

Discussing How To Restore The Early Church

Returning Intimacy and Power to the Father's Children

*"I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for,
it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.
For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."*
(Matthew 18:19,20)



SECTION 6 - LESSON 47

FELLOWSHIP IN HOMES — Extended Spiritual Family:

• *Shepherded by Elders*

1. Our Father's Representatives; Anointed By The Spirit
2. Honored in the Family and Faith Community
3. Shepherding: A Father's Heart
4. Having Our Father's Larger View
5. Newer Testament Qualifications



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Introduction

Through a variety of ways the extended spiritual family of a home fellowship can come together. For instance, in response to the prompting of the Spirit an evangelist or an elder may bring people together who have a heart to be family; or individuals and families who are in relationship with each other as friends may gather as a fellowship of homes.

When a biblical evangelist brings together a faith community as the Spirit has moved in the hearts of people, he leaves its care in the hands of the elder(s) as did Paul, Timothy and Titus.

An elder is an older man who has arrived at the final stage of male development. (See Lessons 10 and 34 to explore these insights from Robert Hicks' book, *The Masculine Journey*.¹) As Hicks noted, men pass through different life stages:

1. Creational Male (*adam*)
2. Phallic Male (*zakar*)
3. Warrior Male (*gibbor*)
4. Wounded Male (*enosh*)
5. Mature Male (*ish*)
6. Elder/Sage (*zaken*)

No matter how the extended spiritual family is drawn together, the promise of Jesus to be in their midst still holds. And the confirmation process of two or three who are looking to the Spirit for guidance helps rein in any one person from trying to exert control.

Be aware though that if there is no mature man to offer the wisdom of a biblical elder, the faith family will miss the significant *role modeling* of a man who has made it through the male stages of life and represents our Father's compassionate care for His children. Nor will the younger women have access to an elder's wife who has stood by him in their years of sanctification together.

That can be a painful void for an extended spiritual family! As we've discussed in previous lessons, role modeling is the primary way of change for both men and women as they seek to walk in obedient trust in our Lord Jesus. But as people in the fellowship family mature in age and wisdom, they'll learn to model righteousness through life's lessons as they respond to the Spirit in loving obedient trust.

In this lesson we want to anchor the biblical background and nature of an elder since our Father is restoring the role of *zaken* to shepherd His children.

FELLOWSHIP IN HOMES
Extended Spiritual Family:
Shepherded by Elders

1. Our Father's Representatives; Anointed By The Spirit

“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed” (1 Peter 5:1).

Proven wisdom and ***leadership*** were key for the men of Israel who aspired to be elders. As we’ve shared, the Hebrew word for elder, *zaken* (zah-KEN), connoted men who had evidenced they were worth following.

Over the course of their lives these men learned to exhibit servant-like character qualities that took into consideration the welfare of others within their family, clan and tribe. This was the **Trustee-type Family** we discussed in Lesson 3, and is the nature of the faith communities described in the Newer Testament.

The role of elder was a life’s goal to which men ***who sought wisdom*** aspired. *Zaken*, by definition, means “gray-bearded,” and suggests wisdom gained by many years of life experiences.

Not all older people are wise, however. Some have wasted their lives as hardened, mocking, or God-denying fools (see Lesson 10). But in general, men were expected to grow in wisdom as they advanced in years. And those who demonstrated wisdom were sought by God’s people as true leaders.

Dr. Ron Moseley offers this cogent insight for the need for years of experience to produce wisdom:

In Judaism, those who had reached the age of *forty* were considered to have attained understanding, and those who were over *fifty* were considered worthy to counsel the younger people.²

Biblical elders were esteemed for their maturity, wisdom and experience. They were dependent on the Hebrew Scriptures as a foundation for their biblical applications. Faithful obedience to God by applying His Word was paramount, and these older men served to help the people in their care do that.

