

*Reflecting
the heart of the
Father...*

*Pastoring by
Elders*

Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz

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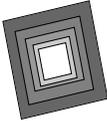
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Dedication

We dedicate this book to all the lovingly courageous men who are answering the Father's call to reflect His merciful concern for His children.

Foreword

If ever there were words spoken which need to be heeded today, the words of the Lord to Jeremiah cry for understanding and application in our time. *“This is what the Lord says: ‘Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.’”*

The voices clamoring for our attention are numerous. Each one claims to have the “answer” and promises real freedom and happiness. And each one leads to disillusionment because each is an illusion. The end result —hopelessness, despair, loneliness, unfulfilling relationships, and lack of connectedness.

The heart of our Father, however, longs to restore broken relationships, mend families and churches torn apart by false promises, and put the people of God back on the ancient paths which bring rest to the soul. Out of the heart of the Father flows the desire to restore our older saints to the places of honor, loving care, and wise leadership which are the proper roles of true biblical elders.

This book is about the heart of our Father — a heart yearning to restore true koinonia with our Lord and with one another. The role of biblical elders is a vital link in that process of restoration the Father is producing in His body. We need elders who can be the kind of role models and shepherds for our families and faith communities that will produce true disciples of Jesus Christ. No greater resource has been made available to us for this purpose than godly elders who want to make a difference for the Kingdom of God.

Mike and Sue Dowgiewicz have done a masterful job of leading us into an understanding of God’s plan for healthy families and churches. We are at a crossroads today. What you are about to discover is an ancient path — the good way that God calls us to. Walk in it and you will find rest for your soul!

Cavin T. Harper
President, ElderQuest Ministries

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Men Over 40: The Father Wants You!

VIETNAM, 1972

My closest friend in Navy flight training was a husky Marine named John. A feisty Californian, John spurred me on to many a finish line when I thought I'd drop in my tracks. We were inseparable.

After flight training I went to a helicopter combat cargo squadron while John was assigned to a Marine unit elsewhere. We stayed in touch as often as we could.

During my second deployment to Vietnam I was flying from Danang to my ship. A major offensive had begun a few days before around the city of Hue, not far from where I was flying. Suddenly, on my radio I heard a distress call from a unit that was being overrun near the beach. I recognized the frightened voice on the radio: It was my buddy John!

I shouted into the radio, "John, is that *you*?" John shouted back, "Dogger!! Is that you? *Come and get us!* We're not going to make it!!"

Just as I began to turn the helicopter toward the beach, the Commanding Officer of my ship called: "Lieutenant Dowgiewicz! Return to the ship at once or face a court martial!" The court martial part didn't bother me, but something deep inside caused me to obey orders.

Landing aboard the ship, I was almost overcome by sorrow and despair. I was promptly called to the bridge to face the captain, who had been monitoring the radios and had heard the whole interchange.

Fighting back tears, I stood at attention in front of him. "What were you doing?" he demanded. I admitted that John was my best friend. Then he asked, "Dowgiewicz, how did you intend to rescue anyone in an unarmed helicopter?" Feeling stupid, I had no answer.

As we talked, the Captain recognized that I had not intended to be insubordinate in trying to save my friend. I had just given in to an error in judgment. Rising from his chair, the captain put his hand on my shoulder. In a fatherly tone he gently but firmly spoke. "Mike, I'm sorry about your friend and I appre-

ciate the courage it took for you to return to the ship. But there's a whole offensive taking place and we're the only combat cargo ship for hundreds of miles. Ships and other units are going to be out of ammunition and supplies if you don't do your job. I need your helicopter doing what it was sent here to do. Get back in your chopper and fly."

It was five days before I saw a bed. My copilot and I took turns catnapping in the cockpit whenever we could. Even though I knew I'd done the right thing by flying back to my ship, the voice of John pleading for help haunted me. I wondered how I could ever face his wife back home.

A few days after the offensive subsided, the captain ordered me to fly to one of the amphibious ships that housed Marines. When I landed I was ordered to shut down the helicopter. That was strange.

As I hopped onto the flight deck, up from the catwalk popped John, beaming from ear to ear! With a whoop, we hugged and cried and laughed like long-lost brothers. John related his story: A few minutes after I had headed for my ship, a Marine H-53 helicopter armed to the teeth had come in and rescued everyone. My captain had kept track of what had happened. At the appropriate time, he had surprised me in the most wonderful way. Deference to authority had its reward!

My heart had broken when I had thought my friend lay there helpless under fire and I couldn't save him. Fathers, *you're* feeling grieved and frustrated as you see the pain of destroyed families all around you. You want to jump in and rescue them but you are finding no forum or encouragement to do so, even in the Church. But there's good news! Our compassionate Father in heaven wants to prepare men just like you to enlist in His service to heal His people.

God must weep as He watches the love of His people growing colder. Pollster George Barna will tell you that **43%** of Americans consider themselves "born again" — yet families are fracturing at devastating rates and children are drowning in immorality at ever-earlier ages. Could these be *your* children and grandchildren?

Jesus forewarned us that this would occur: *“At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other. . . Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold”* (Matthew 24:10,12).

Church programs cannot be counted on for the nurturing, loving warmth our Father would like to bring to hurting families. Nor are extended families available to offer the refuge and support that could have been expected only a generation ago. The divorce rate of believers in the United States now approximates that of the world. Too many of our Father’s children lack either the desire or the ability to help the rest of their biological or spiritual family.

For men over 40 like I am, much of this destruction happened on “our watch.” While we were supposed to be standing guard over our families and faith communities as good soldiers of Christ, the enemy stole in to take us captive. We were duped into thinking that everyone else, from schools to Sunday school classes, would pass along moral and spiritual values to our children. We were wrong! As Sue and I travel around the country sharing Restoration truths, there is hardly a grandparent-aged person we meet whose family has not been touched by divorce.

What can be done? The pain and sorrow of broken homes has not gone unnoticed by our Father. He is recruiting older men whom He can use to undo this mess. God is prepared to forgive us for our mistakes and to train us to mend the hurt in our families and faith communities. He is looking for men who are humble enough to obey Him no matter what the cost. Out of His compassionate mercy He will do the rest.

God has given us the means in His Word to carry out His plan. *He* is restoring the influence and authority of older followers of Jesus to rebuild all that made the early Church so intimate and powerful. *Pastoring by Elders* amplifies the need to equip wise, older men in their fatherly role in the Restored Church. These men are being restored to the shepherding leadership that elders exercised in both the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the New Testament. Older women, as well, are desperately needed to come alongside younger women as a treasured resource of compassion and wisdom.

We recognize that the restoration of pastoring by qualified older men will call for a fundamental change in the structure and operation of a large segment of the contemporary church. We also realize that any questioning of the contemporary role of pastor can become an emotional arena. Love for our Lord, however, compels us to bear witness to the truth. For too long those in leadership have been the successful, educated ones who can “get the job done.” Our intent is not to create a document of controversy. Rather, we are affirming the biblical foundations and relational processes of shepherding God’s people that were embraced by our Hebraic forefathers—our predecessors who first followed Jesus.

Being an “elder” goes far beyond holding a church position. Eldering is a reflection of our Father’s love and care for His people. Paul clearly understood this Hebraic view of the Father when he exclaimed, *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God”* (2 Corinthians 1:3,4).

Our Father is a God of compassion and mercy. How very sad that many today, both churched and unchurched, have a distorted view of Him. Unloving treatment by their own earthly fathers and misuse of authority in many areas of church life have distorted the concept of fatherly loving kindness.

Our Father is revealing His tender heart more and more as the Restoration continues. He is in the process of recruiting older men who will exemplify His loving nature to His people. Our Father’s nature resides in the *hearts* of His children, not in their minds.

Let’s focus on the question of age. Obviously, Scripture abounds with examples of younger men who served as priests, prophets, and even kings. The Levites served at the tabernacle from the age of thirty to age fifty (see Numbers 4:3,23,30). David was anointed king at

Hebron at age thirty, and Jesus began his ministry at that age. Yet elders, the older men of wisdom, served the people in a far different capacity from those in other leadership roles.

This book is written primarily for men who are forty and older, not because Scripture mandates that as a minimum age but because our Hebraic forefathers understood that men usually do not have sufficient wisdom, experience, or capacity to minister to others before that age. Those who are somewhat younger will benefit by learning how to prepare for the type of leadership which represents the heart of the Father for His people.

There are three categories of men in the forty-plus group:

- Those of sufficient age and character who are biblically qualified to represent the Father in pastoring His people.
- Those who are of sufficient age but missing the complete character development which the Father requires of men who shepherd His people.
- Those who are approaching an age to qualify as an elder but still require more time and experience for mature character development.

And this is who this book is for—especially those who are part of a faith community that has few or no biblically qualified elders.

