeness of Christ. Jesus said, "If you have seen me you have seen the Father" (John 14:9). Later Paul is inspired to write that "...Christ is the exact representation of God..." (Colossians 1:15). So Christ is your model, but much, much more! His Spirit is within you to work this transformation of your character, not automatically, but with your intentional cooperation and desire. This is not an option but a must, especially for anyone called by God to shepherd his flock. Getting this right will make a huge difference on many levels in your life and the lives of others.

Let's take a look at the transformation of Peter, Paul and you.

S.O.A.P. 1 - Peter's Transformation

The sinful and fallen character of both Peter and Paul reveal the extreme pride and self-righteousness we see in ourselves. Peter had spent three years with Jesus but was still so “full of himself” that it took a failure of great magnitude to finally humiliate and transform him. Every amazing thing Peter did and heard and witnessed in his journey with Jesus made no difference in the hour of his greatest challenge. Peter denies his relationship to Jesus three times before the crucifixion only to be forgiven and restored by Jesus following the resurrection.

S.cripture – Read John 18:15-18, 25-27; Acts 4:1-22

O.bservations

1. The best way to examine Peter's transformation is with a “before and after” snapshot. Briefly list what you see in Peter's character on these two occasions:

John 18-15-18, 25-27

Acts 4:1-22

2. What events between the above made the difference? Look at John 21:1-14 and Acts 1-3.

A.pPLICATIONS

1. What is your present understanding of the person and work of God's Holy Spirit in the life of a follower of Jesus Christ?

2. Describe your experience here of your own character transformation since your conversion experience.

Before

After

P.rayer – Ask God to take you deeper in your understanding and experience of character transformation.

S.O.A.P. 2 - Paul's Transformation

Paul's pride and self-righteousness was the product of his education in Jewish law and his rise to religious leadership. His extreme pride is seen in his first appearance in the scripture when he ordered the execution and martyrdom of Stephan in Acts 7. Paul was born again when the resurrected Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). The words of Jesus shattered the hollow shell of Paul's religious self-righteousness. Later Paul describes the transformation of his character in his inspired letter to the house-churches throughout the city of Rome and Philippi.

S.cripture – Read Philippians 3:2-11; Romans 7:14-8:17

O.bservations

1. Paul's resume` of self-righteousness (Philippians 3) was air-tight until what? Briefly summarize what happened here:

2. After Paul was born again, he discovered that he needed his character transformed by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in him (Romans 7-8). How do you think Paul cooperated with the Holy Spirit to make the transformation of his character a reality?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. If you wrote a resume` of your own self-righteous achievements like Paul did in Philippians 3, what would you put on it? Jot them down here:

2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how close does Paul's moral frustration come to your own (Romans 7:14-25)
Not Close 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Spot On

3. List the statements that Paul uses in Romans 8 to describe this "break-through" from his moral frustrations. List them here:

4. Have you had your own moral and spiritual “break-through”
Yes _____ Not Sure _____ No _____ What is your story?
Explain here:

P.rayer – Ask God to help you clarify your spiritual journey and understand the work of God’s Spirit in you.

S.O.A.P. 3 – Your Own Transformation

Your story of spiritual rebirth may be quite different from that of the apostles Peter and Paul, but your transformation into the likeness of Christ will put you in their company—the same Spirit that lived in them lives in you. The same Holy Spirit that sanctified them will also “separate you from sin and to Christ”—the definition of sanctification. Paul wrote to the Thessalonian believers, “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire...May God himself, the God of peace sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thessalonians 5:19, 23).

S.cripture – Read Galatians 5:13-26; Ephesians 5:3-18

O.bservations

1. List the words or phrases that Paul uses in Galatians 5 to state or suggest your intentional on-going relationship with the Holy Spirit.

2. In your opinion, how would continuously “...be [being] filled with the Holy Spirit...” (Ephesians 5:18) be an antidote to Paul’s long list of “...fruitless deeds of darkness...” (Vv. 3-17)?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. In what ways would the fruit of the Spirit or character of Christ in your life impact the sheep you shepherd in the flock of God? List as many ways as you can think of here:

2. Look at the list of “acts of the sinful nature” in Galatians 5:19-21 and list each one under one of the follow headings:

I Struggle With

I Don't Struggle With

3. Look at the list of the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-23 and list each one under one of the follow headings:

I Struggle With

I Don't Struggle With

P.rayer – Thank God for the progress made in your transformation into Christ-likeness. Ask him to fill you each day with his Holy Spirit for your continued sanctification.

Further Thoughts

Reborn to be Transformed

If you “aspire” to be an “overseer”, whether career or lay, your character must be transformed in and out of an ongoing relationship with God in Christ. You must continue in the grace of God that saved you and now progressively transforms you or sanctifies you. So the remaining question is this: How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit to effect this transformation? The most important answer is humble surrender. God makes these profound statements about Himself to Isaiah his prophet:

For this is what the high and exalted One says—He who lives forever, whose Name is holy: ‘I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.’ (Isaiah 57:15) ‘These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word.’ (Isaiah 66:2)

How will you know when you are humble enough? Fortunately, only God can measure your “lowly spirit”—your humble surrender to the work of His Spirit in you. But God is anxious to fill you with His Spirit in response to your humble desperation for Him.

The Apostle Paul wrote of this humble surrender as a kind of “death to self” experience. To the Romans he wrote this,

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. (Romans 6:11)

For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. (Romans 8:13-14)

In Paul's letter to the Galatians he refers to the sinful nature six times in chapter 5 verses 13-26 concluding with, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24). This is not about comingling Christ's nature with your sinful nature but practically applying Christ's crucifixion to your sinful nature. As you do that the nature of Jesus will emerge in you. It's quite exciting!

A Refreshing Breakthrough

Every follower of Christ must become aware of their need of Christ's Spirit to sanctify them (Romans 8). The first awareness will liberate you to grow toward Christlikeness and away from the sinful desires and habits that imprison you in guilt and hopelessness. Your emotional response to your first "infilling" experience may be determined by how long or how deep your struggle for self-righteousness has been. The greater your struggle—the greater your breakthrough and joy! This is a welcomed blessing from the "...exceeding riches of [God's] grace..." (Ephesians 2:7).

A Daily Surrender

To be filled with the Spirit, who sanctifies or separates you from sinful desires and empowers you in the face of temptation and grows the fruit of Christ-likeness in you, is the result of daily humble surrender in prayer. Jesus taught in the upper room, "...the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name..." (John 16:23-24), meaning, sincere prayer "for only those things that glorify Christ". "Living", "walking" and "being led" by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 17 & 25) requires a way-of-life daily surrender. No formula here. Paul summed it up simply, "be continually filled with the Holy Spirit..."

While you are positionally sanctified from the condemnation of sin by Christ's atoning death, you still need a daily progressive sanctification to live the righteous life of Christ's likeness. Therefore, your progressive sanctification is not one prayer or filling for a lifetime, but a lifetime of humble surrender and many fillings.

Furthermore, Christ-likeness pleasantly impacts all of your relationships. If you are in the midst of parenting, your need of Christ-likeness is multiplied. If you manage others in the workplace your need for Christ-likeness is continuous. As you shepherd God's people you need to be like the Good Shepherd!

Recommended: For a deeper and practical study of the Spirit-filled life and the Fruit of the Spirit see: *Life In The Vine—Increasing the Likeness of Jesus in You*, Lesson 1 – A Greater Righteousness. Also see: *Following Me – What Jesus Wants You to Know as You Begin the Journey with Him*, Lesson 4 – "I will remain in you..."

Lesson 5

Above Reproach

The Perception Of Others

In the first four lessons I have tried to lay a good foundation for elder leadership. In summary, because the church is unique it requires a unique shepherd-like style of leadership described by Paul in his “trustworthy saying”. Such a leader is not born, but rather transformed by the indwelling Spirit of Christ who sanctifies and empowers for increasing Christ-like leadership.

In this lesson we begin to unpack the specific qualifications for elder leadership. Please keep in mind that these qualities are not perfections. Think of them as spiritual and emotional goals toward which you are striving. Simply put, are you running in the right direction and have you made enough progress that those you lead are confident to follow? Hopefully your progress was observed before you were asked to prayerfully consider God’s call to eldership. Unfortunately, as sinful creatures in a fallen world, what others see in you may not be clear or complete or correct! Or worse yet, is there a dark or secret side known only to God Himself?

The purpose of the following lessons is summed up well by the Apostle Paul’s encouragement to the believers in Rome.

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you:
Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but
rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance
with the measure of faith God has given you. (Romans 12:3)*

Your own “sober judgment” is critical. By humble surrender in prayer, God will give you the self-awareness you need to say “yes” or “not yet” to God’s call.

The Perception of Others

In both lists of elder qualifications we find several words that we’ll group together in this lesson that describe the perception of others. Using the same image above, as your fellow believers are striving toward the spiritual and emotional goal of Christ-likeness, do they see you out in front of them or at least beside them? How will they view your progress?

S.O.A.P. 1 – “Above Reproach” (I Timothy 3:2)

Above reproach in the Greek means, “not to be laid hold of”; in other words, impossible to bring a charge of wrong doing. While it’s true that when you were born again (John 3) you became a “new creation; the old has gone, the new has come...” (II Corinthians 5:17), but it does not mean you can dismiss or ignore the past of unresolved conflicts, broken relationships and sins against others you need

to confess and make right. If a charge can be made against you, you are at risk as an elder.

S.cripture – Read Matthew 5:23-26; Colossians 3:12-14

O.bservations

1. In Matthew 5, Jesus builds a case for urgency in resolving past wrongs and present conflicts in your life. Summarize his teaching in your own words here:

2. Paul instructs the Colossian Christians to be forgiving. Why do you think asking for forgiveness and granting forgiveness are so important?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. What is most difficult for you – asking for forgiveness or granting forgiveness? Check one: _____ Asking _____ Granting. Why? Explain here:

2. Who comes to mind when asked, “Is there an unresolved wrong or conflict in your past or present? If so, write their name here: _____

3. Who in your life would be astonished to hear that you are an elder in your church? Name: _____ Why?

P.rayer – Ask God to lead you and give you courage to resolve any wrong or conflict in your past or present.