Let’s head back in time to explore the historical context for elders. Even before the Exodus, God noted the position and influence of elders. These men served as both a support base for Moses and as representatives of the nation of Israel as a whole. From the burning bush He commanded Moses,

Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, “The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt.”... The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, “The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us...” (Exodus 3:16,18).

Later, God commanded Moses to select seventy of these family heads for His specific purposes. Each of these seventy had proved himself and was ***known by Moses*** to be a leader among the people. Because of the intensity of responsibility that this role entailed, they needed the assuring and awesome anointing of the Holy Spirit:

The LORD therefore said to Moses, “Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and their officers and bring them to the tent of meet-

ing, and let them take their stand there with you... So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. Also, he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people, and stationed them around the tent. Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him; and He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed Him upon the seventy elders (Numbers 11:16,24,25a,NAS).

Let's consider for a moment the impact this heritage of Spirit-anointed oversight had on the early Church. The followers of Jesus were called to be a living organism that drew its power from the Holy Spirit. Therefore the leaders too were Spirit-appointed:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

Elders were not elected by popular vote or personal prestige. Because of their age, the fruit and outcome of their lives were readily apparent. Other followers of Jesus had recognized and were already following their leadership.

In effect, these men were *not made* elders. Rather, they were **recognized** by God and men as such. They were accountable to the Father for the diligence with which they ministered His care to equip the saints for service.

In Lesson 10 we shared how the role of the shepherd that was carried out in the Older Testament was to be the same for shepherds within the faith communities of those who embraced our Father's Covenant. Take note of *His* purpose for *zakens*:

It was He Who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be shepherds and teachers,

- ***to prepare God's people for works of service,***
- ***so that the body of Christ may be built up***
- ***until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God***
- ***and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).***

God's goal for spiritual shepherds as well as for those anointed as apostle, evangelist and prophet would be unattainable without the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit in each person who trusts. Through HIM comes:

- **unity of faith in the Body of Christ**
- **development of mature believers**
- **becoming like Jesus.**

As anyone will attest who has studied the history of Christianity, the operational loss of these four anointings within faith communities has severely handicapped the unity of the Body and the ability for followers of Jesus to mature and become like Him.

Yet, our Father at this time is restoring all four of these anointings. Witness the return of:

- **True apostles** with servant's hearts who are fulfilling assignments on our Father's behalf without the need for personal recognition.
- **True evangelists** who aren't just delivering a gospel message at crusades then leaving, but who are staying on until a faith community is planted.

- **True prophets** who don't stand on stages entertaining people, but who stand for God and bring people back to His Word.
- **True shepherds** who have gained wisdom and compassion to selflessly serve God's people as His resource of biblical guidance and direction.

What a blessing to see the Holy Spirit choosing those whom He knows are best suited to serve! And key to that suitability is *humility*. We know from Scripture that those who learned humility during their years of sanctification are the ones lifted up by our Lord (James 4:10).

The character trait of humility shuns self-seeking attention. Rather, those who are humble of spirit seldom see the profound impact they are having on others, and prefer to remain unknown.

Contrary to the very visible self-serving nature of the religious system leaders, Jesus stressed *servanthood* among His disciples. He warned that those who were tempted toward personal recognition in their scramble for public adulation would miss the inner blessing of greatness in God's sight (see Matthew 23:11,12).

That's why He prohibited the use of any titles of honor—"Rabbi," "Father," "Leader"—that would draw attention away from bringing glory and praise to the Father (see Matthew 23:8-10).

2. Honored in the Family and Faith Community

"Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching"

(1 Timothy 5:17).

If you remember, a Hebrew individual belonged to a *family* which was part of a *clan* which was part of a *tribe* which was part of the *nation* of Israel. Leadership at each level was provided by elders who had proven their ability to lead.