In Bible times, everyone understood that a good elder had certain traits and abilities. Each chapter of this book tells you about one of those characteristics. The chapters overlap some, just as the varying experiences and wisdom of elders overlap to strengthen the Body as a whole.

If you enjoy scholarly research — searching out details on every reference to elders in the Scriptures — we recommend two books in particular: *Biblical Eldership* by Alexander Strauch and *The New Testament Order for Church and Missionary* by Alexander R. Hay. Both were designed as expositions of eldership and the operation of the Church as it would have been understood in the first century.

Who is the Father recruiting to join Him in His restoration? Everyday people who will permit Him to shine through them: *“It was at that time Yeshua said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you concealed these things from the sophisticated and educated and **revealed them to ordinary folks**”* (Matthew 11:25, JNT)¹. In these pages you will find a composite picture of elders who fulfill God’s plans for Body leadership. And you will discern why strong, loving elders are needed so desperately today.

Mike Dowgiewicz

1. *Jewish New Testament* by Dr. David H. Stern, P.O. Box 615, Clarksville, MD 21029 (410)764-6144. Used with permission; pp. 15,16.

SECTION I

Historic Hindrances to Biblical Pastoring by Older Men

Chapter 1

The Assault on the Hebraic Foundations

Let's start with a surprise.

The clergy class that so prevails throughout the Church today does not find its basis in the Bible. Rather, it was adapted from the pagan practices of the Greeks and Romans who depended on priests to stand between them and their gods. The role of clergy got its philosophical underpinnings from the teachings of Plato in the fifth century BC.

Of profound influence in the second century church was Plato's concept of *cosmic dualism*. He postulated that life was divided into two components, the transcendent spiritual arena of eternal truths which he deemed "good," and the coarse physical realm of matter which he considered "evil." Lofty spirituality was an ideal, a goal worth forsaking all other values to attain. Consequently, the earthly concerns of temporal life (food, shelter, vocation) were vulgar and common, though unfortunately needed for existence.

Dualism stood in stark contrast to the Hebraic world-view, in which man had been created in God's image for personal relationship with Him both on earth and in eternity. The Creator viewed the physical body as "good;" joined with the spirit, it defined "man." God placed such great value on man because, like all physical creation, it testified to His greatness: "*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse*" (Romans 1:20).

The Greek philosophers who converted to Christianity attempted

through their writings to reconcile Platonic thought with the Bible. This merger led to a depreciation of life in the here and now, and created an unbiblical “relationship” with God that was mystical and virtually unattainable. Dualism set apart and exalted the clergy, who followed a “spiritual calling.”

That kind of thinking is perpetuated today: Many seminaries infer or teach that those who choose to engage in a full-time ministry as an occupation are somehow more spiritual than those in secular vocations. God, however, makes no such distinction between the sacred and the secular, for *all* that His people do should be for His glory. If you still feel that only “professionals” can be used by God to share His truths, savor the Hebraic encouragement of A.W. Tozer in his classic, *The Pursuit of God*:

The “layman” need never think of his humbler task as being inferior to that of his minister. Let every man abide in the calling wherein he is called and his work will be as sacred as the work of the ministry. It is *not what* a man does that determines whether his work is sacred or secular, it is *why* he does it. *The motive is everything. Let a man sanctify the Lord God in his heart and he can thereafter do no common act.* All he does is good and acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For such a man, living itself will be sacramental and the whole world a sanctuary. *His entire life will be a priestly ministration* (emphasis added).

Because of Plato’s influence, the Hellenistic culture that was so influential during the early Church times despised manual labor as degrading. The Hebraic culture, to the contrary, valued the worth of manual trade. Even before the Fall, Adam and Eve worked in the Garden. Rabbis as well were expected to participate in a profession: Jesus was a carpenter; Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla were tentmakers; noted Jewish teachers Hillel and Shammai were a woodcutter and a carpenter, respectively. Few today would disagree with this apt observation:

An excellent plumber is infinitely more admirable than an incompetent philosopher. The society that scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water.

—John Gardner

Being *in* the world but not adopting its values was vital to Hebraic life. However, Church Fathers such as Clement, Origen, and Justin had been powerfully swayed by Hellenistic thought. As converts to Christianity, their combined influence fashioned a new theology for the Church based on Plato's philosophy. Their emphasis on *pietism*, withdrawing from worldly concerns in order to focus on spiritual matters, was passed along for centuries within the church. Such personal withdrawal contradicted the *family and community participation* that exemplified the Hebraic outworking of faith as described in the New Testament.

Origen, Clement's best-known pupil, was called "the father of Christian theology." Origen had been enveloped by the dualist teaching that regarded flesh as evil and spirit as good. Carrying dualism to an extreme, he actually castrated himself in order to avoid sexual temptation! As he studied the New Testament, Origen discovered that he could allegorize the Old Testament away from what he considered an "earthy" perspective. So, for example, the graphic description of marital love in the Song of Songs was allegorized into the relationship between Christ and the Church. Eager theological students from all over flocked to Alexandria to be infused with these teachings.

How could believers so willingly stray from the truth as it had been presented in the Word? Initially, the majority of Christians opposed Origen's teachings. The system that could explain away the context and content of the Word had risen out of the desire of Hellenist believers to integrate Greek philosophy with the biblical text. In time their writings became venerated as highly as the

Scriptures, nullifying any pressure to stay true to what God intended. As students from the Alexandria schools spread out to establish their own arenas of instruction, these misguided interpretations gained ground steadily, ultimately achieving near-universal acceptance.

By the early fifth century, dualist practices had become thoroughly engrained in ecclesiastical thought. This was particularly due to the influence of Augustine. This late fourth century theologian taught that church authority *superseded*, or took on greater importance than, the authority of the Scriptures. Thus the educated clergy class were able to exert even greater power over the common, illiterate man. It was not until the Reformation — over a thousand years later — that *sola scriptura*, faith and practice based upon the Scriptures alone, was restored to the Church.

During the unfortunate earlier centuries, however, Christian doctrine shifted away from the trusting faith and spiritual wisdom that would have been imparted to each believer by the Holy Spirit. The increasing reliance on Greek reasoning removed the Spirit from His true place of empowering men and women to live a life pleasing to God. Instead, only the “elite few” could be trusted to interpret God’s Word for the rest of the Body.

The dualist concept also brought about the myriad of church rituals requiring an intermediary on behalf of the people. A priest, a professional clergyman, was required to *sanctify*, or make holy by prayer, that which God had already created and declared to be good.

For instance, no longer could a group of believers simply share in the breaking of bread and passing of the wine cup as the early Church had enjoyed. Dualism viewed bread and wine as too “earthly” to be the body and blood of Jesus; the physical elements had to be spiritualized. And so a sacrament was born which only the clergy could perform on behalf of the congregants. Clergy control through sacraments would keep worshipers enslaved for centuries, distanced from their biblical privilege of walking as a priesthood of believers.

Other facets of our biblical heritage were discarded as well. When Greek oratorical skills replaced Judeo-Christian role modeling, the

church lost the Hebraic approach to life's difficulties: practical application of biblical truth taught by older, wiser men. Through the influence of John Chrysostom, a fourth century theologian from Antioch, oratory rose to new heights. Greek rhetoric (the structure and style of sermons) became the main teaching pattern in the church. Today's seminary homiletics, hermeneutics, and oratory — all the related fields through which preachers *speak at* people—find their origins not in the first century Church but in the Greek teaching tradition.

Rejected as well was the *halakhic teaching style* of the early Church, an approach that relied on discussion and application of God's Word. (We will discuss this in a later section.) The Hebraic vine had been hacked to the root.

Chapter 2

Nicolaitanism: Repression of God's People

Most Christians today are so accustomed to the clergy/laity arrangement in their congregations that they are amazed or even angered when it is questioned. *Nicolaitanism* is a system of control and power, a governmental system of suppression and subjugation. So how does this tie in with the separation of clergy and lay people?

Perhaps you're not familiar with the Nicolaitan system that is so odious to God. (We gratefully acknowledge the research of F.W. Grant (1834-1902) in his work *Nicolaitanism: The Rise and Growth of the Clergy*.) The Nicolaitans were not a religious group. Rather, they promoted a doctrine that sundered the connection between individual believers and their God.

This insidious separation can be seen by the very definition of the name. The Greek word *nicolaitane* means "conquering the people." The first part of the word refers to *nikos*, to conquer or have victory over. The middle of the word is derived from *laos*, which means "the people". The commonly used term "laity" is derived from it. The Nicolaitan system *subjugates the people* by making "laity" out of them through raising up others who lord it over them.

The spiritual predominance of a priestly (or ministerial) system is maintained by the Nicolaitan spirit. Men with the most personal charisma or the greatest natural abilities are elevated to leadership. Believers learn to depend on these individuals for guidance and faith practice rather than on a vibrant personal relationship with the Lord. Such dependence on one man lessens the sense of personal responsibility for obedience that Scripture commands.