S.O.A.P. 2 – “Respectable” (I Timothy 3:2)

The Greek word literally includes “modesty”, “orderly” and “honorably”. It does not mean a stuffy pompous demeanor. But it does speak to your general conduct as an overseer in the presence of others. A respectable person is careful to behave properly with everyone from boys to girls to teenagers and all adults, singles and married, to seniors and strangers. A respectable elder shows respect in behavior, expressions and speech, even in the most extreme responses to humor or anger. Respectability is easily lost in these extreme emotions. Let’s take a brief look at these extremes.

S.cripture – Read Ephesians 5:3-4; James 1:19-21, 3:1-2

O.bservations

1. Based on Ephesians 5, Paul calls for intolerance of inappropriate speech and humor. In what ways is respect lost by such language?
2. Based on James’ teaching, how and why does “quick to listen” slow down angry responses toward others? Explain here:

A.pPLICATIONS

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you measure your present ability or skills to listen?
Quick to Anger 1 2 3 4 5 Quick to Listen
2. How prevalent were obscenities or coarse joking in your childhood and family life? Describe here:
3. How difficult is it for you to guard your tongue regarding the use of inappropriate humor? Explain briefly:
4. How sensitive and quick are you to apologize when you lose respect by ungodly speech or behavior? Explain here:

P.rayer – Ask God by His indwelling Spirit to help you guard your tongue, slow down to listen and think before you speak.

S.O.A.P. 3 – “Blameless” (Titus 1:6)

This Greek word implies there is no doubt regarding a person’s reputation—the fact is well established. Furthermore, any false accusation against a blameless elder dies quickly to the shame of the accuser. This was always my greatest fear

in ministry—that I would be falsely accused, especially of a moral or ethical indiscretion. I guarded myself as best I could with an awareness that Satan “prowls” (I Peter 5:8) to take down elder leaders. Safeguard yourself and trust in God’s protection.

S.cripture – Read I Timothy 5:19-20; I Timothy 6:11-16

O.bservations

1. Why do you think Paul wisely instructs Timothy (5:19-20) that it must take 2 to 3 reliable witnesses, apart from the accuser, to bring an accusation against an elder?

2. Paul encourages Timothy and all elders to maintain a blameless reputation (6:11-16) by doing what?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. What kind of character would a reliable accuser and witnesses possess before a “charge” against an elder is considered? Describe here:

2. What is your feeling or attitude regarding “public shame”?

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you measure your desire to “flee”, “pursue”, “fight”, “take hold of”, “keep”, “without spot or blemish”?
Very Weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very Strong

4. How would your wife measure this desire in you? Talk with her about it.

P.rayer – Tell God you want to increase your desire to remain blameless. Ask Him to fill you with His Spirit and sanctify your “whole spirit, soul and body [to] be kept blameless...” (I Thessalonians 5:23).

Further Thoughts

A Good Reputation with Outsiders (I Timothy 3:7)

The quirky, lovable former mayor of New York City, Ed Koch, was always asking people on the street, “So, how am I doing?” I think most people humored him—I don’t know if he really wanted an honest answer. It’s not the kind of question you should be asking of outsiders—people that only know you outside of your family and local church. Outsiders are people like your neighbors, your service providers, your children’s teachers, your fellow workers, your boss or the people you manage—the list goes on. Would any of these people be surprised or even shocked to discover that you are an elder in your church? Do they know something about your character or behavior that is not known by your “insiders”?

At the risk of sounding like I made this up, a married elder I knew actually invited his mistress to a church I attended! Unknown to me she sat in front of me. This is by far my most extreme example of “...fall[ing] into disgrace and into the devil’s trap” (I Timothy 3:7), that I have ever witnessed when it was found out. The “trap” means to have been taken captive to do the devil’s will. Not only was he disgraced, but his failure brought disgrace to the church and the cause of Christ—His gospel. There are many other extremes that bring disgrace.

What have you left undone, unresolved or unforgiven that could bring shame and injury to you and your family and the flock of God? Do you have a dark side of sinful desires you act out in secret? If you have answered yes, you’re not ready for elder leadership. The Spirit of God is grieved with you (Ephesians 4:30).

The Clear Conscience

On a positive note, the value of a clear conscience is immense. The conscience is a common theme in the New Testament. The scriptures are filled with references to the “defiled” conscience (Titus 1:15), the “seared” conscience (I Timothy 4:2), the “good” conscience (I Timothy 1:5), the “pure” conscience (I Timothy 3:9) and the “clear” conscience (I Peter 3:16). A clear conscience will liberate you on many fronts such as:

- Free from the fear of being “found out” or falsely accused
- Free from guilt and shame
- Free to confront sin and sinful behaviors
- Free to teach on every Biblical topic
- Free to receive God’s blessing and empowerment

A good shepherd of God’s flock has a pure conscience. Be blessed with a conscience of an elder who is “above reproach”, “respectable” and “blameless” having “a good reputation with outsiders”.

Lesson 6

Husband Of One Wife

Marriage As God Intended

The elder qualification of “...husband of one wife...” (I Timothy 3:2) has little to do with divorce and much to do with the cultural and moral condition of the Greco-Roman world of the first century. One glimpse of pre-Christian Ephesus will enlighten you. Here it is. At that time a wife had every obligation to remain sexually faithful while a husband had absolutely no moral obligations what so ever. Sexual immorality of every kind ran rampant through that culture. Serial, if not actual, polygamy along with all other perversions was common.

The introduction of the gospel of Jesus Christ into that society equalized the obligations of wives and husbands to one another and revolutionized the institution of marriage and family. Faithfulness to sexual purity in a monogamous relationship would become the foundational bedrock for marriage. But as you look into the scriptures, God’s expectation takes you deeper and higher than mere monogamy. To put it simply, as a husband you are not the king of your castle who returns each day to be served but rather to serve!

Marriages Made in Heaven

My wife and I firmly believe that God’s sovereign rule brought us together. It’s a long story but we still possess the two letters that “crossed in the mail” that prove it. However, our marriage may have been arranged in heaven but it was made on earth as was Adam’s and Eve’s and yours. How to make a marriage as God intended it to be is too great a topic for a single Bible lesson. So what could be said in a single lesson that could make a single marriage last a life-time? In a single word—Christ! Look at Him closely!

S.O.A.P. 1 – Mutual Submission

A genuine Christian marriage is more than a generic equalization of obligations and rights. This is grossly insufficient. First, look at the portrait of Christ in Paul’s letter to the Philippians and then consider Paul’s Spirit-inspired description of Christian marriage in his letter to the Ephesian house-churches over which Timothy pastored. You should see God’s intention for your marriage. All followers of Christ can be empowered by Divine love—the grace (charas) to love unconditionally and sacrificially. In their marriage, elders and their wives must model a mutual submission by surrendering their personal rights in order to meet the needs of each other just as Jesus did for all of us at the cross!

S.criptures – Read Philippians 2:1-11; Ephesians 5:21-33

O.bservations

1. According to Philippians 2, what did Christ think or do to take on the nature of a servant? List as many as you find here:

Things Christ Thought

Things Christ Did

2. Based on Ephesians 5:12, marriage illustrates the relationship of Christ to his church. How does mutual submission accomplish that?

A.pplications

1. How easy or difficult is it for you to make yourself “nothing” in your marriage like Christ did for you on the cross? Explain here:

2. In your opinion how does your sinful nature of pride and rights hinder mutual submission in your marriage?

3. Why is the primary need of women (love) and men (respect) best met by the other? Explain as best you can here:

4. Why is a demand by the wife for love or a demand by the husband for respect ineffective?

5. How would you measure the light your marriage sheds on the mystery of Christ and his church?

Circle One: Dark Dim Visible Bright

6. Name a small thing you could think or do to brighten the light.

P.rayer – Thank God for your wife. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with the fruit of love to deepen your capacity to love unconditionally and sacrificially.

S.O.A.P. 2 – The Wife of an Elder

Like a career elder's wife, the lay elder's wife must also see herself as a "one-flesh" partner engaged together both spiritually and emotionally in a shepherding ministry. To be effective your wife can't be merely "willing to go along with you" but to "team up" in support of the heavy responsibilities of eldership. If not, you will be torn or distracted. At the risk of a false assumption, what applies to the wives of deacons and "older women" (Titus 2:3) in Paul's letters also applies to the wives of elders. This is not much of a stretch.

S.criptures – Read I Timothy 3:11

O.bservations

1. In your own words how would the characteristics Paul describes in I Timothy 3:11 compliment the noble task of an elder-shepherd?
2. How would malicious talk undermine an elder's care of the flock of God?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. How would other women measure your wife's respectability? Circle One:
Weak 1 2 3 4 Acceptable 7 8 9 10 Very Strong
2. How would other women measure your wife's trustworthiness? Circle One:
Weak 1 2 3 4 Acceptable 7 8 9 10 Very Strong
3. How would you measure your wife's temperance or self-control? Circle One:
Weak 1 2 3 4 Acceptable 7 8 9 10 Very Strong

P.rayer – Thank God for your wife. Ask him to show you how to encourage her to be a shepherd-like leader.

S.O.A.P. 3 – Teachers of Younger Women

Who better to instruct young women and model devotion to Christ, their husband and children than the wife of an elder-overseer? Who better to demonstrate respect for a loving husband than a spiritually mature wife of a spiritually mature shepherd? Who best to give care to needy younger women and disciple them life-on-life? Keep in mind that Christianity at its finest is a

movement of lay people, not an institution led by educated clergy. You and your wife do not need to be educated teachers to teach.

Given the pre-Christian culture on Crete, it may have been difficult for Titus to find a qualified husband with a “reverent” wife (Titus 2:3) to serve and lead as a shepherding couple. Reverent in the Greek was used to describe the conduct of a priestess who believes that all of life is sacred.

S.cripture – Read Titus 2:3-5

O.bservations

1. According to Titus 2, what are the specific characteristics Paul points to that describe the “reverent” priestess?
2. God’s inspired Word always elevates the role of motherhood as in Paul’s letter to Pastor Titus. What reasons come to your mind?

A.pplications

1. How would you describe your wife’s “reverent” qualities? Re-read the brief description in the S.O.A.P. introduction above.
2. If your wife is a mother, on a scale of 1 to 10, how would you measure the value she places on her own motherhood? Circle One:
Valuable 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Valuable
3. Why is her own value of her motherhood important to your children, you as an elder and to the church—the family and flock of God?

P.rayer –Thank God for your wife. Ask God to remind you to regularly encourage her to become and reach her full potential in Christ and for Christ.