The council of elders within the Hebrew community directed the course of life for the whole "family" of Jews who lived there. Every Jew knew that the elders over the city where he resided could be found at the city gate to address issues and problems, as in Proverbs 31:23: "***Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.***"

The synagogue functioned as an extended spiritual family within a village. The influence of elders among the synagogue brethren was as profound as that exercised at the city gates. As pointed out by Ron Moseley, leaders of a synagogue "would join together to form a tribunal for judging cases concerning money, theft, immorality, admission of proselytes, laying on of hands, and a host of other things."³

Again, the elders worked together as a *plurality* to better ensure impartiality and justice. There was no one greater than another. And, there was no "clergy class". The *zakens* were the shepherds of the extended families, and this role was key to the faith communities in the Newer Testament.

Elders were shown deference because they had arrived at the stage in which they'd obtained wisdom. An elder was prepared through years of trials, character development, and repentance to lead the Father's children as he looked to the Spirit in obedient trust. Because he had gone through the stages the younger men were in, a *zaken* was relied on for wise counsel by the less mature.

3. Shepherding: A Father's Heart

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends”
(John 15:13).



No greater purpose can there be for an elder than to accurately represent our Father's love as he serves fellow followers of Jesus.

A father's heart loves so much that he hurts for people in their distress. He points them to ever-growing love and trust in Jesus. He offers wise counsel to help them avoid foolish mistakes and grow in the character of Jesus. He leads and coordinates his flock to fulfill God's purposes.

The character trait of *ahav/agape* love is critical for the shepherds our Father is preparing. In Lesson 2 we shared that the Hebrew letters for *ahav* mean “**a window into the Father's heart.**” Think about what that perspective means to a godly man's motivation...

This depth of our Father's compassionate love is first developed in a man's *home* as he humbly learns to sacrificially love his wife as Jesus would: “*Each one of you also must [agape] love his wife as he loves himself*” (Ephesians 5:33).

As his love for his wife grows through God's grace, a man is then more prepared to fulfill our Lord's definition for love: “*that he lay down his life for his friends.*” This type of man is the first to jump on the hand grenade (see Lesson 21). He won't flee! Instead, you'll find him on the bottom of the pile, showing by example what love is.

A true shepherd's heart is really a *father's* heart. Impregnating an ovum

technically makes a man a father. But the heart of a father is developed over many years as a man learns self-sacrifice and acquires wisdom that is motivated by love.

Paul's *spiritual fatherhood* stirred within his heart a deep identification with those who were part of his family in Jesus. A father's heart bleeds with loving care even when his loved ones are out of reach and all he can do is pray for them:

*Apart from such external things, there is the **daily pressure upon me of concern** for all the called out ones. Who is weak without **my being weak**? Who is led into sin without **my intense concern**?* (2 Corinthians 11:28,29).

Our heavenly Father reveals the nature of *love that acts* as He describes the example of his *own* shepherding with a father's heart:

*As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I **look after My sheep.** I will **rescue** them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness... I will **search for the lost and bring back the strays.** I will **bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy.** I will **shepherd the flock with justice** (Ezekiel 34:12,16).*

A wealth of fatherly instruction for elders pours out of these two verses. It's easy to recognize the parallels between fathers and shepherds. Both keep a close eye on their charges, not confining them with a leash or rigid boundaries but allowing them a certain amount of freedom to make choices.

Yet there are always consequences to

wrong choices, and children as well as immature Christians need help in facing those situations with integrity. Learning to take responsibility is an important lesson. Otherwise the inexperienced will repeat their foolish errors or learn to blame others.

A godly shepherd *searches for* and *brings back* the strays. He *feels* a responsibility for every single sheep in the flock, not just for the ones to whom he is partial or who are easy to care for.

At our retreat center we had one sheep in particular that Mike just plain didn't like. She was our most independent ewe and was frequently sidetracked from following us to the barn with the rest of the flock. This meant you always had to go back and retrieve her.

One harsh winter morning she was missing. It was lambing season and Mike suspected she must have wandered off to have her lambs. Frantically he prayed that God would forgive him for his hardness of heart toward that sheep and allow him to find her.