Thrusting responsibility for personal holiness onto someone else who will stand in the gap is nothing new. Jeremiah bemoaned the sin of this situation: "*A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way*" (Jeremiah 5:30,31). Of course, the people them-

selves are part of the problem. By hiring an intermediary to represent them before God, they mistakenly believe they can hide behind *his* “holiness.”

In the letters written to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, two churches are confronted with the issue of the Nicolaitans. The letter to the church at Ephesus states, “*But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate*” (Revelation 2:6). These are incredibly strong words. Can you imagine being the object of something that God hates?

Again, to the church at Pergamum John writes, “*Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will **fight against them** with the sword of my mouth*” (Revelation 2:15,16). At least the Ephesians hated the Nicolaitan practices as God did. Some of the Pergamum residents, though, *embraced* that teaching. What an awful situation to be in. How would you like to be someone against whom God Himself must fight?

This is exactly what the Lord is doing in the church today to expose and cast off that pernicious Nicolaitan influence. The church has become so proud in its system of man-made tradition that the Lord must oppose it. The immensity of clergy misconduct, a divorce rate on par with unbelievers, and worldly programs for “church growth” are all part of the delusion to which God has handed over the Western church. Believers can separate themselves so far from the Lord and His ways that He is then compelled to let them *live the lie* they embrace: “*For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie*” (2 Thessalonians 2:11).

A lesson for Christians today: Have you ever considered why more first century Jews didn’t devote their lives to the Messiah? Picture for yourself how hard it was for them to give up centuries of dependency on the annual Day of Atonement during which the blood of an unblemished goat was offered for their sins. Commitment to Jesus meant putting their trust in *His* shed blood alone, once and for

all time. How do you change centuries of tradition? After the ascension of Jesus God allowed the Romans to destroy the temple in AD 70 so that the Jews wouldn't have a place to keep that tradition alive.

Isn't this what we, the followers of Jesus in the US, are facing today? Believers have had access to the Bible in English for more than four centuries. Why hasn't the *priesthood* of *all* the followers of Jesus occurred before now? The Nicolaitan subjugation! This spirit's control over much of the Church keeps us from carrying out God's plans for us: "*I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another*" (Romans 15:14). The Church needs the freedom to walk in that truth!

Certain clues are evident when the Nicolaitan spirit is ruling:

- You discover that you are looking up to people "holier" than you to intercede between you and God. That mediation role keeps you from having to mature in the relational intimacy and accompanying responsibility that your Father desires.
- Perhaps there are ecclesiastical positions in your faith community that are reinforcing your spiritual infancy and irresponsibility — a "Care Pastor" who visits the sick on behalf of (and maybe *instead* of) your faith community, or a Youth Pastor who is supplanting the responsibility of parents to teach moral and spiritual standards to their children. Or maybe some in your congregation claim personal preeminence based upon their special spiritual anointing. In either situation, the nature of Jesus is violated, because in position and anointing He came to *serve*, not to replace.
- You begin to recognize that someone in authority has established certain practices of faith and doctrine with which you are pressed to agree, even if you have no personal biblical conviction about them.
- You encounter individuals who proclaim or introduce themselves by an honorific title, such as, "I am Apostle (or Bishop, Reverend, Prophet) Smith," rather than as simply, "I'm Joe Smith."

These indicators should warn you that someone is stepping into a position that *removes you* from personal intimacy and responsibility before God.

The Destructive Effect of Rule #3

Are you one of the few who is able to read the Bible in its original languages? Probably not. You most likely have a favorite translation which speaks to your heart and which you hope is accurate. However, each group of translators of the various versions are directed by certain rules to guide their interpretive efforts.

For instance, the translators of the 1611 King James Version were required to follow *Bancroft's Rules to Be Observed in the Translation of the Bible*. Rule #3 states, "The **old Ecclesiastical Words** to be kept, viz. the Word *Church* not to be translated *Congregation*, & c."¹

An unfortunate result of applying this particular rule was that Nicolaitan-supported ecclesiastical positions were reinforced in the church. Bancroft's Rule #3 perpetuated a clergy class within the church that had been neither intended nor indicated in the New Testament.

That rule not only *negated* the Hebraic relational framework that was required for the priesthood of all believers. It also *perpetuated* the anti-Semitic stance of the converted Greek philosophers and the Nicolaitan dominance in the Church. By maintaining the word "Church" with its structural hierarchical meaning, this rule of interpretation prevented a return to the more relational Hebraic understanding encompassed in "congregation." The earliest followers of Jesus related to one another as *family*. They *congregated* as biological and spiritual families.

Let's consider one of the examples of anti-Semitism preserved by the translators of the King James version. "*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting*" (James 1:1). Note that James is writing to the Jewish believers who are dispersed among the nations. In James 2:2 he writes, "*For if there*

come unto your synagogue a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and then come in also a poor man in poor raiment."

You're probably thinking, "I don't remember the word 'synagogue' in my translation." That's because it isn't there. The Greek word *sunagoge* (*soon-uh-goh'-gay*), from which we get the word synagogue has been translated as "assembly." Yet that same word is translated in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 as *synagogue* of Satan, a truly repulsive-sounding gathering.

The King James translators further continued the Nicolaitan dominance by inserting the word "pastor" in both the Older and New Testaments instead of the more precise word "shepherd." By this act they nullified the biblically-Hebraic basis for "pastoring": *shepherding* in the context of caring for a flock of sheep. For example, in the King James version of Jeremiah 2:8, the Hebrew word *raah* (*raw-aw*), meaning "to tend a flock" or "to pasture" a flock, is translated "pastor" instead of shepherd: "*The priests said not, Where is the Lord? and they that handle the law knew me not: the **pastors** also transgressed against me...*" Emphasis is placed here on a *position* rather than on the function of a shepherd-leader.

The King James translators again substitute "pastor" for "shepherd" in Jeremiah 17:16: "*As for me, I have not hastened from being a **pastor** to follow thee.*" From the time of the Greeks and Romans, the definition of "pastor" has placed an undue emphasis on *title* and *position* rather than on the intimate and relational serving, caring, leading and protecting carried out by keepers of sheep. Contemporary use of the word "pastor," as well, often refers to an occupation. Sadly, in many faith communities, a pastor has little or no intimate knowledge or understanding of the flock supposedly in his care.

In other verses where *raah* or a derivative is used, it is most often translated "shepherd." In Psalm 23 the related Hebrew word *ro'iy* (*roh'-ee*), also translated "shepherd," vibrantly depicts the personal devotion of the herdsman: "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me **lie down** in green pastures, he **leads** me beside quiet waters, he **restores** my soul. He **guides** me in paths of righteousness for his*

*name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are **with me**; your rod and your staff, they **comfort me***" (Psalm 23:1-4). Intimate knowledge and interaction with the flock are encompassed in this passage. Similar "shepherd" uses appear in Zechariah 10:2: "[T]herefore they went their way as a flock, they were troubled, because there was no **shepherd**," and Isaiah 40:11, "He shall feed his flock like a **shepherd**."

As a result of the substitution of the word "pastor" for shepherd in certain select passages, then, a clergy class has unscripturally been perpetuated in the Church. Regrettably, the true shepherds whom God has called to "pastor" His Church in the intimate manner He has prescribed are most often prevented from doing so by clergy who have no biblical basis for the position they occupy.

To undergird a clergy/laity distinction in the New Testament, translators not only of the King James Version but of virtually all commonly read translations used the word "pastor" in Ephesians 4:11: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be **pastors** [shepherds] and teachers." Had the Greek word used here, *poimen* (poy'-men), meaning "shepherd," been translated as such, this passage would have kept continuity with the other New Testament passages that refer to the shepherding role of the elder, *presbuteros* (prez-boo-tair'-oss). The inaccurate translation creates a false distinction between the Greco-Roman ecclesiastical position of "pastor" and the Hebraic biblical function of "shepherding by elders."

1. Olga S. Opfell, *The King James Bible Translators*, Appendix II, p. 23.

Chapter 3

Undoing the Effects of Rule #3

Buoyed by the dualism of the Greek philosophers and the fourth century Roman government framework, the Church leaders replaced the priesthood of all believers with ecclesiastical dominance. The Empire that had conquered much of the world established a firmly fixed hierarchical system that put power in the hands of a very few. (See our *Restoring the Early Church* for further discussion of Greco/Roman intrusion.)

Because of the anti-Semitic stance taken by the Church in the second and third centuries, many of the Hebraic foundations readily built upon by the earliest believers were discarded. The functions listed in Ephesians 4:11 had been part of the *synagogue* prior to the advent of the Church. That the Holy Spirit had inspired the Church to keep these practices so that it might be unified and mature is evident in Paul's letter. Ponder the following verses in your heart to determine our Father's purposes for the *cooperative use* of each role:

*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).*

Paul had no need to define these functions since they were so well known among the first century Jewish followers of the Messiah. The *combination* of these anointed functions that had been established in the synagogue would enable God's people to serve Him, to mature in Him, and to attain the fullness of His Son.