Further Thoughts

Predictable Elder Leadership

Your effectiveness in fulfilling your call to elder leadership is made predictable by, or commensurate to, the strength of your marriage and family life. Your inattention and lack of care of your wife and children will ultimately take you to failure on many levels. Over many years of observing the marriages and children of career and lay elders, I have witnessed both husbands and wives who were “malicious talkers”, “quick tempered”, “controlling” and, yes, “immoral”. Fortunately, the majority I have known were women of “inner beauty” (I Peter 3:4) and purity with husbands who loved them like Christ loves the church. The difference can be attributed to husbands who maintained their devotion to their wife and children by living their life with “margin”.

What Is Margin?

Dr. Richard Swensen, a Christian medical doctor, popularized the word in his book, *Margin*. His prescription for improved physical, mental and relational health is the creation of “margin”—having reserves to give and invest in the people you “say” you love. If you are living on the fumes of over-activity and have no reserves or margin, it is only a matter of time before your marriage and family will begin to fall apart. In coaching pastors I always exhorted them to give their wife and children the “best” of their time and energy, not the “worst” or the fumes of their life. Your wife and children deserve better and know the difference—do you? Such failure is devastating for the church family as well. The sheep will scatter and recovery is long.

In my last pastoral ministry of sixteen years, the elders and their wives created a loving culture and warm environment for church growth and health. I credit the wives as much as their husbands, if not more. Their wives also endeared themselves to unbelievers as well. Their children proved to be well disciplined and spiritually healthy. I wish the same for you!

One of the nicest and most memorable compliments the church I pastored received was said to me at a high school basketball game. As I was walking into the gym, the assistant principal, whom I knew well through coaching his son in recreation sports, came up to me and asked, “So Dick, what brings you to this game?” I answered, “Adam and Brian are playing—they attend my church.” He replied, “I know all the kids that go to your church—they are the nicest kids in the whole school!” Obviously, I praised the Lord that His love made its way into the local high school by teenagers who most likely were unaware. What a wonderful testimony! It began with Christ-centered marriages modeled after Christ’s love for His church.

Lesson 7

A Well-Managed Family

Raising Responsible Children

The Apostle Paul not only opened the huge elder qualification of marriage by “...the husband of one wife...”, but opens yet another big one of “a well-managed family”. Paul tells Timothy:

He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) (I Timothy 3:4-5)

To Titus Paul adds,

...a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. (Titus 1:6)

This is a tall order, especially if you’re in the throes of raising children. Who among us is confident enough in the present, and much less in future outcomes, that our children will be “believers”, “not wild” and “not disobedient”? As strong as we believed our marriage to be, my wife and I always felt insecure about our calling to career ministry because of the uncertainty of parenting. One day we felt quite qualified and the next day, not so much! Parenting at best is a blind-folded roller-coaster ride. If you don’t have time to pray—have kids and you’ll be on your knees a lot! Only by the grace of God my three children were not “wild” or “disobedient” (as far as I know) and are still believers who married believers. We take no credit for God’s grace, only to say that in spite of our fallen natures, “we like to think we gave it our best shot”. Not perfect—but who is?

Your qualification for eldership “to manage the household of God well” is proven and tested, not by your success in the workplace, but in your home and the heavy responsibility of raising your own children. It seems, I suppose, if you can raise your own children well you can do most anything well. Parenting is so challenging that it’s one of the most talked about and written about subjects in every generation and culture. As you can see from the scriptures, the godless cultures get parenting wrong most of the time. It was to such a culture in first century Greco-Roman society that the gospel of Christ penetrated for the first time. Since the early church met in houses, new followers of Christ needed to see and experience a new way of family life in the homes of elders. Would they see the gospel and Lordship of Christ really work and make a difference? Would they observe a Christian marriage as a picture of Christ’s love for his church? And would parents see parenting that reflects the image and nature of God the Father as shepherd of his flock, the church?

These are the reasons “why” managing your household well and raising responsible children is so important. Now let’s consider several of the “how-to’s” of parenting from God’s inspired Word. Get these right at home and you’ll be effective in managing God’s household well.

S.O.A.P. 1 – The Ultimate Goal

There is no argument that parenting well is the most important and heaviest responsibility any father and mother could undertake. Like it or not, your child’s spiritual, emotional, behavioral and social maturity is a measure of how well or poorly you have disciplined them. Keep this in mind—there is no age of innocence (Psalm 51:5), only a period of unawareness. As the infant’s unawareness wears off, “wild and disobedient” emerges (Titus 1:6). God-like discipline is a parent’s only hope! Also keep in mind that discipline is your child’s pathway to self-discipline, responsibility, wisdom and a healthy self-reliance. The ultimate goal of raising children is to discipline them for independence, let them go, and have them return as your friends.

S.cripture – Read Hebrews 12:4-11; Ephesians 6:1-4

O.bservations

1. According to Hebrews 12, how is God the Father’s discipline of us similar yet different from a natural father’s discipline? List them here:

Similarities

Differences

2. “Exasperate” means making unreasonable demands on a child causing them to lose heart in a constant state of resentment. How is God’s fatherhood different? Explain here:

A.pplications

1. How often do you and the mother of your children discuss privately the discipline of each child?
2. Why is such a discussion important for you and your children?

For You:

For Your Children:

3. What do you feel you should do when you have over-reacted and “exasperated” your child with out-of-control anger or unreasonable demands?
4. Are you merely repeating the same methods of discipline your own parents used or are you looking to your heavenly Father to teach and train you in his ways? Explain here:
5. This S.O.A.P. is not intended to be a parenting handbook, so what other Biblically based resources have you read or participated in?

P.rayer – Ask God for a deeper understanding of his fatherhood as well as his wisdom to apply it to your own parenting.

S.O.A.P. 2 – The Great Gain

Cutting “apron strings” is an old-fashioned image of a young child clinging to their mother’s apron while she fixes dinner. Cutting the apron strings of dependence is the goal of good parenting. From my own experience as a son and father, I have concluded that the strongest and final string to be cut is financial dependence. Without financial independence your child remains a child, no matter how old they get, and the genuine friendship of equals fails to emerge. The equalizer is, “...godliness with contentment is great gain” (I Timothy 6:6).

S.cripture – Read I Timothy 6:6-10; Matthew 6:19-34

O.bservations

1. How would a love of money (Matthew 6) and uncontrolled materialism become an expression of a type of “wild” (Titus 1) in a child? Describe here:
2. Since “godliness with contentment” (I Timothy 6) means to be satisfied with what God provides, how would you model that and teach it to your children? Explain here:

A.plications

1. Since your children are both impressionable and unaware of the dangers of a love of money, what values or habits should you and your wife adjust or discard outright?

2. How are you and your wife training your children to work and be generous?

Work:

Generosity:

3. How are you and your wife training your children in how to save and spend wisely?

Saving Wisely:

Spending Wisely:

P.rayer – Ask God to show you the dangers in your own stewardship that hinder your devotion to follow Jesus and the devotion of your children to follow him.

S.O.A.P. 3 – Disciple-Making

Are you generically raising your children or are you making disciples of Jesus Christ? Many Christian parents fail to equate the two. One of my great joys as a pastor-elder was to see the children of lay elders disciplined by their parents to follow Jesus with total abandonment. Many entered career ministry even in far-away places. What saddened me most were Christian parents who neglected to encourage their children to be fully devoted to Christ, or worse yet discouraged them for selfish reasons. As we saw in S.O.A.P. 2, how you value money and happiness is the value you pass on to your kids.

S.cripture – Read Matthew 10:32-39; II Timothy 1:5-10 & 14-16

O.bservations

1. Christ's call to follow him (Matthew 10) requires a love second to none. How do a father and mother who possess such a love for Christ teach it and demonstrate it for their children to follow?

2. What do you think Timothy's mother and grandmother (II Timothy 1:5-7) felt when he left home to follow and serve Jesus Christ?

A.plications

1. From your own observations, what Christian parental dysfunctions do you see that hinder a child's desire to be fully devoted to Jesus?
2. Do you or your wife have any hint of these dysfunctions that would hinder your child's discipleship to Christ?
3. It seems that Timothy's mother and grandmother were quite intentional in his spiritual formation. On a scale of 1 to 5, how intentional are you and your wife? Circle One:
Not Intentional 1 2 3 4 5 Very Intentional
4. What could you and your wife do to become more intentional in making disciples of your children to Christ?

P.rayer – Dedicate or re-dedicate your children to the Lord and ask God for his wisdom to help you make disciples of Christ.

Further Thoughts

Recognizing God

Will your parenting make it easy or difficult for your children to recognize and understand the nature of God and their response to him with love and trust? Paul told the Ephesians, “...*be imitators of God* ...”. As the shepherd of your own lambs first, this is a “heavy responsibility” that requires your consecration. You can't pass this off to their mother or school teacher or daycare worker or even the church. The discipleship of your own children begins with you. Every elder knows this and also feels the added responsibility to model discipleship and teach it to other parents.

As a pastor-elder and father of three lambs, I felt one of the greatest challenges in parenting, and perhaps yours as well, was simply how and when do I demonstrate the mercy of God? How do I parent in the tension between being

oppressive or being permissive? If I show mercy will they actually get it and recognize God? Later my children told us they did. It would have been nice to know at the time!

Helicopter Parenting

Helicopter parenting is not new, but our godless culture has made it acceptable and even honorable. Helicopter fathers “drive” their kids to excel and win at any cost, while helicopter mothers coddle their kids to protect them from every source and form of pain. Modern godless parenting is breeding an emotionally and spiritually disabled generation. These parenting extremes do not reflect the nature of God our Father who neither “drives” nor “coddles” us. Children must accept the failure and pain of a fallen world and learn how to draw close to the Good Shepherd who cares for their soul (I Peter 5:3-5).

One Further Thought

Many of the elders both lay and career along with their wives, that I have known or labored with, have excelled in raising their children. Quite a few of these kids have entered career ministry in response to God’s calling. Most of them have become devoted followers of Christ and are active leaders in their own local church. I have also observed two exceptions. First, the children who found their way into the church through friendships and were discipled to follow Jesus with abandonment even though their own parents remained unbelievers! Second, unfortunately some children of elders turned their back on Christ and his church. Sometimes I have wondered why, and other times I knew why. Hopefully their spiritual journey is not over with.

Lesson 8

Holy

Facing Unholy Things

Having just moved my family to a new church plant, one of the wives came to me in tears. She had just discovered that her well-known and well-loved husband was having an affair. The church had 65 attendees of which 30 were children. I thought for sure that any attempt to lead my three “overseers” through a process of discipline and reconciliation would blow the young church apart and scatter the sheep. Had I moved my family from a growing and healthy church plant to close this one down? In my mind this was the worst possible scenario.