Suddenly, down in the woods he spotted faint wisps of steam: newborns! With streaming eyes he rushed down the hill and there she was, a new mother once again. Gently scooping up the wet lambs and holding them close enough to her so that she would follow, he led the stray sheep up the hill and back to the warmth and protection of the barn.

That ewe ultimately produced more lambs than all the others!

Referring again to the Ezekiel verses, see how diverse is the pattern of care that is poured out by a shepherd who has our Father's heart. He:

- perseveres and keeps searching.
- loves enough to sacrifice comfort and energy to rescue his sheep.

- mercifully binds up their wounds and nurtures them to recovery.
- discerns which ones to cull for the good of the rest.
- impartially cares for them all.

You can see why Paul was so detailed in his listing of leadership qualifications in Timothy 3 and Titus 1. These characteristics represent the essence of a mature, caring, responsible person. Biblical elders are very special men of God!

This is the picture we get of our Lord as He tenderly shows His love for each one through the care He extends: "***He tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart; He gently leads those that have young***" (Isaiah 40:11).

What a picture of compassionate intimacy! The shepherd can recognize the special need of those who can't go on without personal help—the lambs—yet he doesn't separate them from the flock or push them beyond their capability or rebuke their weakness. He comes alongside them, bearing their load and helping them to remain connected with the others.

Only a man who has tasted the Father's forgiveness even when he felt he'd sinned beyond forgiveness could have such compassion. He's known grace firsthand!

Let's translate this into the service of an elder. Like a father he knows the condition of each of the people in his care—which ones are strong and healthy, which need some "one-anothering" from the rest of the flock, and which are temporarily disabled by a catastrophe and need his immediate attention.

This kind of personal awareness requires far more than being concerned

about what goes on during a gathering. The ability to care personally and relationally is a result of daily concern and interaction with his flock.

Just as a father trains his children, an elder should be training up the flock to be *aware of each other* through exercising their spiritual gifts and growing as extended family toward one another. As part of equipping a flock, a fatherly elder encourages more mature sheep to come alongside those who need special attention.

Sheep nurse lambs; shepherds help the sheep do their job well.

Lambs don't stay little for very long. A shepherd or mature "sheep" is not meant to "carry" a distressed person on a long-term basis. The best way you can help a needy person is to pray with them and compassionately point them to Jesus so that their trust in God's faithfulness can strengthen and encourage them.



By tactfully mentoring and guiding others in the flock to assume **relational responsibility** for each other, elders are not overwhelmed by a myriad of difficult life problems confronting their faith family. They are gently leading those who have "younger" believers in their care so that *both* discipler and disciple will grow in spiritual maturity as they trust Jesus together.

(We'll discuss more fully the relational connectedness of helping each other in Lesson 49, *Hand-in-Hand Fellowship*).

God looks at the heart of an elder who trusts Him to be a vessel through whom He can display His loving care. That is why elders are called to minister

to the sick through prayer and anointing (see James 5:14). Through discerning prayer these men can perhaps also discover if this is an *illness for chastisement*, or for the *glory of God*, or *unto death*.

By this act of mercy they are following the example set by Jesus and His disciples in anointing the sick with oil and healing their infirmities. Through faithful ministry to the afflicted, elders can compassionately point the weary and sick toward a greater trust in their Lord.

Intimate Contact And Personal Understanding

"Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds" (Proverbs 27:23)

Since each believer is at a different point along his or her pilgrimage, eldering shepherds need intimate knowledge of each one. One thing you learn from tending a sheep flock as we have:

You can't move them faster than the weakest one can travel. To do so creates a lot of tension for a ewe with lambs; her flocking and mothering instincts collide. *Every* sheep needs careful attention.

A flock that grazes together is more easily tended. Once the sheep are scattered because the shepherd has been careless, it's much harder to lead them. They're also more susceptible to attack. Lack of diligent leadership can bring disastrous results:

So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals (Ezekiel 34:5).