- An *apostle* (Heb. *shaliach*/Gk. *apostolos*) was a person sent forth to an appointed place on a mission. This is not a position of dominance either through ecclesiastical position or anointing. An apostle is a person used by our Lord to complete a specific mission. The Twelve, then Paul, received special commissioning from Jesus. But note other believers referred to as apostles: Andronicus and Junias (Romans 16:7), Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 2:7).
- An *evangelist* (Heb. *magid*/Gk. *euaggelistes*) was a synagogue planter and repairer. In the Church this person not only shares the Gospel, but gathers together a faith community which he will leave in the responsible care of the elders. Timothy and Titus were both evangelists and church planters: “*But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry*” (2 Timothy 4:5), and, “*The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you*” (Titus 1:5).
- A *prophet* (Heb. *esha’elohim*/Gk. *prophetes*) was one to whom and through whom God spoke for the benefit of His people. Prophets generally functioned beyond the confines of the Hebrew synagogue while Paul expanded that function to include prophetic messages shared within worship gatherings.
- A *shepherd* (Heb. *zaken*/Gk. *poimen*) was a gray-haired man of leadership who imparted wisdom and counsel to a specific group of people.
- A *teacher* (Heb. *rab*/Gk. *didaskalos*) rightly divided the Word to bring clarity to others and to exhort them to action.

God wanted these functions to continue so that His purposes could be fulfilled. Notice that the association of shepherd and teacher is consistent with other biblical passages: “Now the overseer must be . . . able to teach”; “The elders who direct the affairs of the congregation well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17).

Mike was a counselor to church leaders for many years in southern New England. Many of the men who occupied the position of “pastor” were really *evangelists*, church planters of the synagogue/early Church variety. So many of these men experienced difficulties in their ministries because God’s call for them was to share the Gospel, plant the faith community, and move on to start another congregation. The care and training of each flock was to be left to the shepherds, the older men of wisdom in each established fellowship.

Because their seminaries had not understood the Hebraic basis for the distinct roles of evangelist and shepherd, these distressed men had been trained to fill the wrong role. The sad result was tragic burnout in men who were trying to fill the position of “pastor” because they felt that was what they were supposed to do. Their spiritual gifting and anointing, however, lay in other areas. Tens of thousands of today’s “pastors” are actually *administrators* rather than nurturing shepherds!

The *Hebraic understanding* of these roles has been lost to the Church for centuries. Remember, the disavowal of Hebraic practices and the severance of Hebraic roots occurred primarily after Greek philosophers converted to Christianity. The writings of such men as John Chrysostom, Justin Martyr, and Origen not only introduced Greek philosophical practices and thought into the Church, but their anti-Semitic vitriol also ripped away and buried the precious Hebraic relational fabric on which Jesus had founded the Gospel.

Think about this: Might the loss of our Hebraic heritage be a direct result of the arrogant *conceit* shown by the Church toward the Jews? Meditate on Romans 11, especially verses 1 and 25: “I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descen-

dant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. . . I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in."

Our Father has given the Jews numerous irrevocable promises that He will never reject them. Consider the word spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

This is what the Lord says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the Lord Almighty is his name: "Only if these decrees vanish from my sight," declares the Lord, "will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me." This is what the Lord says: "Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done," declares the Lord (Jeremiah 31:35-37).

History bears witness to the centuries of the Church's persecution of the Jews. (See *Restoring the Early Church* for more on this.) Only in the last 40 years have several Christian denominations repented for branding the Jews as "Christ-killers." It is difficult for Christians today to believe that God could relegate the Church to centuries of Greek and Roman domination because of its disdain toward the Jews. But consider this: How would the Jewish people respond if they fully realized that God had hardened the hearts of their people for centuries until the full number of Gentiles might enter the faith? Might they wonder, "Why have you Gentiles waited so long?"

For Jew and Gentile alike, our Father is vividly displaying His sovereignty and mercy: *"For God has bound **all** men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all"* (Romans 11:32). It is evident that God is in the process of restoring the Jewish people back to Israel. Since the fall of the USSR, 750,000 Russian Jews have returned to the land of their forefathers! (That's one-sixth of Israel's current popula-

tion. To put it in perspective, imagine if a flood of forty million immigrants poured into the US in less than a decade!) The Lord promised this restoration through the prophets:

See, I will bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labor; a great throng will return. They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son. "Hear the word of the Lord, O nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: 'He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd'" (Jeremiah 31:8-10).

At the same time, our Father is pouring out on the Gentiles an awakening of the Hebraic components that made the early Church intimate and powerful. An important part of this quickening will be that qualified older men will serve in their rightful place of shepherding in their faith communities.

Apperceive the Word, Don't Revise It!

That which God is restoring today has not been experienced by the vast majority of the Church since the early centuries. Relational intimacy and spiritual power seem almost alien to believers today but not to those who authored the Scriptures.

Since the role of elder in the New Testament follows the pattern of the shepherding elder in the Hebrew Bible, let's review the part played by wise seniors in the Jewish society of the Old Testament. We propose that the pastoring role of elders was God's plan for His Church just as it had been for the Jewish people.

In order to undo the influence of the Nicolaitan spirit we must apperceive the Scriptures as our Hebraic forefathers did. You might not be familiar with apperception. To *apperceive* is to return to the

original framework of understanding that God gave the scripture author as he wrote. Only by apperceiving can you fully grasp the background and intent of particular verses and passages.

Consider this example: *“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true”* (Acts 17:11). The Bereans were commended for studying the Scriptures by apperceiving Paul’s new teachings in light of Hebraic scriptural truths. So important were the Hebrew Scriptures as a basis for the gospel message that they were quoted apperceptively all throughout the gospels, the epistles, and the Revelation.

For instance, God commanded the people, *“Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain”* (Deuteronomy 25:4). Paul, apperceiving that command, teaches a new application:

For it is written in the Law of Moses: “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.” Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn’t he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? (1 Corinthians 9:9-11).

Paul looked back to the *intent* of the original writer and then brought forward a specific application of its truth. The apostle warns, *“Do not go beyond what is written.’ Then you will not take pride in one man over against another”* (1 Corinthians 4:6). That admonition is especially apt today, when so much of what is said or written is affected by “political correctness” or appeasement of unbiblical agendas.

Paul also cautions the Colossians, *“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ”* (Colossians 2:8). Today, the Greek and Roman practices that the Church has inherited must be addressed in light of biblical prece-

dents. If you do not apperceive and define your faith practices through the Scriptures, how can you be sure that you are not operating out of a framework of revisionism?

Revisionism restates historical truth and facts to manipulate them to fit current social or cultural standards. A major attempt at revision in the Church occurred late in the second century. Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyons in Gaul, claimed that the apostle Peter was the “rock” upon which his successors could claim church primacy as the Bishop of Rome. In so doing Irenaeus ascribed ecclesiastical power to Peter which the Bible did not support.

Revisionist writings and councils convinced the Church to adapt the autocratic system of the Roman government with which it became enmeshed. Revisionism within the church has had a profound effect down through the centuries, reflecting customs, practices, and organization far different from what had been intended by our Lord.

Revisionism is by no means a problem of the past. Many current history books have been revised to downplay the quest for spiritual freedom sought by America’s Founding Fathers. These texts instead reflect a lust for greater economic prosperity in the New World.

Another current example of revisionism comes from across the Atlantic. In order to appease the Arab countries that provide them oil, several European universities are teaching from revised history books which claim that the Jewish Holocaust never took place. (An ancient proverb says, “Lies written in ink can never replace facts written in blood.”) And to appease feminists, the Bible has recently been revised into a version that promotes a genderless God!

Followers of Jesus who want to be true to the Word of God must be willing to leave behind certain church practices and traditions that may seem “sacred” yet have no biblical foundation. Appropriate the nobility of the Bereans and investigate the Bible yourself to apply what God has said. Like the Bereans, you, too, may yearn to share in the practices of faith that “*do not go beyond what is written.*”

A simple illustration of apperception and revisionism was shared by Dr. John Garr of Restoration Foundation. A man sets about to build a house. He carefully measures out a pattern for a roof joist and cuts it, then uses that joist as the pattern for the second one. For each and every joist, he uses his original as the pattern. This describes apperception—going back to the pattern of the Word for every application and religious practice.

The revisionist carefully measures out and cuts the first roof joist, then makes a second one from that. But instead of using the original joist as his pattern, he uses the second joist as a pattern for the third, the third joist to make the fourth, and so on. By the time he finishes cutting his last joist and lays it against the original one, he discovers that the measurements are way off. What started as minor deviations added up to major differences. So too with revisionism. As God's Word was subtly altered to accommodate ever-changing cultural standards, the original pattern of God's intent was lost.