But these lay elders quickly joined me in the confrontation and disciplinary process. This “heavy responsibility” resulted in “good news—bad news”. The bad news was we had to dis-fellowship this unrepentant believer in Christ. The good news was the defeat of Satan who opposes the church and the sweet wave of spiritual and numerical growth that followed. This would not have happened without the commitment and holy character of these elders who “risked” everything for the glory of Christ in his church. Un-holiness is always defeated when confronted by holy men and women.

As the Apostle of Christ to the Gentiles, Paul could not insist enough on the need for holiness or moral purity as a contrast to the moral decadence of the Greco-Roman world. He directs pastors Timothy and Titus to look for overseers among the “self-controlled” (I Timothy 2:2) and “holy” (Titus 1:8). Look for men who “love what is good” and “upright” (Titus 1:8).

So what about your personal holiness? Take a “sober look”.

S.O.A.P. 1 – A Family Trait

Holiness has nothing to do with your outward appearance or acts of piety. Jesus called the pious Pharisees “white-washed graves”—clean on the outside with the decay and stench of death on the inside. God has called all of his children to “...be holy, because I am holy...” (I Peter 1:15-16) referring to his own perfection of moral purity and excellence. In other words, holiness in God’s children is a family trait. What God calls you to, Jesus died for and His Spirit makes possible!

In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul describes their great need of holiness or moral purity. Let’s look at several examples.

S.cripture – Read Ephesians 1:3-5; Ephesians 4:17-24

O.bservations

1. Paul begins his magnificent Christological statement with (1:3-14) God chose them in Christ “to be holy and blameless in his sight.” How do you think these early Christians reacted to that?
2. List the words in Ephesians 4 that Paul uses to contrast those who are “before and after” faith in Christ.

Before Christ

After Christ

A.ppllications

1. While God’s holiness or moral perfection is frightening, how does his love, mercy, compassion and care as your shepherd (Psalm 23) make you feel? Describe here:
2. Holiness or moral perfection seems impossible if not overwhelming. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you measure your progress to date? Circle one:
Just Started 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completed
3. If pride before God leads to self-holiness, where does humility before God lead to?

P.rayer – Tell God that you desire to be holy and are willing to humble yourself before Him.

S.O.A.P. 2 – Unholy Shepherds

If you read the descriptions in Soap 1 of immorality in first-century Ephesus and thought that little has changed—you’re right! The scriptures are ever-relevant. One obvious change is that of internet pornography. Unfortunately, pornography is epidemic even among the followers of Christ and, worse yet, among those God has called to shepherd his flock—both career and lay elders and their wives. The Apostle’s condemnations and exhortations are greatly needed

today as is the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify! When moral failure in the shepherd is exposed, the sheep who trusted them will feel betrayed and scatter.

S.cripture – Read Romans 1:18-32; I Timothy 4:2

O.bservations

1. According to Paul in Romans 1, describe in your own words the causes of unbridled evil?

2. How does the “searing” of the conscience (I Timothy 4:2), meaning unfeeling about deliberate and willful wrong doing, fit Paul’s description of unholy things in Romans 1?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. What are the moral compromises you have made that hinder your personal holiness?

2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how determined do you feel to improve and maintain your personal holiness with God’s help? Circle one:
Determined 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely Determined

3. What could you do now to improve or maintain the “good”, the “right”, and the “true” in your life, marriage and family?
Your Life:
Your Marriage:
Your Family:

P.rayer – Ask God to show you any unholy thing in your life, renounce it and repent of it.

S.O.A.P. 3 – Maintaining Moral Purity

In addition to creating “margin” for emotional and physical intimacy with your spouse (Read I Corinthians 7:1-5), you must also create margin for spiritual intimacy with God Himself to maintain moral purity. As the pleasure of God’s fellowship grows, unholy temptations weaken. In Lesson 4, “Life In The Spirit”, you considered the overseers need to be “...filled with the Spirit...” (Ephesians

5:8) to continue the grace of God in you—reborn to be transformed. This is a real pleasure God has for you in your time spent with him each day. Let's underscore that progressive spiritual experience here by looking at Paul's letter to Titus and the Galatians and followed by "A Big Key" in the Further Thoughts.

S.cripture – Read Titus 3:3-8; Galatians 5:16-26

O.bservations

1. Paul offers Titus a "trustworthy saying" that God our Savior "renews by the Holy Spirit", a reference to sanctification. Why do we need God's intervention? Explain in your own words:

2. According to Galatians 5, God works by his Spirit to transform us when we cooperate. How do we cooperate? Explain:

What does God do? Explain:

A.pplication

1. When, how or where do you feel most vulnerable to moral compromise?
When?
How?
Where?

2. Are you cooperating by intentionally "living" in the Spirit, being "led" by the Spirit and keeping in "step" with the Spirit?
Yes _____ No _____ Not Sure _____

3. Describe your time alone with God each day here:

P.rayer – Tell God that you desire to have deep and pleasurable fellowship with him every day.

Further Thoughts

The Big Key to Resisting Temptation

Paul states in both letters to Timothy a simple but profound principle for maintaining your moral purity. Here it is: “flee and pursue”.

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. (I Timothy 6:11)

In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

(II Timothy 2:20-22)

It is ineffective to merely flee. Here’s the image of fleeing—your focus is looking back at the temptation. Add “pursuing” and you have something to focus on that is much more attractive—God himself. When you determine to actually pursue God daily, you “Draw near to God and he will draw near to you” (James 4:8). God desires that you find pleasure in Him. God’s pleasures will weaken your temptations because the pleasures of evil will grow less attractive to you. This is why secular or godless counseling fails most of the time. These counselors suggest “flight” through behavior modification and dependence on your own strength or the strength of a counselor or the strength of a group of people who are victims of the same evil. For one thing, these are “pursuits” for strength from the strengthless! Furthermore, all of these fall short of the power and pleasure of the God you pursue.

So, be continually filled with the Holy Spirit. With a humble and contrite heart, surrender yourself each day in pursuit of the God who desires to share His holiness with you! Remember, the strength to resist temptation comes not in the moment of your temptation but in your daily pursuit of God. In other words, when you fail to pursue God daily your resistance to temptation weakens. Put yet another way, failure to pursue God makes the lie of temptation (Romans 1:25; Hebrews 3:13) more believable.

Unholy Things

One of the downsides of career eldership as a pastor is exposure to unholy things. Demonic possession ranks high on that list. Sexual immorality is one of the gateways the enemy uses. On three separate occasions I led or participated in a deliverance ministry. Why bring this up? If it wasn't for the support and participation of lay elders, I would never have attempted this "heavy responsibility" alone. You may never have such an occasion, nor would you seek it. To me there is no greater darkness than to listen to the guttural sounds and words of a demon. On the other hand there is great joy when the power of the person and name of the Lord Jesus Christ defeats the enemy and liberates the captive! Several other results: First, you will never doubt the "spirit" world again; that Satan exists and Christ has defeated him. Second, you will never compromise with unholy things. Third, your faith in God increases.

Your own holiness is the best preparation for every ministry. Holiness will free you to call on the name of Jesus. If you ever face such a heavy responsibility as an overseer—don't run from it. Rather, walk prayerfully toward it with your pastor and fellow elders.

Recommended: For a deeper and practical study of holiness see: *Life in the Vine, Lesson 2 – The Fruit of Holiness: Resisting My Temptations*

Lesson 9

Gentle

Tender Yet Strong

In addition to a sling to ward off or kill predators, the ancient shepherd had two other tools-of-the-trade. David said of God, "...your rod and your staff, they comfort me..." (Psalm 23:4). The rod was used to inspect the sheep every night to determine their health. The staff was used to correct and keep them from wandering off or at times to rescue them. Since sheep easily scatter, the tools were administered gently. A tender and strong heart was required for shepherding. The same is true for elder leadership in the local church today.

When we look closer at the word "gentle" as a qualification for eldership (I Timothy 3:3), we discover that the Greek word "praus" includes both gentleness and meekness which is "strength under control". These two traits combine to make the disposition of an elder anything but timid, weak or passive. In our English Bible these co-characteristics of gentleness and meekness are used interchangeably and at times together. So when you read either English word, keep in mind the other characteristic as well. It makes sense then to conclude that **gentleness is the outward expression of inward meekness**. When inner strength is under control, the outward disposition appears calm and even tender-hearted.

While no harm or injury is done physically, emotionally or mentally, verbal communication is never timid or weak or passive. Truth must always be spoken in love (Ephesians 4: 15). And remember, the truth of God's Word is stronger than a "two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). It does not kill but intends to rescue, comfort and confront. While confrontation and correction is never easy nor comfortable, when administered with truth and love it is the good and right thing to do. Fear and friendship should never get in the way.

Let's go to the gospels to see and learn from the gentleness of the Good Shepherd.

S.O.A.P. 1 – "I am Gentle"

In Matthew's gospel Jesus says of himself, "I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29). Jesus came to the manger and goes to the cross in meekness and surrender. We see him speaking the truth in love with the gentleness and meekness of a shepherd. From the Pharisees to fishermen to the wealthy, to Roman authorities, to the famous and forgotten and despised, Jesus was always gentle and meek—tender-hearted with controlled strength. The One who is

perfectly gentle and meek wants to share His character with you for shepherding God's flock.

S.cripture – Read John 10:1-18; John 4:1-42

O.bservations

1. The self-portrait of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and the Gate in John 10 reveals both his gentleness and meekness. Write down his statements you find of each quality:

Gentleness:

Meekness:

2. In John 4, notice Christ's gentle and meek nature in real time with the Samaritan woman at the well. How did he express his nature and what was the impact?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. Who are the "Samaritans" in your life that you see often but have never spoken to? List them here:
2. For Jesus and this woman the "well" was common ground and common need. What are the "wells" in your life for reaching out to others in gentleness and meekness?
3. Have you ever thought or felt that these "Samaritans" in your life are actually Divine "appointments" on your pathway? Yes _____ No _____ Not Really _____ If not, why not?

P.rayer – Tell God that you desire the Christ-likeness of gentleness and meekness to reach out to others with his love.