Human sheep, unlike their woolly counterparts, can hide their pain and needs behind a facade. It takes close contact and mutual trust for some people to open up. Individuals who have no mature believers to come alongside them or who have no access to brothers or sisters in Jesus for “family” relationship are like the lost sheep of whom Jesus spoke: “*When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd*” (Matthew 9:36).

Every follower of Jesus should have access to the mature in Him if their focus on Jesus is sliding. Followers of Him also thrive when they enjoy close spiritual companions to “one-another” with.

The sheep/shepherd analogy that Jesus paints in John 10 is a poignant model for elders to emulate: “*I am the good shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me*” (v.14).

Because the sheep have experienced such loving commitment from their shepherd, they eagerly respond to his voice: “*He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out*” (John 10:3). In fact, he is intimately aware of the character and quirks of each one, for he knows each one *individually*.

Most retreat guests who visited our flock were mystified that we were readily able to identify each sheep, even at a distance! To the casual observer they all looked alike. But we, the shepherds, knew which was the outgoing bold one, which had a favorite post to rub against, and which one loved to have her ears rubbed. And yes, each one indeed had a name!

Although opportunistic to snag a treat even from a stranger, our sheep did not allow outsiders to get too close. But when they heard the familiar “Sheep, sheep!”

from their devoted caretakers, their heads would jerk up and their pace quicken. Even if no goodies were at hand, they’d linger to be scratched or to follow us. Maybe we thought they especially enjoyed our company, but more likely they just felt secure when their shepherds were accessible. Somehow they knew that we *understood their needs and consistently filled them*.

Jeremiah put it this way: “*Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding*” (Jeremiah 3:15). Shepherding elders lead the people in their care in righteousness with knowledge and understanding of what is *good*:

- to steady encouragement to love Jesus and to keep trusting in His faithfulness to hear and to respond to their heart’s call;
- to instruction and discipleship that will prosper their souls and encourage them to bear fruit;
- to comforting relational folds for nurture and guidance and friendship;
- to admonition and correction for attitudes or behaviors that are harmful to both the individual and the rest of the observing flock.

A shepherd whose heart is truly after our Father’s own heart will pour himself out on behalf of those in his care. He will constantly ask his Father for righteous understanding of each person’s situation so he’ll share from His perspective.

“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17).

There can't be so many within the extended spiritual family of a home fellowship that those who are eldering can't render account to our Father personally for all whom they're serving. Satan himself delights in helping a faith community grow larger than the shepherds can personally render account for so that frustration ensues. And our Lord will judge shepherds whose *hearts* are not folded with the sheep in their care.

Our first home fellowship family grew to a point that everyone recognized intimacy was being lost. Mike was eldering at the time, and he was struggling to render account for the brothers and sisters he was helping in their trust walk. We all went on a weekend retreat and prayed.

Prompted by the Spirit, one of the women stood up and asked, "Would you mind if I did something?" She then proceeded to divide us into two groups. "How does this feel?" she asked. All of us had a witness in our spirits that this is what the Spirit wanted as He multiplied us into two families who could reach out to others, introduce them to Jesus, and disciple them in the family.

Mike had already been preparing one of the men to lead a home fellowship family, and this man joyfully stepped into service. God is good to all who seek Him!

Hebraic caring and leadership can be summed up by this: "*Show them Jesus as you walk in obedient trust.*" Your caring example will be caught by others, but this can only happen through personal contact. With personal contact you're able to render account that you've guided each one toward a deeper walk in Jesus.

It's all connected: personal contact, role modeling, rendering account to our Father. Remember this because it's criti-

cal if our Lord is preparing you to serve others by eldering!

How important the criterion of *personal care* was in recognizing leaders in the early Church! The way a man lived reflected his true measure, for those who loved Jesus wholeheartedly always had *Him* as the focus of their relationship with others:

Remember your leaders, those who spoke God's message to you. Reflect on the results of their way of life, and imitate their trust—Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:7,8).