Consider this: Suppose that in conjunction with restoring the Jewish people to Israel, our Father *is* restoring to the Church the shepherding by elders which blessed our Hebraic forefathers. Shouldn't followers of Christ clearly grasp how shepherding people was understood in the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament? Ask yourself:

- How was the function of elder understood by Paul and the other Jewish believers of the first century Church?
- Was it really God's intent that pastoring by elders evolve into the clergy hierarchy so prevalent in the western Church today?
- Did God turn the Church over to pagan practices adapted from the Greeks and Romans because of its arrogance toward the Jews?
- Is the current system of clergy dominance a direct result of the *Nicolaitan spirit* warned about in the Book of Revelation?

SECTION 2

The Biblical Basis for Leadership by Older Men

Chapter 4

Shepherding by Elders

Proven leadership was key for the men of Israel who wished to be elders.

The Hebrew word for elder, *zaken* (zah'-ken), connoted men who had proven themselves worth following. Over the course of their lives these men exhibited servant-like character qualities that took into consideration the welfare of others within their family, clan, and tribe. Because the nation of Israel saw itself as a singular “extended family,” each body of elders possessed an inherent interest in the directions and decisions that were made: Their own kin would be affected.

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. In Middle Eastern culture, the oldest members of a family were respected and given deference. Thus, the elders—the wisest and most respected men of the families—were venerated and honored.

Biblically, wisdom is generally considered to be embodied in older people: “*Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?*” . . . “*I thought, ‘Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom!’*” (Job 12:12; 32:7). Not all older people are wise, however. Some have wasted their lives as fools by remaining hardened in their ways or mocking those who truly are astute.¹ But in general, men are expected to grow in wisdom as they advance in years. And those who evidenced wisdom were sought by God’s people as true leaders.

Dr. Ron Moseley offers this cogent insight: “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 These men were esteemed for their maturity, wisdom, and experience. No problem was too trivial to be disregarded by these spiritual leaders. They were dependent on the Hebrew Scriptures to determine God’s will for those in their care. The elders were also responsible, along with the priests, to ensure that the people were instructed in the Law of God. Faithful obedience to God by applying His Word was paramount, and these older men served to make sure the people did just that.

God Recognizes the Shepherding Role of Elders

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. Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God” (Exodus 3:16,18).*

The elders were to accompany Moses as a unified leadership before the king of Egypt to request permission to worship God in the desert. But these men were far more than silent witnesses. In order to disseminate God’s commands to His people, Moses first addressed the elders because of their recognized influence. He knew that their leadership would carry weight with the rest of the people: “Then Moses

*summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, 'Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb'. . . So Moses went back and **summoned the elders** of the people and **set before them** all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak" (Exodus 12:21; 19:7).*

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, empowerment by the Holy Spirit was crucial:

*The Lord said to Moses: "Bring me **seventy of Israel's elders** who are **known** to you as **leaders and officials** among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. . . So Moses went out and told the people what the Lord had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the Tent. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took of the Spirit that was on him and **put the Spirit on the seventy elders** (Numbers 11:16,24,25a).*

The elders operated as a collective body. Their wisdom, rule, counsel, and advice were crucial to the religious and social welfare of Jewish society. The *plurality* of elders within each community helped to forestall a "power play" by any one individual who might view himself higher than he should.

Let's consider for a moment the impact this heritage of oversight had on the early Church. The Church was called to be a living organism that drew its power from the Holy Spirit. Therefore the leaders too were Spirit-appointed: "*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the **Holy Spirit** has made you **overseers**. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood*" (Acts 20:28).

Elders were not elected by popular whim or personal prestige. Because of their age, the fruit and outcome of their lives were readily apparent. Also, others were already following their leadership. In

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

The community of believers needed to be trained and encouraged to minister to one another through their gifting. As they reached out to non-believers, they needed to see the example of these godly, wiser believers.

What a blessing to see that the Holy Spirit chooses those whom He knows are best suited to serve! And key to that suitability is *humility*. We know from Scripture that those who humble themselves before the Lord will be the ones lifted up by Him (James 4:10). The character trait of humility does not seek elevation. On the contrary, those who are humble of spirit seldom see the profound impact they are having on others.

Jesus often stressed the importance of servanthood among His disciples. He warned that those who were tempted toward personal recognition would miss the inner blessing of greatness in God's sight in their scramble for public adulation (see Matthew 23:11,12). Thus Jesus prohibited the use of any titles of honor—"Rabbi," "Father," "Teacher"—that would draw attention away from the Father Who alone is worthy of honor (see Matthew 23:8-10).

Historical Note: The body of elders that so often confronted Jesus in the New Testament were generally the wealthy council members of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, the scribes (experts in the Law of Moses), and the priests who offered sacrifices. Local communities at the time of Jesus, however, looked to their own autonomous group of elders for representation and guidance. For example, recall the "elders of the Jews" who came to Jesus on behalf of the centurion's sick slave (see Luke 7:3-5). The local elders were more concerned about the daily needs of their townspeople than about events that might be happening in Jerusalem.

Elder: A Position of Honor in the Family and Faith Community

A Jewish person 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 the appropriate elders. 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 they resided could be found at the city gate to address issues and problems. We see this 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 operated as extended spiritual family. The influence of elders within the synagogue structure 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 mentioned in the Sanhedrin section of the Mishnah.”³ Again, the elders functioned as a plurality to better ensure impartiality and justice.

As undershepherds of Christ, new covenant elders were under His authority. As brothers in the faith, they were also mutually accountable to one another to guard and instruct the flock. Just as a husband was the head of his household (a family), so, too, the elders led, protected, and trained up the family of believers. Note the “family” words employed over 250 times in the New Testament: *brothers* and *sisters*. And what functions and purposes do such intimate family members do for one another? They build each other up by obeying the fifty-four “one-anothering” commands found in the New Testament!

Just as each synagogue was autonomous, so too was each New Testament faith community—that is, each extended spiritual family. These faith communities, although self-governing and independent, recognized their “family” sense of belonging to each other as did the

Jews worldwide. That is why they could be called on to contribute donations for the needier congregations, to share apostolic letters, and to pray for and entertain in their homes believers from other congregations.

A significant example of personal sacrifice for the good of “family” in the larger spiritual context is seen in Acts 11:29,30: *“The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.”* The believers knew that they could trust the elders of Judea to disburse their offering where it would most benefit their needy family in Jesus.

The practice of gathering funds for the needy had long been practiced in the synagogue. Jewish men known as “almoners” collected money (alms) and distributed it to the poor, a practice hearkening back to the exile period. The same charity was encouraged by James regarding the care of widows and orphans (see James 1:27), as well as by the apostles and their concern for the care of widows (see Acts 6:1-4). Paul extended this concept of “family” responsibility by commanding Timothy to make sure that widows who were really in need were helped by the Ephesian faith community (see 1 Timothy 5:3-10).

This sense of connectedness cries out for restoration. Families today, even in the Church, are fragmented, with little sense of relational responsibility. Several years after we were married, Mike’s dad phoned to ask how much money we had in the bank. One of Mike’s relatives was out of work and his wife was having a baby. Dad recognized the need and felt responsible for the family to join together to meet it. Because Dad held a place of honor in the family, he could exercise the privilege and responsibility to intervene when necessary.

Paul exhibited the same caring concern when he encouraged the Corinthians to give generously: *“Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: ‘He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little’”* (2 Corinthians 8:13-15).

Succession: An Inherent Process for the Family and Faith Community

The Bible proclaims that our spiritual father Abraham's trust in God was credited to him as righteousness. Trust in the shed blood of Jesus does the same for believers today. Yet Abraham was chosen by God because He could trust him with an important responsibility: *"For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him"* (Genesis 18:19). God knew that Abraham would instruct in His ways the children who would succeed him.

Preparing others to be successors is a critical factor for those who would lead God's people. The Psalmist reinforced this:

We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands" (Psalm 78:4-7).

Why should it matter if someone is prepared to take up a mantle of counsel and leadership? One fact affects all families: Everyone dies at some point. As our society has moved off the farm, *succession*, or who will serve in place of a certain individual, has been forgotten. Except for those in some family-owned businesses, few of us think about succession. Yet God wants His people to be diligent about the spiritual inheritance we leave to succeeding generations. He desires that each generation *"bring up [their children] in the training and instruction of the Lord."* Regrettably, the 50% divorce rate in the church today has proved that we are not succeeding in passing along a vibrant trust in Jesus.