S.O.A.P. 2 – The Pharisee Inside You

Inside all of us is a little Pharisee—the sinful tendency to pass judgment on others to make us feel better about our own failures. Paul writes to us,

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you:
Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought,
but rather think of yourself with sober judgment,
in accordance with the faith God has distributed
to each of you (Romans 12:3).*

As an elder, humility will keep you compassionate and merciful toward the sheep of God's flock so gentleness and meekness emerge rather than the snobbery of a Pharisee. Our maturity in Christ is not something to be proud of but must keep us humble. Remember, your own spiritual victories over sin were once temptations you yielded to easily. And truth be told, every follower of Jesus is a "recovering sinner". We are all in the process of transformation. If we succumb to the temptation to think more highly of ourselves than we really are, we become Pharisaical.

S.cripture – Read Galatians 5:13-25

O.bservations

1. Paul blends service and love in vs.13-15. How would you describe the relationship or interaction of serving and loving?

2. How would living in the Spirit or being led by the Spirit and the fruits of love and gentleness (vs. 22-25) empower you to serve others well?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. Can you remember an occasion when a mature Christian served you in some unexpected way? Tell your story here:

2. If you have served others in love, how did you feel and how did they feel?
How did you feel?

How did they feel?

3. Have you ever received from a more mature Christian a gentle word of counsel or wisdom, acted on it, and it made a difference in your life? Tell your story here:

P.rayer – Ask God for opportunities to love and serve others with a gentle and meek heart.

S.O.A.P. 3 – Correcting One Another

One of the most unpleasant “heavy responsibilities” of the elder-shepherd is correction. The church is not a country club where we ignore the sinful behavior of other members. On the other hand, the church is not a police state that looks for law-breakers. Rather, the church is God’s family in which we reach out to one another in love to restore and encourage. Who best to model this than the elders? Just as you wouldn’t ignore a medical threat in your own body, sin is a spiritual threat to the body of Christ and the flock of God. From time to time you will see the need in others for correction. Don’t let friendship get in the way!

S.cripture – Read Galatians 6:1-5; I Corinthians 5:9-13

O.bservations

1. Based on Galatians 6, how would you describe “...you who are spiritual...”?
2. Based on I Corinthians 5, what are the reasons or motives behind Paul’s insistence on judging the sinfully wayward?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. What else besides your own fear or friendship can get in the way of correcting a sinful brother or sister in Christ?
2. What can happen if correction is ignored or applied poorly?
Ignored:

Poorly Applied:

3. Describe where you feel mercy ends and discipline is applied.

P.rayer – Ask God for his wisdom, gentleness and meekness if and when correction is needed in shepherding others.

Further Thoughts

“Judge Not!”

The rod and staff are never used by the shepherd to beat the sheep into submission. We could say the “rod” and the “staff” of the shepherding elder is gentleness and meekness. This demeanor or disposition most likely results in a good outcome of care, correction and restoration. I say “most likely” because there will be times when you speak the truth in love with gentleness and meekness that does not have the story-book ending you hoped for. I remember one woman who left the church with her husband and impressionable children never to be seen again.

One of the most common defensive techniques of misguided Christians is to declare, “Judge not lest you be judged” (Matthew 7:1-5). I have heard this often and so will you if you shepherd well. Quoting these words of Jesus seems hard to refute, except they are used “out of context”. The context tells us that when you confront someone about their sin, make sure you are not guilty of the same sin as in the “plank in your own eye”. That would be hypocritical. This misguided defense is “cherry picking” or using Bible words and phrases out of context to construct a self-serving theology. I’ll say more about this in Lesson 13, “Able to Teach”.

You discovered in S.O.A.P. 3 that the greater context of the New Testament is that judging others in the church is a health-giving function to be practiced not ignored. Jesus himself gives us instruction regarding correction in Matthew 18. What is prohibited according to Paul is judging unbelievers outside the church (I Corinthians 5:12-13). The unbeliever is to be won-over to Christ by the love of God (John 3:16) not our judgment of their sin.

The Power to Correct

Paul’s inspired letter to Timothy contains a foundational statement of Christian faith;

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (II Timothy 3:16-17)

Likewise, Peter's letter to Jewish Christians contains a similar statement:

*For prophecy never had its origin in the human will,
but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were
carried along by the Holy Spirit. (II Peter 1:21)*

Since the Godhead is "at home" (John 14:23) in the life of every believer, the follower of Christ who is living in sin must be corrected by the inspired written Word of God. James refers to it as a mirror that exposes us to the truth of who we are and what we are doing (James 1:22-25). Therefore, elders, both career and lay, shepherd with gentleness and meekness "speaking the truth [of God's Word] in love" (Ephesians 4:15). It is God's Word that penetrates the heart and soul, not your opinion.

Lesson 10

Self-Controlled

Four Angry “Nots”

Paul tells both Timothy (3:2) and Titus (1:8) to look for elders among those who act rationally and discreetly, having a sound mind and emotions or, the self-controlled. Self-control is a must for overcoming a multitude of human weaknesses, starting with potty-training and extending to all immoral or unethical temptations. While self-control is required in every facet of life, this lesson will focus on one of the strongest human emotions—anger, a common theme in the scriptures.

Since man is created in the image of God, we express justifiable anger most every day. But Paul, quoting David in Psalm 4:4, tells the Ephesians (4:26) “In your anger do not sin”. Self-control as a qualification for elder leadership is extremely critical at this very point. While anger is permissible, out-of-control anger is always sinful and harmful. When a shepherd abuses the sheep verbally or physically, he crushes their trust and they scatter. Such is true in the church as well.

Out-of-control anger comes in many “flavors”. So Paul uses four negative “not’s”, when grouped together, underscore the need of self-control. Keep in mind, you lack the natural inner strength for “self”-control, so the Holy Spirit will empower you with the fruit of self-control when you “live in Him”, “keep in step with Him” and are “led by Him”. See Lesson 4 again and Romans 7 and 8 and Galatians 5.

Now consider Paul’s four “not’s” in the following three S.O.A.P.s.

S.O.A.P. 1 –Not Overbearing

Perhaps the most subtle expression of out-of-control anger is “over-bearing”, which means arrogant disregard of the interests of others to please one’s self. This person not only angers others but is easily angered by others. However, the “blameless” elder always yields to the interests of others, as well as the interests of God, as a shepherd of His flock. A good shepherd is never disloyal by self-serving. As an associate pastor I witnessed two over-bearing lay elders who didn’t get their way, undermined the lead pastor, sent him “packing” and delayed a needed change in the church for several years! If your attitude is “my way or the highway”, you are not elder material.

S.cripture – Read Philippians 2:1-5; Galatians 5:19-21

O.bservations

1. How do the four “if’s” of Philippians 2:1-2 form the basis of a Christ-like, selfless attitude? Explain as best you can.
2. Describe how serious you think it is that Paul includes “selfish ambition” in the context of the other evils listed in Galatians 5:19-21.

A.pPLICATIONS

1. How angry do you feel inside when you don’t get your own way?
2. How would you describe the difference between persuasion, manipulation and control?
Persuasion is:

Manipulation is:

Control is:
3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you measure your love of others that maintains a oneness of “spirit and purpose” in the church? Circle one:
Shallow love 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Deep Love

P.rayer – Ask God to show you any “overbearing” attitudes you have toward anyone in your life.

S.O.A.P. 2 Not Quarrelsome; Not Quick-Tempered

I instructed my daughters, “Don’t give your heart to a guy till you have seen him in a crisis. That’s when what’s on the inside comes out!” Quarrelsome means contentious and combative, and quick-tempered means readily yielded to anger. I have known both career and lay elders who have failed miserably because of out-of-control anger like this. One such failure told me his out-of-control anger was justified because he was Irish! I couldn’t believe my ears. This pastor-shepherd became a wolf and scattered the sheep.

S.cripture – Read Ephesians 4:29-32; James 4:1-3

O.bservations

1. Describe what you think happens when the Holy Spirit within you is “grieved” by “unwholesome talk”.

2. How would sincerely seeking the will of God in prayer by all parties eliminate quarrels and fighting?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. Why does prayer effect our disposition?

2. If you are not quarrelsome or quick-tempered, do you express your anger in any of the following ways? Circle the ones you use:
Silence Sulking Seclusion
Facial Expressions Gestures Coldness

3. Describe the power of wholesome talk?

P.rayer – Ask God to fill you with his Spirit and grow the fruit of kindness—kind words and kind actions.

S.O.A.P. 3 – Not Violent

Not violent means the obvious, not a striker. Fortunately, I have never known of a career or lay elder who actually punched someone. But I do know of an elder who acted violently by destroying property. And I have also known elders who made “radical” decisions out of anger by quickly pulling their families out of the church. If you or your wife are “thin-skinned” and prone to respond violently in any way, then your commitment to elder leadership will also be thin. Self-control thickens the skin of the shepherd.

S.cripture – Ephesians 4:26-32; Galatians 5:22-26

O.bservations

1. In addition to “not violent” or a striker (I Timothy 3:30), Paul lists rage and brawling in Ephesians 4. What do you think are some of the tipping points when rage turns into brawling?
2. Based on Galatians 5, what does God provide for “anger management” among his children and especially for elder-shepherds?

A.pplications

1. Can you recall any abuses or acts of violence in your childhood or family of origin that injured you in any way? If so, describe it here:
2. How difficult was it, or would it be, for you to forgive them? Explain here:
3. Has rage in you ever reached a point that you acted violently? If so, have you, or did you, ask for their forgiveness?

P.rayer – Tell God that you desire a clear conscience from all past injuries and abuses.

Further Thoughts

Sheep Bite Each Other

I often say, “Where two or three gather in His name—there is conflict.” The New Testament letters to followers of Jesus contain lists of evils filled with nuances of out-of-control anger found among them. Never fantasize about the early church. For instance, who would want to be an elder in the Corinthian church? Not me! But in the church today the sheep are still biting each other. Who should be better at peace-making and peace-keeping than elder-shepherds and their wives who have control of their mind and emotions, especially anger.

The children of God engage in the conflict of ideas, unkind words and actions. It is always a “when” and never an “if”. The “heavy responsibility” of peacemaking is carried by elders who never take sides except for the side of God’s Word. Acting redemptively, the shepherd will show the sheep how to confess their sins to one another, and ask for and grant forgiveness.