Leaders serve by example. That which they hope to see our Lord do in others must be seen in their own lives. In current vernacular: "Does he walk the talk?" Since elders are the "undershepherds" of Jesus (see 1 Peter 5:4), and since the character of Jesus never changes, the same qualities of caring and attentive leadership are timeless for any era or culture.

The relevance of leaders serving as godly examples whose lives matched their teachings was reinforced by Paul:

Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church (1 Corinthians 4:16,17).

Paul elevates Jesus as the model Shepherd in any age when he writes, "*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ*" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Our Father loves us too much to allow us to remain unchallenged in our

own sin. Isn't that part of parenting—confronting the human sin nature? Out of the same loving heart biblical elders are compelled by the Spirit to confront those in the extended spiritual family fold who are straying from the Lord.

Confrontation can run a gamut from mild chiding to strong rebuke. Appropriate confrontation by an older man who has personal knowledge of a disciple and a relational connection is vital because it can incite a younger man to change his course:

*We ask you, brothers, to **respect** those who are **working hard among you**, those who are **guiding you in the Lord and confronting you in order to help you change**. Treat them with the **highest regard and love** because of the work they are doing. Live at peace among yourselves (1 Thessalonians 5:12,13, CJB).*

Some might call confrontation “tough love”. Others recognize it as fatherly concern that clearly exposes evil and points the way to righteousness as the hearer returns to a walk of loving, obedient trust in Jesus. Again, effective confrontation bears fruit when it's done in a spirit of love by an elder who has ongoing personal contact.

As our home fellowship family was gathering one Sunday, one of the families showed up without the husband/father. His wife explained that the two of them had gotten into an argument that morning and he decided not to come.

Mike encouraged everyone to enjoy themselves as family and drove off to the man's house. As the front door opened, the man stood there embarrassed. Mike rebuked him, “Bill, don't you ever send your family to fellowship with us when you have unre-

solved issues between you all! I pastor you and you pastor your family. By staying behind you're abdicating your responsibility for your family and muddying our gathering. Your family is under the responsibility of *your* authority, not mine. Please don't ever do this again!”

Bill returned with Mike to our house where the rest of us were sharing with each other. He took his family aside and asked forgiveness from them. Then he came to the rest of us and did the same.

This was a man who had chosen the path of wisdom: “*He who listens to a **life-giving rebuke** will be at home **among the wise**. He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever **heeds correction** gains **understanding**” (Proverbs 15:31,32).*

[We encourage you to apply our book [**Growing Relationships Through Confrontation**](#) (a free download) as a way of life for you and your extended spiritual family. It will help keep communication lines open!]

A warning to elders who neglect rendering account:

The converted Greek philosophers introduced into the Church a concept of education which was based on *disseminating content*. The character and experience of the teacher were unimportant, and a personal teacher/student relationship considered unnecessary.

What a fallacy to believe that imparting even *biblical* knowledge alone will change lives or character! You have only to consider the Germans of the first half of the past century, a culture full of Bible knowledge. But that knowledge did not stop them from the Holocaust atrocities, nor did it motivate them to halt Nazi inhumanity.

If you fail to earnestly spend mean-

ingful time each week with the individuals and families within your faith family, you will be nothing more than a “knowledge imparter” whenever you gather. This neglect is a sign to the flock: avoid such a man! He only has *his* interests rather than yours at heart!

4. Having Our Father’s Larger View

“The plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of His heart through all generations”
(Psalms 33:11).

As the shepherd/king of Israel, David understood that the Father’s purposes for His people extended far beyond the problems and joys of day-to-day living.

God had defined the borders of Israel for the patriarch Abraham—from the River of Egypt in the South to the Euphrates River in the North.