Succession was a vital feature in Hebraic society. The oldest son received a double portion of the family inheritance, not to spend on himself, but to maintain the family property and carry on the family estate. As the oldest, he represented the authority of his father in the family. That is why it was extraordinary for Jacob to favor the younger Ephraim over Manasseh in his blessing, and for Jacob to be favored in God's sight over the older Esau. Everyone could recognize the privilege and the responsibility of the successor.

Our spiritual heritage indicates that each family and faith community faces two crucial questions: "Who will *succeed* the current leaders? How well are potential successors being *trained to lead*?" Moses understood the importance of succession. For many years he trained Joshua to succeed him. The succession was complete when Moses passed on the mantle of leadership to the younger man in front of the whole nation: "*Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their forefathers to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance'*" (Deuteronomy 31:7).

Yet it wasn't long after the people entered the Promised Land that something failed to get passed along: "*After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel*" (Judges 2:10). Even great men may fail to properly train the next generation. Samuel was confronted by the elders of Israel because they did not want his sons to succeed him: "*So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, 'You are old, and your sons **do not walk in your ways**; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have'*" (1 Samuel 8:4,5). The consequences of his failure to train up successors was profound.

Unlike a tangible inheritance passed along regardless of the heir's qualifications, succession in leadership demands specific requirements of judgment, maturity, and wisdom. Succession in a family or faith community places great emphasis on understanding the *process*-

es needed if future leaders are to be skillfully prepared. Those who succeed must bear at least the same concern for the welfare of the family or faith community as those who are passing on the “mantle.” If not, the family or congregation will suffer the consequences.

An illustration of this concept: As the time drew near for Mike to return to the US from his first of three deployments to Vietnam, the enlisted men in his detachment came to him with a serious concern. Mike’s soon-to-arrive replacement, Gerry, had a reputation as a man who would claw his way to the top no matter what. The men shared their fear that Gerry would care more about his own advancement than for their welfare. Mike knew that what they were saying was true.

Gerry met the ship in Hong Kong. On their last night in port, Mike took him to a viewing deck on top of a hotel that overlooked the harbor. Grabbing Gerry by his shirt collar, he hung him out over the edge. As the startled man gaped at the street some thirteen stories below, Mike rebuked him. “My men are afraid that you’re going to push to advance your career even if it costs them their lives. I want your promise right now that you’ll care for them as I have. And if you don’t promise, I’ll drop you.” In tears he gave Mike his word.

Months later the entire detachment returned to the States. The enlisted men couldn’t rave enough about what a fine officer Gerry had been. Gerry came to Mike to thank him for the tough love he’d shown him. That rebuke had altered his entire outlook and persuaded him that an officer should put his men first. (But he never did ask Mike if he really would have dropped him!)

Time and again Paul admonished the congregations of believers to aim for spiritual maturity. Mature people display an awareness and concern for the well-being of others. Colossians 1:9-12 depicts the results: fruit born in every good work; growth in the knowledge of God; strength from Him for great endurance and patience; joyful thanksgiving. As these inner qualities deepened in the lives of early followers of Jesus, the evidence was obvious to those around them. The men who were mature in these qualities would then be encour-

aged to lead other spiritual families so that the Kingdom could spread.

A leader who has a shepherd's heart, which is really akin to our Father's heart, can readily discern the training and preparation a young man needs to succeed him. Family successors came from *within* the ranks, not from outside. Eldership was home-grown through the many varieties of relationships that influence a person's development. An elder's personal trust and exercise of scriptural obedience required a lifetime of individual decisions. Unfortunately for our faith communities today, however, a spiritual intermediary from the outside, such as a "clergy" person, *lessens the NEED* for personal intimacy or relational responsibility within the Body. Intimate Body life led by qualified mature men is absolutely vital for the accountability and encouragement so needed to develop future leadership.

1. For further discussion of the various types of fools presented in the Old Testament, see *Our Father Abraham* by Marvin Wilson.
2. "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.

Chapter 5

Shepherds: Our Father's Concern for His People

Scripture abounds with references to an occupation about which most of us today have very little personal knowledge: tending sheep.

Tending sheep was not an esteemed position. In fact, it usually fell to the youngest child in the family who was capable of protecting the animals. Unless you have personally been involved in the care and nurture of these woolly creatures, you cannot fully understand the implications of people as sheep or of shepherds as their leaders.

Having spent ten years raising them at a retreat center, the writers know firsthand that sheep require tremendous care. We had no prior farming experience, but Mike had been asked to counsel pastors who were under strain in their ministries. Since the Bible refers so often to the relationship between shepherds and sheep, what better way to understand them than through firsthand experience!

When you are around sheep for any length of time, you become identified with them by their odor and by their timetable of needs. Sheep have a flock identification gland in their front hooves. When they rub against each other, this gland gives the flock members a common odor. Their strong olfactory system compels them to be close to one another—they find security in their mutual identifying odor. This is why sheep flock together.

So many potential dangers and disadvantages confront sheep. They are subject to internal parasites if they are not led to different pastures regularly. They are practically defenseless, and with their short legs and hefty bodies, are much slower than most predators. When confronted by danger, they will often stand paralyzed in a huddle, allowing the enemy to pick them off at will. The ewes frequently need manual assistance in giving birth. Can you see how important the shepherd is to the well-being of the flock? Goats, which we also raised, are independent, intelligent, and quite capable of surviving without constant care, but *sheep would die without a shepherd.*

Human beings require that same loving concern by mature men who represent the Father's heart. Without diligent care, people are bent on their own destruction. Our Father intimately understands the frailty of His creation. Both testaments depict His appraisal of mankind: *"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time"* (Genesis 6:5); and, *"[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). Yet God's love is steadfast.

Similarities between the needs of humans and of sheep abound in Scripture. The classic Twenty-third Psalm indicates all that God's people need to prosper in spirit: a faithful, loving shepherd who cares for us; a place of rest where we can feel accepted; restoration and refreshment in his presence; direction and protection; confidence in trials; tender mercy and care; and hope for a wonderful future.

That mankind as well as sheep need the personal care of a shepherd comes as no surprise. Our Father knows that without someone to point the way we will either drive ourselves in frantic pursuit of success or fall back into lethargy and inactivity. Both result in destruction. In order to bear much spiritual fruit we need the role modeling and guidance of men more mature in their pilgrimage with Him. That maturity is hallmarked by diligent and sacrificial care: *"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).

Moses spent forty years of his prime tending his father-in-law's sheep, and another forty years leading a stubborn band of wanderers through the desert. This preparation opened his heart to the desperate need of his people for an equally attentive leader who could be trained up to replace him: *"May the Lord, the God of the spirits of all mankind, **appoint a man** over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will **lead them out and bring them in**, so the Lord's people will not be like **sheep without a shepherd**"* (Numbers 27:16,17).

The shepherd must lead the way with courage and conviction, identifying and confirming the path of safety and righteousness. Paul stresses *wholehearted* participation: *"If it is encouraging, let him encour-*

age; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (Romans 12:8).

What can we learn about godly leadership from the most famous shepherd in the Hebrew Scriptures? David spent most of his youth learning that shepherding involves intense self-sacrifice, intrusion, and personal discomfort. Time and again he got into situations that endangered his own well-being in order to protect his father's sheep. Such was God's training ground to develop Israel's mightiest warrior. Note David's honest, forthright response to King Saul about his ability to fight Goliath:

*Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I **went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep** from its mouth. When it turned on me, I **seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it**. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. **The Lord** who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear **will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine”** (1 Samuel 17:34-37).*

When you are accustomed to disregarding your personal safety for a cause higher than yourself, “self” does not enter into the picture. This is a vital point to remember for elders who would shepherd the Father's flock.

Our Father evaluates the inner motives of a man: “*But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but **the Lord looks at the heart**’”* (1 Samuel 16:7). Human achievement will never be our Father's criterion for selecting His shepherds. Men who trust in the strength of their own hands—their ability to succeed at all cost—will fail to reflect Him to His flock.

Intimate Contact and Personal Understanding

Sheep are not driven along as are cattle or horses. They need to be led. Our flock knew that when they saw us approach, something interesting was about to happen in their midst: some grain to be dispersed, a move to another pasture, a gathering of the flock to the barn. So they would follow, waiting to see what their shepherd had in store for them. 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). Shepherd elders lead their people in righteousness with knowledge and understanding of what is *good*: to instruction that will prosper their souls and encourage them to bear fruit; to comforting pens for nurture and guidance; and to admonition and correction for attitudes or behaviors that are harmful to both the individual and the rest of the watching flock. A shepherd whose heart is truly after the Father’s own heart, as was David’s, will pour himself out on behalf of those in his care. He will constantly ask his Father for righteous understanding of each situation.

Since each believer is at a different point along his or her pilgrimage, shepherds need intimate knowledge of each one: *“Be sure you know the **condition** of your flocks, give **careful attention** to your herds”* (Proverbs 27:23). One thing you learn from tending a flock: You cannot 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 congregates together is more easily managed. Once the sheep are scattered due to carelessness or laziness on the shepherd’s part, it’s much harder to lead them and they are 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 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 needs attentive shepherding as well as 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 high 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 *by name*.