Without forgiveness, anger and vengeance grows like a cancer in the body of Christ. Ignore the conflict and it never goes away but grows bigger and messier. “Don’t let the sun go down on your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26) is not a nice suggestion, but a call to moral urgency in the face of a great temptation (Ephesians 4:27) Satan’s foothold. The heavy responsibility of brokering reconciliation is much easier to bear than the larger mess later when conflict is ignored. Furthermore, as I said earlier in *About the Author by the Author*, “I love a good night of sleep.” How about you? Conflict in the flock will keep you up at night! Broker reconciliation quickly!

Recommended: For a deeper study see *Life In The Vine – Increasing the Likeness of Jesus in You*. Lessons on The Fruit of Self-Control, The Fruit of Kindness, and The Fruit of Love.

Lesson 11

Temperate

Avoiding Compromise

When the gospel of Christ entered the pre-Christian Gentile world, paganism had reigned for centuries leaving cultures deeply ingrained with unrestrained evil habits. In Lesson 8 we looked at sexual immorality and the great need for holiness. In Lesson 10 we looked at various forms of out-of-control anger and the great need for self-control.

In this lesson Paul addresses the common problem of drunkenness in both Ephesus and Crete. He says to Timothy and Titus, look for men who are "...not given to much wine..." (I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7). While drunkenness remains a serious social problem around the world, the deeper and broader spiritual issue here is addictive habits of any kind whether amoral or immoral. Amoral simply means anything good in and of itself that becomes destructive when abused excessively. So elder-shepherds and their wives must control their emotional and bodily appetites. They must be "temperate" (I Timothy 3:3) in every area of life maintaining a clear-minded focus on their faith.

Cultural Drift

I wish our culture was drifting, but today it's in "white water" heading quickly to the falls. Political and social correctness is merely a smoke-screen for secular moral relativism. Once thought of as sinful destructive habits are now disorders and diseases caused by some outside influence. These "victims" are turned into heroes (Romans 1:32). Read the entire context of Romans 1:18-32. Good is now evil. Right is now wrong. Truth is now false. Everything is upside down!

Because followers of Christ still hold to Godly moral absolutes, they are now labeled self-righteous and intolerant and must be silenced. Jesus warned his disciples and us that the world would hate us because of Him (John 15:18). In this lesson three qualifications for eldership are grouped together to underscore a leadership that maintains a personal Christ-centered lifestyle for a Christ-centered culture within the church in spite of the cultural drift of the world outside. As you examine these qualifications, may they examine you.

S.O.A.P. 1 – Avoiding Spiritual Drift

In Timothy's list of qualifications, Paul adds "...temperate..." (3:2) meaning sober minded, clear headed and vigilant—always keeping the life of faith in view. The temperate follower of Jesus is governed by their awareness of anything that causes spiritual drift away from God through compromise. Spiritual drifting is

most often the result of small and subtle compromises. The faithful shepherd is vigilant to keep his view fixed on both the Good Shepherd and the flock of God.

S.cripture – Read II Peter 1:3-9; Ephesians 4:17-24

O.bservations

1. What does Peter instruct his readers to do to remain spiritually focused and productive? Briefly summarize his teaching.

2. How does Paul compare the “old self” to the “new self”?

<u>Old Self</u>	<u>New Self</u>
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A.pPLICATIONS

1. Are there any recurring immoral temptations, either emotionally or behaviorally, that compromise your temperance or spiritual focus?
What are they?

How often do they occur? Circle One:
Daily Weekly Monthly Occasionally

2. What are your amoral activities that could become “deceitful desires” that “corrupt” your clear-minded vigilance?

3. Is there someone in your life with whom you could have a mutually “accountable” relationship for maintaining a “temperate” life and focus?
Who is it?

P.rayer – Tell God that you are willing to find and ask someone who will challenge you to remain spiritually clear-minded and vigilant.

S.O.A.P. 2 – Controlling Bodily Desires

Paul tells Titus to also look for potential elders among the “...disciplined...” (1:8). Here the Greek word means inner strength to control bodily desires. Perhaps he had in mind what a false prophet of the circumcision group said about the Cretans that they are always “...lazy gluttons...” (1:12). A Spirit-filled elder (Ephesians 5:18) has gained control of the impulses to over-indulge bodily

appetites, excessive behaviors and amoral pursuits. He knows where the lines of moderation lie.

S.cripture – Read Ephesians 5:3-18; II Peter 2:17-19

O.bservations

1. Paul now compares (Ephesians 5) the “deeds of darkness” with the “fruit of light”. Write a sentence that describes each.

Darkness:

Light:

2. In Peter’s description of false teachers (II Peter 2), he states, “...a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.” Name as many bodily desires you can think of that promise some kind of false freedom but ultimately enslave:

A.pPLICATIONS

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how quick are you to please yourself rather than to “find out what pleases the Lord” (Ephesians 5:10)?

 Yourself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 The Lord

2. Are there any bodily appetites that have, or come close to, “mastering” you? Yes No If Yes, what is it or what are they?

3. Is there a bodily desire or habit that is threatening your spiritual, emotional or physical health? Yes No If Yes, what is it?

P.rayer – Ask God each day to fill you with his Holy Spirit and grow the fruit of self-control to live a disciplined life for his glory.

S.O.A.P. 3 – Knowing When to Say, “No”

Paul tells both Timothy (3:3) and Titus (1:7) “...not given to much wine...” Rather than “carping” on drunkenness, I suggest to you, “not given to much” of anything that is excessive or obsessive. Amoral pleasures are permissible and that list is long. But when to say “no” or “enough” to yourself and others is a sign of spiritual and emotional maturity. We all need a pastime for rest, but when the

pastime becomes an escape, we have crossed over into dangerous territory in which some aspect of God's will for us is compromised. A Spirit-filled shepherd knows when to say "no".

S.cripture – Read Titus 2:11-15; Titus 3:1-8

O.bservations

1. Paul tells Titus to teach his people to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions. Describe how important you think it was for Titus to model what he teaches to the flock of God under his care.

2. According to Titus 3, summarize what "God our Savior" has done to free us from the "passions and pleasures" that could enslave us.

A.pPLICATIONS

1. Are there any amoral pleasures in your life you find difficult to say "no" to? Circle all categories that apply:
Requests Invitations Work Sports
Hobbies Games Shopping Food
Pastimes Drink Technology Children
Other _____

2. Is there something you indulge in that your spouse or children would say is "too much"? _____ Yes _____ No _____ Not Sure If Yes, what is it?

If not sure—ask them!

3. If "Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:6) generously renews us by the Holy Spirit, how deeply are you experiencing that renewal daily? Circle One:
Somewhat 1 2 3 4 5 Very Deeply
What could you do to experience more?

P.rayer – Ask God to renew you daily by his indwelling Holy Spirit to say "no" to over-indulgence.

Further Thoughts

Small Compromises

This lesson may seem that Paul is “splitting hairs” or “knit-picking” regarding the selection of potential elders. But remember, while the enemy of your soul would prefer to take you down as well as the church by a devastating ethical or moral failure, he finds it far easier to diminish your influence by small compromises so subtle you’re not even aware of them. On the other hand, don’t blame the enemy for lapses due to your own desires of the flesh. By a disciplined and temperate character, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, maintain a focused awareness of God’s on-going will and purposes for you and your family.

The Other Woman

Like the marketplace workaholic who chooses excessive vocational pursuits over family, some lay elders and career pastors are guilty of the same. Their wives refer to the church as the “other woman”. A sad comment, not about the church but about their husband. God never calls a pastor or lay elder to sacrifice their marriage and children on His altar. Keep in mind Jesus can and will build His church with you or without you. You are God’s well-cared-for servant not an over-worked slave—the choice is yours. Any martyr complex dishonors the genuine martyr.

Rather, your calling to lay eldership in the local church is made effective when your devotion to Christ includes devotion to your wife and children. When you diminish your devotion to your family, you diminish your devotion to Christ. I have served with and observed closely authentic elders. These elders and their wives had enormous influence. Their spiritual fervor and devotion to each other and their children was exemplary. Again I will say, Christianity at its finest is a movement of lay followers of Jesus. It is not an institution driven by the clergy. Who is best positioned to love and reach lost people? You and your family are, in your networks with families, neighbors and work associates!

Lesson 12

Not A Lover Of Money

The Great Gain

In his first recorded teaching, Jesus declared that the love of God and the love of money is a great spiritual battleground (Matthew 6:24). Later, Jesus offered proof of this in his conversation with a rich young man who was given an opportunity to renounce his love of money. He refused and lost his soul (Matthew 19). It appeared, at least on the outside, this young man might have had the right stuff to be an elder, but Jesus put his finger on the man's misplaced love. So powerful is the love of money that Jesus made it a major theme in his teaching.

Paul instructs Timothy that elders must not be a "lover of money" (I Timothy 3:3); but to Titus he adds, "...not pursuing dishonest gain..." (Titus 1:7). In addition to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit here, Paul understood this qualification from his own experience while planting the church in Ephesus. He told the elders:

Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' (Acts 20:32-35)

The flock of God must be led by shepherds who renounce any love of money and live a life of obedience to the great commandment—"to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength..." (Matthew 22:37). Add to this Godliness, contentment with what God provides and you will experience the great gain.

S.O.A.P. 1 – The Great Gain of Contentment

Financial and material contentment plays a larger role than you think in the life of one who aspires to the noble task of overseer. Few things are more noticeable than your lifestyle. Financial contentment or discontent touches everything from your parenting to generosity. A love of money and the discontent that follows is devastating to the health and vitality of the church. Likewise I have observed a few elders who used their wealth to leverage influence. I have also seen discontented career elders "fleece their sheep".

S.cripture – Read Philippians 4:10-13; I Timothy 6:6-10

teaching and encouragement. They are the wealthy and the new believer. Both groups are vulnerable to the “love of money” with its “many kinds of evils” (I Timothy 6:10). Both need to understand the conditions of their fallen hearts that hinder faithfulness and fruitfulness in stewarding God’s wealth. Will you help them? Keep in mind that stewardship includes earning, managing, giving, spending and saving.

S.cripture – Read I Timothy 6: 6-10; I Timothy 6:17-19

O.bservations

1. All new-born followers of Jesus are “lovers of money” who need to be rescued. Name as many specific “temptations” and “evils” that a love of money leads to.

2. Paul instructs Pastor Timothy to command the wealthy. Summarize the details of Paul’s instruction here:

A.pPLICATIONS

1. How would you describe your adequacy or inadequacy to teach and model Biblical financial stewardship?

2. What fear or fears would you need to “get past” before you could teach or command Biblical financial stewardship?

3. How would your own godliness with contentment liberate you to model, teach and encourage the people under your care to become faithful stewards of God’s wealth?