Given the vast number of enemies arrayed against them before they could take that land, the troops needed training—not just military preparation but *spiritual* training so that they could be victorious through righteous obedience. That was the role of the shepherd: to lead the way in righteousness:

Previously, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and in [as a shepherd would]. And the LORD said to you, ‘You will shepherd My people Israel, and you will be a ruler over Israel’ (2 Samuel 5:2).

The mission God entrusted to David involved both the knowledge and compassion of a shepherd as well as the skill and courage of a general. Like a father with his children, *spiritual shepherds* see beyond the immediate needs to the larg-

er purpose of God for their faith communities (see Ephesians 4:11-13). Training up the flock to care for each other is vital for growth in maturity.

When a fellowship family that is intent on Jesus reigning in their lives comes together, it’s a time for mutual encouragement and edification as well as worship and intercession. When they are apart, their concern for one another continues as well as their burden for the unsaved in their neighborhoods, schools, workplaces and community.

The heart of Jesus yearns for those who have yet to trust Him to be reached for His Kingdom. That focus should ever be on the hearts of each person who loves Him. Yet the true message of Jesus has too often been counterfeited by glib lies that “anything goes” in regard to God. Jesus offers a sober contradiction to the “easy-believism” so prevalent in religious circles today:

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’ Anyone who loves his father or mother **more than Me** is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter **more than Me** is not worthy of Me; and anyone who does not **take his cross and follow Me** is not worthy of Me (Matthew 10:34-38).

This is no matter of repeating a few verses and assuming you have a ticket to heaven’s gate. Jesus utters powerful words that smack of unwavering deter-

mination, self-denial, and a life transformation that will reap anger from others at the very least and most likely violence for following Him.

Look at what happens when you turn wholeheartedly to walk in the steps of the Lord you love:

- a sword severs the way you used to relate to others;
- Jesus turns those who refuse to follow Him against you;
- your own relatives decide you're now their enemy and treat you accordingly;
- your love for Jesus is so strong that any other relationship pales by comparison;
- you're called to put aside anything that might detract from your relationship with Him, even to the point of willingness to die for His sake.

The image we get from these words seems so opposite the lovey-dovey peace scenario we've come to expect when people talk about Jesus. Rather, this proclamation by Jesus is more like trying to train sheep to become predators!

But Jesus has sounded the clarion that His "called-out ones" are at war. When you embrace the Gospel of the Covenant with our Father, new relational priorities and responsibilities come with it. You become family with Jesus (Matthew 12:49). Satan wars against you (Revelation 13:7). And, you become a Spirit-impelled foot-soldier in a battle for the souls of mankind.

Just as soldiers must leave their families behind to go to war, we too must count our own lives as lost to the world's purposes and values. And our Lord doesn't promise any days off either!

*If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him **deny himself, and take up his cross***

***daily, and follow Me.** For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever **loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it** (Luke 9:23,24).*

David realized he needed a larger overall view of the kingdom God gave him. He had no doubt Israel was surrounded by enemies who hated them. With that in mind, he established over forty fortified cities in Israel, each autonomous under the leadership of elders.

But the residents of each city understood *their connectedness* with the rest of Israel and their responsibility to their fellow Jews nationwide. Therefore they could respond to the king's call when they were needed for battle against Israel's enemies.

An elder of our Father's faith communities must also have a larger view for their family in Jesus. They must see their extended spiritual family as part of our Father's collective family through whom He is extending His Kingdom of light into the kingdom of darkness.

Relational connectedness as modeled by the elders of home fellowships is an important feature for faith communities today if we are to obey our King's commands and "take the land" for Him.

[We'll discuss this in Lesson 50, **Seize Your Neighborhood And Your City For Jesus!**]

5. Newer Testament Qualifications

It should come as no surprise, given Paul and Barnabas' history as devout Jews, that they would draw upon their Hebraic heritage and appoint elders to serve each gathering of believers:

*Paul and Barnabas **appointed elders** for them **in each church** and, with prayer and fasting, **committed them to the Lord, in Whom they had put their trust** (Acts 14:23; see also Titus 1:5).*

The Hebrew Scriptures are fairly silent about the qualifications for elders because the whole nation had been served by these men from before the time of Moses.