Most visitors to our sheep flock were mystified that we were readily able to identify each ewe, 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.

How sad it is that so many congregations have only one individual to look to for leadership. This is generally the "pastor," the hired position found neither by scriptural precedent nor by command. Such a singular elevation of one person involves incredible stress and responsibility. Little wonder that an article in *Leadership* magazine revealed, "Ministers had the third highest divorce rate, exceeded only by that of medical doctors and policemen."¹

One leader of a major denomination shared with Mike that the adultery rate among their clergy was approximately 50%. Another denomination has spent in excess of \$400 million in out-of-court settlements due to clergy sexual misconduct. The overwhelming burden hefted onto these individuals is crushing their spirits, their marriages, their very integrity.

The number of believers in a home fellowship cannot get so large that the necessary intimacy and attention that are defined in the Word are impossible. Satan himself delights in helping a faith community grow larger than the shepherds can personally render account for to God. Regrettably, some congregations led by elders tend toward rule by *oligarchy*, or absolute rule by a few. This impersonal system offers control with minimum personal sacrifice. Through this type of closed leadership a small group of men can direct the affairs of a faith community despite inadequate personal knowledge of each individual in the flock. Yet God is looking for more than well-run church corporations. He is judging the so-called “shepherds” whose hearts are not folded with their sheep.

Leadership Through Example

Anyone can be taught information that will add to his knowledge. But a man is *changed* by what he observes by interaction with role models and through personal confrontation.

Hebraic teaching can be summed up by this: “*Do as I do.*” The converted Greek philosophers introduced into the Church the concept of education based on disseminating content. The character and experience of the teacher were unimportant, an intimate teacher-student relationship unnecessary. What a fallacy to believe that a biblically knowledgeable society would become morally upright! You have only to look at the Germans of the first half of this century, a culture full of Bible knowledge. But that knowledge did not stop them from the Holocaust atrocities, nor did it motivate many to halt Nazi inhumanity.

How important the criterion of intimate care was in determining leadership in the early Church! The way a man lived reflected his true measure. The writer to the Hebrews reaffirmed this understanding: *“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the **outcome** of their **way of life** and **imitate their faith**. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever”* (Hebrews 13:7,8). Leaders lead by example. What they want to produce 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 Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, the same qualities of caring and attentive leadership should be expected in any era or culture.

The relevance of leaders 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). And 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. So too are biblical elders compelled by the Spirit to confront those in the fold who are straying from the Lord. Confrontation can run a gamut from mild chiding to a strong rebuke. Appropriate confrontation by an older man who has intimate knowledge of his disciple 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, JNT)² Some might call confrontation “tough love”; others recognize it as fatherly concern that clearly exposes evil and points the way to righteousness.

For a number of years at the retreat center we administrated, a singles group from another state came two or three times annually.

Although the average age of the group was late 20s, they were led by two young men, ages 21 and 20. Their loving devotion for God and for their brothers and sisters was evident in both these guys. Also in the group was Bill, a man in his mid 30s. who was mainly interested in scoping out the women for dates.

During one of the summer retreats Mike privately asked Bill to walk with him in the pasture, downhill from the lodge. Addressing him in a *very fatherly manner*, Mike said, “Bill, what you’re doing in this group is *wrong*. As one of the older men, you’re setting a bad example for the younger guys. Your actions are hindering what those two young leaders are trying to accomplish. I don’t want to see you back here again unless you’re leading this group—and leading them in the path of Jesus!”

Several months later the group returned, with Bill leading them. Several of the singles took Mike aside and told him how, after the last retreat, Bill had asked if he could lead. He had been changed, no longer obsessed with women. Later, when Bill suggested another retreat at our center, some spoke up. “Bill, why would you want to go back there? We heard how tough Mike was on you!”

The singles told Mike Bill’s response: “No one has ever loved me like Mike did. It took love to tell me what I needed to hear.” 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). (See our book *Growing Relationships Through Confrontation* for more on biblical confrontation.)

The Cooperative Leadership of the Jewish Elders

Let’s look at the development of the pattern of cooperative leadership in Jewish history. From Moses onward we see a certain trend: Those who were anointed by God for leadership *sought out the elders* for guidance and affirmation.

For example, Moses recognized that the Israelites needed more

enforcement to follow God than he himself could muster. So he called together the elders whose leadership would reinforce his authority: "*Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people: 'Keep all these commands that I give you today'*" (Deuteronomy 27:1).

Following the defeat of the Israelites at the city of Ai, "*Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads*" (Joshua 7:6). The elders understood the communal responsibility they carried before the Lord in regard to the entire nation. Joshua, who had been mentored by Moses, was their role model for humility and dependence on God. Later, near the end of his life, Joshua would entrust to the elders their primary assignment: to lead the people in obedience to love the Lord their God (see Joshua 23:6-11).

David, too, was mindful of God's design for the powerful influence of those who were wise and experienced. Although chosen earlier by God to be king and anointed by the prophet Samuel, it was not until he was anointed by the *elders* that David began to reign: "*When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a compact with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel*" (2 Samuel 5:3). David understood, as did Moses, that the rule of an entire nation was beyond the capability of any one man. By making an alliance of loyalty with them, he could be assured that his authority would be recognized in every city and town represented by those elders who were present.

David's successful alliance with the elders of the people continued through his son Solomon. God's favor rested on the young man, for his heart's desire was to represent his nation justly: "*When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice*" (1 Kings 3:28).

Unfortunately for Israel, however, Solomon's wisdom and willingness to receive counsel from those who also were wise did not pass on to his son: "*Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served*

his father Solomon during his lifetime. 'How would you advise me to answer these people?' he asked. . . But Rehoboam **rejected the advice** the elders gave him and **consulted the young men** who had grown up with him and were serving him" (1 Kings 12:6,8). From that point on, the kingdom would be divided and ultimately fall.

God had set into place in every Israelite community accessible elders who could be accountable to one another through plurality. No single elder could dictate to others the course of direction for either an individual or for the collective community. Therefore the sheep could find a measure of security in the care of their local shepherds even if the ruler of the nation proved unreliable.

This practice of relational accountability is especially needed today. One of the safeguards that comes from a plurality of elders who serve a congregation is the variety of spiritual gifting that will be present in their midst. It is the *combination* of all the gifts in synchrony that completely equips the saints for service. Believers need the interplay of individual gifting so that no one individual burns out or races ahead of the rest because of pride or impatience. A far wider breadth of perspective on a given situation comes forth when the collective input of much varying experience, wisdom, and gifting is meshed. No one individual is called to meet all the needs of a faith community. Elders must work as a team.

The "*council of the elders*" referred to in Psalm 107:32 sensed heavily the responsibility to protect those under their care from insidious influences that could destroy them all. Therefore they stood steadfast on their knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures and their determination to trust God even in unpopular decisions. Study, for example, what appears to be a harsh dictum from God regarding a rebellious adult son:

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, "This son

*of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a **profligate** and a **drunkard**." Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must **purge the evil** from among you. **All Israel will hear of it and be afraid** (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).*

God's reputation was at stake among the nations. Fear of Him had to far surpass any reluctance of His people to obey His commands. The council of elders shouldered that responsibility, even to the extent of determining who needed to be excluded for the good of the nation.

Any good shepherd must know which sheep to eliminate from the flock. When we first started our sheep flock, we were given sixteen ewes. Two of the ewes would prowl the fence line to look for weaknesses. They would push against it until the fence fell down. Then all the sheep would exit the pasture with these two to eat the grass on the other side. We tried all sorts of methods to stop this behavior but none worked. Finally a wise farmer counseled us to *cull* these two from the flock. They were, in effect, training the others to be rebellious. They were fostering habits that were detrimental to the safety of the rest.

As we gained wisdom through the helpful advice of other knowledgeable shepherds, we realized how important culling was for the health and overall purposes of the flock. In order for the flock to pay for itself we needed each ewe to produce two lambs a year. If, after several tries, we didn't get twins, we'd sell the ewe.

We also looked for lambs who weren't overly afraid of people since we had so many guests who enjoyed visiting the flock. Unlike goats, sheep are not normally "people friendly." We kept the lambs that showed a predisposition toward people, and the others we sold. Some people may think our methods were severe or unkind. But consider John the Baptist's meaning when he tells the people, "**Produce fruit in keeping with repentance**" (Matthew 3:8).

Jesus looked for fruit as a parameter to identify who really belonged to Him. False prophets would bear bad fruit, and like a bad

tree, be cut down and thrown into the fire (see Matthew 7:15-20). He commanded His disciples to *“go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name”* (John 15:16). Ask yourself, was the discussion between Jesus and the rich ruler (see Luke 18:18-23) a culling process by which the man himself chose to be culled? Look through the New Testament and see *who* and *how* God culls. Not everyone who cries *“Lord, Lord,”* will be welcomed by Him. God’s criterion? *“He who does the will of my Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 7:21).