P.rayer – Ask God to liberate you from any fear that would hold you back from encouraging and teaching stewardship to the sheep under your care.

S.O.A.P. 3 – Administering Liberal Offerings

Fortunately, I have enjoyed the pleasure of serving with excellent church treasurers--men and women who maintained the highest standard of honesty and accountability, protected by orderly procedures. Unfortunately, I also observed in other churches two extreme failures of elders that “gave away” their authority to treasurers, and worse yet required no accountability until it was too late. These failures resulted in fraud or hoarding, either of which scatters the sheep. Mishandle the funds and the sheep stop giving.

S.cripture – Read II Corinthians 8:16-21; I Timothy 5:17-18

O.bservations

1. In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians he gives a snapshot of the care given to the administration of liberal financial offerings. Write down his statements of care here:

2. “Double honor” (I Timothy 6) means respect and remuneration. In your opinion, how should “double honor” be practically expressed and given to your pastor or career elder?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. How important to the givers of offerings are policies and procedures of administering?
Somewhat Important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely Important

2. Regarding church offerings, what are some painful outcomes, other than fraud or hoarding, when “pain” is not taken to “do what is right”?

3. What do you feel are some of the ways “double honor” benefits both the church and the career pastor-elder?
Church:

Pastor:

P.rayer – Ask God for the wisdom and faith to fulfill the administration of the offerings given by the flock of God.

Further Thoughts

Two Heavy Financial Responsibilities

As an elder you don't need to be an accountant or even good at math—I never was! But you do need to be wise enough to oversee and care for the heavy financial responsibility of stewarding the congregation's liberal offerings. Such wisdom freely flows out of your own "godliness with contentment" along with your fellow elders.

Well beyond the normal "expenses" of the contemporary church lies two heavy annual financial responsibilities that are not "expenses". They are mission funding and pastoral compensation. These decisions require careful and prayerful attention by contented and wise elders, not treasurers. In no particular order these two responsibilities are among the heaviest in the life of the local church. Get these right and God will provide all the funds that are needed. Get them wrong and don't be surprised by shortfalls in giving.

Missions Funding

To be a "sending" church, to fulfill the vision and mission of Christ, is not an option. Our God is a "sending" God (John 3:16). When the church sends followers of Christ to make disciples in every nation, it reflects the heart and will of God. However, each local church must determine how best to do that for the greatest impact. This determination is best accomplished by the career and lay elders who must prioritize the distribution of mission offerings. Each church should have a written criteria that guides the givers and assures them that their offerings are wisely stewarded to advance God's kingdom by the gospel worldwide.

Pastoral Compensation

Another important and heavy responsibility is the compensation of the career elder or elders. This also is not an expense but a divine mandate to invest in the leadership and ministry of the teaching pastors who equip God's people for service (Ephesians 4:12). Since the lay elders minister closely with the career elders, they best know and understand the work and burden of the career pastors as well as their personal and material needs. A proven process for compensation review will demonstrate integrity for the pastors and give confidence to the congregation.

The Stewardship Culture

Every local church has a financial stewardship culture. That culture is either weak and unhealthy or healthy and strong. The vitality of this culture is determined by the career and lay elders not by the poor or the wealthy or the

treasurer. The most important value that you bring to this culture is the great gain of “godliness with contentment”.

See: Missions Funding
Pastoral Compensation
Steward’s Heart
Steward’s Hand
Margin

Lesson 13

Able To Teach

Holding The Trustworthy Message Firmly

Elders are followed because they are perceived to be ahead of the curve in their spiritual and emotional maturity as well as their knowledge and understanding of the Word of God. While no one expects you to be a seasoned theologian or seminary trained, they will ask you questions about the Bible. If you don't know the answer the thing you must not do is "save face" by "winging it". On the other hand, it's easy to dodge a question by telling the questioner, "You need to talk to the pastor about that!" This may relieve you, but it's flawed in two ways. First of all, they asked you, the "overseer" of their soul. Many times I've heard people say, "I don't want to bother the pastor." These people are uncomfortable asking their pastor. They may feel intimidated or too shy. I've wondered how many questions go unanswered because of an elder's deflection. Second, if you don't find the answer for them, you have lost the opportunity to not only show care for the sheep, but to learn yourself and grow in your own understanding. You should ask your pastor.

In this lesson you will investigate the qualification for eldership as one who is "...able to teach..." (I Timothy 3:2). To Titus Paul adds, "...He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message..." (Titus 1:9). This is another "heavy responsibility" of the Noble Task. Most elders I served with through the years have met the qualification in many different ways and settings from children's classes to senior nursing homes; from youth ministries to men's Bible studies, through a wide variety of special interest groups, to married couples' classes to small house groups, and from preaching to life-on-life discipleship. They all found a teaching ministry "sweet-spot" to fulfill this responsibility. Let's take a deeper look at this qualification!

S.O.A.P. 1 – Feed Your Soul First

The qualification to teach the "trustworthy message" begins with your own love for God and His inspired Word. No one can master the Word of God for it is "...living and powerful..." (Hebrews 4:12-13) but it must master you! The sacred scriptures both inform and transform. So your daily time alone with God in His Word both sustains your fellowship with Christ and your credibility as a teacher. Its ongoing and progressive application to your life increases your maturity and wisdom. Feed your own soul first and teach out of it so you can say with the Apostle Paul, "Follow me as I follow Christ" (I Corinthians 4:14-17; Philippians 3:17).

S.cripture – Read Luke 10:38-42; II Timothy 3:14-17

O.bservations

1. Martha’s ministry of hospitality was well intended (Luke 10), but what impression do you think the loving rebuke of Jesus had on her life?

2. According to II Timothy 3, summarize what makes the scriptures the most unique book ever written.

A.pPLICATIONS

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, are you more like Mary or Martha or somewhere in between? Circle One:
Martha 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Mary

2. The scripture leads to the powerful experience of salvation. But especially recall here how the scriptures have changed or are changing your life now.
Taught:

Rebuked:

Corrected:

Trained in Righteousness:

3. Describe your greatest challenge to spending alone time with Jesus every day.

P.rayer – Tell God of your desire to do ministry out of your own personal growth and experience with Him.

S.O.A.P. 2 – Making Disciples

Since you became a follower of Jesus through the witness and teaching of other followers, and are still being taught and disciplined to “...obey everything I [Jesus] have commanded...” (Matthew 28:20), you also are commissioned to do likewise. Disciple-making is the bottom line of teaching. Knowledge of God that

leads to life-transformation is the stuff of discipleship to Christ. The church I was raised in and the churches I have pastored, disciplined adults and their sons and daughters and sent them into every sector of the marketplace and every career ministry to uniquely fulfill their own commission to make disciples who make disciples.

S.cripture – Read II Timothy 1:3-7, 2:1-2; Ephesians 4:11-16

O.bservations

1. Describe what you think Timothy’s mother, Eunice, felt when she sent her son out into a hostile pre-Christian world to make disciples for Christ.

2. Paul describes disciple-making in Ephesians 4. What does it take to “build up the body of Christ”?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. Who played major roles in leading you to Christ and afterward disciplined you to follow Jesus? Name as many as you can remember and describe what they did to disciple you.

2. To whom have you played a role in leading them to Christ or discipling them to follow Christ? List as many as you can remember and describe your role.

3. What have you discovered to be your talents or strengths as well as your best opportunities to disciple others?

Strengths

Opportunities

P.rayer – Ask God to make it clear to you what your strengths are for discipling others and the best opportunities to teach life transformation

S.O.A.P. 3 – Guarding Sound Doctrine

After investing 3 years in the church plant at Ephesus, Paul warned the elders to shepherd the flock and guard against the wolves of false teachers (Acts 20:25-31). Later, the Apostle writes to Pastor Timothy to encourage and instruct him in his confrontation with those false teachers that infiltrated the Ephesian church as Paul had warned (Ephesians 4:14). Likewise, Pastor Titus confronted false teachers in Crete. As an overseer you too must know sound doctrine well enough to recognize false doctrine. Remember, Satan’s deceptions are not always meant to make people irreligious, but his goal is always to diminish the person, power and Lordship of Jesus Christ. There are many theologically liberal churches that prove this point!

S.cripture – Read Titus 1:9-16; II Timothy 2:14-19

O.bservations

1. While Paul’s description of false teachers (Titus 1) seems “off the chart”, what does it tell you as an elder-shepherd about “intolerance” toward false teachers?

2. According to II Timothy 2, describe in your own words how “quarrelling over words that have no value” becomes ungodly? Then give an example.

A.pPLICATIONS

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident do you feel about handling the scriptures correctly? Circle One:
Somewhat Confident 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very Confident

2. Describe how willing you are to correct or warn those who are drifting away from the trustworthy message of God’s Word.

3. What is your greatest challenge or fear in confronting someone who indulges in godless chatter and is divisive?

P.rayer – Tell God of your desire to guard the truth and sound doctrine of His Word and give you the courage to overcome any fear.

Further Thoughts

How to Correctly Handle the Word of Truth

Much of life includes instructions in how to do things correctly for the best or perfect result. When we avoid the instructions we are left to our own thoughts and feelings and the result is woefully inadequate. Correctly handling the Word of Truth implies the incorrect mishandling of the scriptures.. For instance, one career elder I knew made everyone who entered his office take off their shoes claiming they were “standing on holy ground”. I laughed and then grew angry that he would use God’s Word so carelessly. I was ashamed of him! He didn’t last long.

To teach and guard sound doctrine you must have an understanding of the rules of interpretation in order to refute false doctrine. As an elder it is your “heavy responsibility” to warn and correct. If you are not familiar with the rules of interpretation, see my series *Following Me – What Jesus Wants You to Know as You Begin the Journey with Him*, Lesson 5, “It is written....” It will get you started.

Healing or Suffering?

A good example of sound doctrine and the need for interpretive rules is the seeming contradiction in scripture of Divine healing or human suffering. The Apostle James was inspired to instruct the suffering to call for the elders to pray a prayer of faith to be healed (James 5:14-14). Another “heavy responsibility”! While Jesus is “...the same yesterday, today and forever...” (Hebrews 13:8), he did not heal everyone brought to him. Furthermore, in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians he said he prayed for healing three times and the Lord responded, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (II Corinthians 12:7-10). In different churches years ago as pastor-elder, two cancer victims called for the elders to pray for healing. Betty experienced Divine healing but John passed away.