But as the Gospel reached into Gentile world, Paul needed to clarify the character of an elder who represented the Father. The apostle is quite explicit in his list of traits for this important responsibility. He details these character qualities to the evangelist, Timothy (see 2 Timothy 4:5), who will turn the leadership of the faith community over to the shepherds:

*If anyone **sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.** Now the overseer **must be:***

- above reproach,**
- the husband of but one wife,**
- temperate,**
- self-controlled,**
- respectable,**
- hospitable,**
- able to teach,**
- not given to drunkenness,**
- not violent but gentle,**
- not quarrelsome,**
- not a lover of money.**
- He must manage his own family well**
- see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)**
- He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.**
- He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall**

into disgrace and into the devil's trap (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

Note: Throughout the Newer Testament the words “overseer,” “elder,” and “shepherd” are used interchangeably. Peter confirms this:

*To the **elders** among you, I appeal as a **fellow elder**, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who will also share in the glory to be revealed: **Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers** (1 Peter 5:1,2).*

Paul also interchanges the three words, all of which entail a responsibility to make sure their own lives as leaders are righteous, and that no subversive elements distort the true Gospel among the people in their care:

*And from Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called to him the **elders of the church.** “**Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood**” (Acts 20:17,28).*

The same group of men are addressed by three different words. These words refer to older men fulfilling a role of varied responsibilities. The interchangeable use of these words is similar to a married man being called “husband”, “spouse” and “head of the household”.

Just because a man may be qualified to serve as an elder, he might not want to because of time constraints, personal responsibilities or interests, or just plain reluctance.

Conversely, a man may desperately

desire to serve as elder but be lacking in one or more of the qualifications listed. While it is a commendable thing to want to serve one's spiritual family as an elder, these parameters have been established for the protection of both the individual and the faith community.

The listing that Paul enumerates in his letter to Titus is similar to that sent to Timothy. Again we see the situation of an evangelist, Titus, appointing qualified men to shepherd the faith communities in every town (1:5). Besides the qualifications that mirror those given to Timothy, Paul adds this:

For the overseer must be...

- *[a man] having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion...*
- *hospitable,*
- *loving what is good,*
- *sensible,*
- *just,*
- *devout,*
- *self-controlled,*
- *holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching,*
- *that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict (Titus 1:6,8,9,NAS).*

How vital it is for a man to have raised his own family well as an indicator of his personal leadership abilities!

The outcome of a man's life was the critical test for whether others should listen to his teaching. Leadership and character rather than education or wealth were the key factors of honorable leadership in the early Church.

Remember, from the Hebraic viewpoint, a man began to obtain wisdom around age forty. After the age of fifty he might be wise enough to counsel. By

that time, he's made enough mistakes to learn humility! He's also at the stage in which self-pursuit has lost its attraction, and the compassionate goals and purposes of our Father have taken its place.

Bibliography

1. Robert Hicks, *The Masculine Journey* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1993).
2. Ron Mosely, "Evidence of the Jewish Background of the Early Church", *Restore!* Summer 1996, p. 40. Taken from Philip Blackman, *Mishnah; Avot 5:21* (New York: Judaica Press, 1983).
3. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Recommended Further Reading

- July 2001 Newsletter: *Wholeheartedness Toward God — A Life of Adaptation*
- July 1997 Newsletter: *Today's Gatekeepers*
- September 1997 Newsletter: *Church At War*
- October 1997 Newsletter: *Elders*
- January 1998 Newsletter: *Pastoring By Elders*
- September 1998 Newsletter: *Pastoring By Elders*
- October 1998 Newsletter: *The Almost Christian*