What are we to conclude? The rules of interpretation lead us to the case for healing and the case for suffering, not healing alone. Why? By God’s sovereignty he accomplishes His greater purposes by either one He chooses. We must live in the tension or mystery of His sovereign reign over each of us. Here’s my theological description of the mystery of God’s sovereign rule that I once gave in a sermon:

***Today I will live in the guiding
mystery of God's sovereign rule!***

**"God rules over all his creation,
including me, by his immeasurable
power, knowledge, wisdom and freedom—
freedom to fulfill his purposes
and promises when, where and how
he chooses, governed by his infinite
holiness and love for me."**

I passed this out on a small card and suggested that everyone tape it to their bathroom mirror to remind themselves of God's sovereign rule.

Back to the rules of interpretation. A common criticism of the Bible by unbelievers is, "I don't believe in the Bible because you can make it say anything you want!" You can—if you break all the rules. Every false teacher of false doctrine begins by breaking the rules of interpretation. You must also know the rules of interpretation to teach sound doctrine to those under your shepherding care.

Recommended: www.branchesinthevine.com/resources/rulesofinterpretation

Lesson 14

Not A Recent Convert

Tested And Affirmed

I'm sure by now you would agree wholeheartedly with the Apostle Paul's disqualifier that an elder "...must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil" (I Timothy 3:6). The same could be said of any follower of Jesus who has yet to demonstrate spiritual and emotional maturity. The testimony of a conversion many years ago is not enough to qualify for the noble task. In the inspired letter to the Hebrews we find a description of Christian immaturity worth looking at now:

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

(Hebrews 5:11-14)

On the other hand, keep in mind that spiritual perfection is not the qualifier for eldership, but humble surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ is. As mentioned in Lesson 3, to "aspire" to be an "overseer" requires humble surrender to God's calling. To be "...entrusted with God's work..." (Titus 1:7) and to "...take care of God's church..." (I Timothy 1:5) is a "heavy responsibility" void of pride that requires above all else a meek and humble spirit. Pride is always a deal-breaker in all spiritual matters. As elders laid their hands on Timothy (I Timothy 4:14), so elders will lay hands on you when your life has been tested and approved for the heavy responsibilities of shepherding leadership.

S.O.A.P. 1 – Son in the Faith

The Biblical record is quite clear that Timothy was a young man who was well trained and discipled to follow Jesus –"a true son in the faith" (II Timothy 1:2) to the Apostle Paul (Acts 16:1-5; I Corinthians 4:14-17; Philippians 2:19-24). Timothy's grandmother and mother also mentored him spiritually. Timothy was ready for elder-pastor leadership in Ephesus. As you explore the following scriptures, recall again the people in your past who mentored you to follow Jesus.

S.cripture – Read II Timothy 3:14-17; I Timothy 4:6-16

O.bservations

1. According to II Timothy 3, on a scale of 1 to 10, how important was the maturity and character of those who lead others to follow Jesus?
Somewhat Important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very Important
2. According to I Timothy 4, what are the qualities Paul saw in Timothy that qualified him for elder leadership?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. List three qualities of character important to you of those who led you to faith in Christ and a deeper experience with Christ.
(1)
(2)
(3)
2. Apart from your salvation, what specific life-transformations have you experienced that qualify you to “point out to the brothers” (I Timothy 4:6)?
3. How ready are you to lead others into a deeper experience with Jesus Christ?

P.rayer – Ask God to give you wisdom and discernment to lead the flock of God into deeper life-transforming experiences.

S.O.A.P. 2 – Don’t Be Hasty!

By now you should know that being selected or elected to elder leadership is not an honor earned by some achievement but a calling to heavy responsibility. So don’t be flattered, and don’t be hasty to say “yes”! If you have any apprehensions for any reason, talk with your pastor about it. For your own sake, the sake of your wife and family and, of course, for the sake of the church and God’s kingdom—do not be hasty. The warning against hastiness should run in both directions.

S.cripture – Read I Timothy 5:22-25; I Timothy 3:10

O.bservations

1. In the pre-Christian first century context of the Ephesian church, what challenges do you think Timothy faced in selecting prospective elders that would have slowed him down?

2. What do you think Paul had in mind regarding specific procedures for testing (I Timothy 3)?

A.pPLICATIONS

1. After completing lessons 1 to 13, describe how you feel about the calling of God to the Noble Task of elder leadership in your church.

2. On a scale of 1 to 10, measure how fast or how slow you make decisions on important matters:
Slow 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Fast

3. How would you describe your own process for making decisions on important matters?

P.rayer – In prayerful surrender ask God for his leading and confirmation, and tell him of your willingness to patiently wait for it.

S.O.A.P. 3 – Test Your Progress

A second look at the qualification of “blameless” (Titus 1:6-7) is appropriate here. Every new convert or spiritually and emotionally immature followers of Christ have a past that disqualifies them for elder leadership. But blameless signifies a faithful movement toward maturity and wholeness and looks at all aspects of life to discover the work of the Holy Spirit. While spiritual perfection is your eternal goal, are you pursuing it in the present and have you made progress? Paul’s letter to the church in Galatia will help you test your progress—check it out!

S.cripture – Read Galatians 5:1 - 26; I Corinthians 4:1 - 2

O.bservations

1. Based on the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 and several other spiritual and emotional qualities of the character and likeness of Jesus Christ, how would you evaluate your progress to date? Use the following markers:
A = Steady Progress; B = Needs Improvement; C = Very Challenging
 Love Patience Faithfulness Holiness
 Joy Kindness Gentleness Humility
 Peace Goodness Self-Control Wisdom

A.pPLICATIONS

1. When did you come to faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior?
2. How long have you been a sincerely devoted follower of Christ?
3. Are you willing to speak with your pastor regarding any spiritual and emotional quality you find “Very Challenging”? Yes No
If No, why not?
4. Are you willing to cooperate with any “testing” procedure required of you including interviews of yourself and others? Yes No
 Not Sure. If No or Not Sure, why not?

P.rayer – Thank God for the work of his Spirit in your life, and tell him of your continued desire to be like Jesus Christ.

Further Thoughts

The Challenge of Testing

Referring to deacons, Paul instructs they should be “tested” (I Timothy 3:10). How is anyone tested as to the qualifications for church leadership? In addition to “not a new convert”, we find at least three other Biblical tests. First, Paul adds the qualification of “...a good reputation with outsiders...” (I Timothy 3:7). Outsiders is a reference to unbelievers. It’s easy to live a double life on many levels. So, would your neighbors or work associates or service providers be surprised or confused if they knew you were an elder in your church? This “test” is measurable. Second, Jesus said, “...whoever is faithful in little is faithful in

much...” (Luke 16:10). So an elder must first prove their character and faithfulness in lesser or smaller ministries and responsibilities. This “test” is also measurable. The third test is spiritual in nature. We see it in Acts, “...it seemed good to us and to the Holy Spirit” (Acts 15:28). By and in prayer the church should desire and seek God’s confirmation. This test is also measurable. I leave the “how-to” of these tests to your local church.

One More Responsibility

There is one more very “heavy responsibility” of an “overseer” that fits well in this lesson. A new convert is the last person a church wants as an elder when the lead pastor resigns and a new pastor must be called. Pastoral transitions are occasional but extremely stressful in many ways for a team of seasoned elders.

Having walked alongside of Pastoral Search Teams—“the deer in the headlights” look doesn’t go away until their new pastor says, “yes”! Till then, the transition is long and overwhelming. Reassuring the sheep, spending hours in preparation, interviewing candidates, leading the congregation in prayer and seeking wisdom from God are all daunting labors of love the elders perform for the flock. The sleepless nights of a shepherd are quite common with this responsibility. Few elders come to this task with previous experience. So, spiritually and emotionally mature overseers are required. A new convert is a huge liability.

Recommended: Life In The Vine: Increasing the Likeness of Jesus in You

Final Thought

The Elder Affect

Can you imagine what it's like to serve together with men and their wives who share the qualifications and calling by God as overseers? How rich and deep could that fellowship grow? We get a snapshot of this in Acts 20 when Paul farewells the Ephesian elders. The scene concludes this way:

When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship. After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. (Acts 20:36-38; 21:1a)

But my final thoughts to you, my brother, are some snapshots of the elder affects on the church—the flock of God. When imperfect elders and their wives are surrendered to the Lordship of Christ, He does amazing things through them. I gave you some examples in the lessons. But here's a few more I experienced when elders at their finest lead like shepherds.

The Protective Covering – Since pastors are vulnerable targets of Satanic attacks through deceptive or angry people, devoted elders provide the needed covering from false accusation.

Multiplied Servanthood – By joining the pastor in “equipping God’s people for works of service”, the church expands its witness and disciple-making capacities within its self and worldwide.

Love and Unity – The love of Christ that elders and their wives have for each other trickles down and permeates the flock of God to create a culture of love and devotion for the world to see.

Trusted Leadership – People follow those who genuinely care for them with pure motives. Secure and at peace followers of Jesus will follow their overseers, even when taking faith-filled risks.

Financial Generosity – One of the “great gains” of “godliness with contentment” in the hearts of pastors and elders is the release of God’s Spirit in the hearts of His people to steward well and give generously of their time, talent and treasure as worship that glorifies God and expands His kingdom on earth.

The Power of Christ Alone – When elders are called to the noble task void of pride, and depend on the sovereignty of God, He releases the power of Christ to energize the life and growth of His body, the church.

A Christ-Centered Culture – Consecrated elders always make everything in and through the flock of God about Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep. Why? Because the Great Shepherd became the sacrificial “Lamb of God” who on the cross took our sin and guilt upon Himself. Christ is the center-piece of God’s glory! The debt we owe Him is our eternal praise.

A Thankless Task

If you crave the attention of others, the “noble task” is not for you. For the most part it’s a thankless task. At best, the gratitude of others is only momentary. To use our analogy again, most of the time the sheep are unaware of the attention given to them by the shepherd. They are unaware of the heavy responsibilities the elders carry for their well-being. Most ministries of the elders go unnoticed. But the One to whom you are accountable as an overseer, sees and remembers everything you are and do for His flock. Ultimately His “Well done good and faithful steward” is the reward that will surpass every earth-bound accolade.

My prayer and hope for you, my brother, is that you and your wife and children will experience God’s extreme blessings as you shepherd His people to follow Jesus for His glory alone!

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