1. Richards, Larry and Gene Getz. *“A Biblical Style of Leadership?”*, *Leadership* (Fall, 1981), p. 119.
2. *Jewish New Testament* by Dr. David H. Stern, p. 277.

Chapter 6

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 the Father's love as he serves fellow followers of Jesus.

The central issue of the Ten Commandments is God's love toward mankind and man's responsibility to love God and keep His commandments: *“I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments”* (Exodus 20:5,6).

The Hebrew word for love in the above passage is *ahav* (ah-hahv'), a passionate desire to cherish and to be in the beloved's presence. This kind of love has tremendous emotional connotation, a devotion which produces the fruit of obedience. The hallmark of a shepherd our Father chooses is his love for Him and for His flock.

The same emphasis on *ahav* is found in Deuteronomy 6:5-7: *“Love [ahav] the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”* Again the connection is made with loving God and keeping His commandments, and passing them on to succeeding generations.

The kind of love our Father is calling for can be obtained only through personal repentance and supplication. The issue of love is reinforced in the New Testament by *agape* (ah-gah'pay), the Greek equivalent of *ahav*. In 1 Corinthians 13 the whole issue of *agape* love is so important that Paul could state that *without it, “I am nothing.”*

Gifted, faith, wisdom—without love, these are worthless: “*If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing*” (v. 2). Paul emphasized for the Galatians, besieged by agitators teaching them perversion of the Torah, that, “*In Christ Jesus the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through [agape] love*” (Galatians 5:6).

The issue of *ahav* and *agape* love is the critical character element for the shepherds our Father is choosing. This love is first nurtured in a man’s home. In Ephesians 5:33 Paul stipulates, “*However, each one of you also must [agape] love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*” By growing in love toward his wife through God’s grace, a man is then more prepared to fulfill the Lord’s words, “*But I tell you who hear me: [agape] Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you*” (Luke 6:27,28).

Again, the type of love that really matters comes only through repentance and supplication for our Father’s empowerment. *Agape* love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22), while humility of heart causes this love to grow. Armed with humble love, a man can truly lay down his life for others—a genuine mark of leadership. Humility mirrors a sacrificial heart that sets others before self.

Our Lord looks for a *correct heart* in his leaders, the heart of the Father. The Pharisees perverted the Torah by demanding blind obedience to man-made traditions. They evaluated everyone by *correct behavior*. A man who develops a correct heart toward God and his fellow-man will have a heart of *ahav* and *agape*. On the issue of *love* are the Law (Torah) and the Prophets based: “*Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments*” (Matthew 22:37-40).

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 displays his spiritual fatherhood as he emphasizes, "*Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?*" (2 Corinthians 11:28,29). Fatherhood shoulders concern even when the loved ones are out of reach and all the shepherd can do is pray for them.

Our heavenly Father reveals Himself as He describes 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 is 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 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.

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 hard-

ness 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 that stray sheep up the hill and back to the warmth and protection of the barn.

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

- persevering enough to keep on searching.
- loving enough to sacrifice comfort and energy to rescue his sheep.
- merciful enough to bind up their wounds and nurture them to recovery.
- discerning enough to know which ones to cull for the good of the rest.
- just enough to impartially care for them all.

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

Indispensable Suffering

People who have gained wisdom over many years of life experience are not surprised by suffering. Pain comes from the refining fires that help to conform us to the image of Christ. The apostle John recognized the truth of this when he identified himself as *"your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus"* (Revelation 1:9).

Those who have tasted God's compassion over the course of many trials know the limitless extent of His mercy. Such men (and women) are neither speechless nor helpless when confronting tragedy in people's lives. They understand that God alone is the Comforter.

They are just His vessels to pour out comfort to the grieving. Peter, whom the Lord forewarned that Satan desired to sift, realized the developmental value of suffering:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name (1 Peter 4:12-16).

While many younger people have faced severe trials and overcome them with victory, it is over the stretch of many years that they learn the *pattern* of our Father's faithfulness. As a youth you are tempted to feel that your own fortitude has carried you through some tough times. Unfortunately for those around you, you might expect that they, too, should just pull up their bootstraps and get on with life. After all, that is what you did! However, people who have received and extended God's mercy over a long period of time can see past the mystery of a tragedy. They can offer hope and comfort to the weary, even while identifying any actions that need to be taken. This is the picture we get of our Lord: "*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*" (1 Samuel 40:11).

What a picture of compassionate intimacy! The Shepherd can recognize the special need of those who just 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 suffered and understood our Father's purpose in it can have such a heart.

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. Just as a father trains his children to be mature and responsible citizens, the elders 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 their flock training, fatherly elders encourage 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—just long enough for trust in God's faithfulness to strengthen that needy individual. 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 communities. They are gently leading those who have “younger” believers in their care so that *both* discipler and disciple will grow in spiritual maturity.

God looks at the trusting heart of an elder 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 God.

A Father's Larger View

As a shepherd to 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 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. *“In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the Lord said to you, ‘You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler’”* (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 larger purpose God has for their faith communities. Training up the flock in one-anothering is vital for growth in maturity, for reaching the lost for the Kingdom, and for developing new gatherings. This is one reason why the epistles address *all* the faith community family, not just the leadership. Busyness can create a short-sightedness that robs both the elders and the flock of the opportunities God has prepared in advance to further His Kingdom. *Availability* is a key need for all followers of Jesus. Your neighbors and co-workers need to see Him “with skin on” to know that He indeed lives!

When a faith community that is intent on Jesus reigning in their lives comes together, it is 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 Body of Christ is far wider than a single congregation. The multiplicity of small faith communities in biblical times were called “the church at Ephesus” or “the church at Jerusalem.” In the same way, each flock must begin to see itself in unity with other flocks so that Jesus’ will might be fulfilled: one flock and one Shepherd.

David understood the importance of unity in his big, sweeping kingdom. 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.

The leadership of our faith communities must have a larger view of their flocks. They must see their congregations as part of the Father's family at large. Relational connectedness by the shepherds is an important feature for faith communities today if we are to obey our King's commands and take the land for Him.

Picture each time you meet a new person as if your index finger was extending to touch his index finger. If your relationships remain surface, each meeting will continue to be like one finger tip touching another. But as relationships deepen among believers in a faith community, the fingers begin to slide down alongside each other until they are meshed together. Continued one-anothering strengthens those relationships to form a sturdy bond of relational responsibility for each other.

As a counselor to church leaders, Mike would ask the elders of a congregation, "If you weren't in positions of leadership in this Body, would you be friends with each other?" All too often the answer was a resounding "No!" These leaders had never been connected *relationally*, only positionally. They had assumed positions of control and direction in their faith communities but had failed to exemplify the relational leadership that true shepherding calls for.

A certain group of clergy met at our retreat center each month for years. During that time several were driven from their congregations because of their own failures. Mike knew that others in the group could have shared the wise counsel and personal support that might have forestalled the dismissals. At one of the meetings Mike asked those present, "If you were shepherds in the Old Testament and one of you were ill, what would you do?" They responded that they would

have helped him care for his flock until he returned to full health.

Then Mike rebuked them: "We've lost five men from this group in the past few years because their churches have removed them for cause. Some of you, if you'd had the heart to, could have come alongside to keep them from destroying their own ministries. How many of you here feel better about yourself when you hear that some other shepherd has failed in his ministry?" Every man, some with tears in their eyes, raised their hand to acknowledge their competitive attitude, their jealousy of those who had been successful, and their lack of relational love for those who needed help.

Jesus rebuked his apostles for their sectarian perspective: "*Teacher,*" said John, *'we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.'* *'Do not stop him,'* Jesus said. *'No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us'*" (Mark 9:38-40).

The apostle John warned his friend Gaius about men who use their position for their own gain: "*I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church*" (3 John 9,10).

The nature of the shepherd our Father is recruiting and using sees himself as "his brother's keeper." A caring shepherd who sacrifices for his flock can easily relate to other shepherds. Together these leaders can more clearly discern the larger interests of the Father and can cooperate with Him with yielded hearts.

Chapter 7

Authority: God's Training Device for Faith

The word "authority" can conjure up all sorts of images, either positive or negative depending on your framework. Authority *is not* authoritarianism. Authoritarianism uses power and position to control and conform people to meet someone's agenda. It serves the interests of the few who dominate the many. In the Church this system can even use the Scriptures as a series of regulations to control the flock. Authoritarianism will never produce responsible spiritual growth.

Authority, on the other hand, is based on love, not power. Authority is given by God for the orderly passing along of a loving obedience to Him to succeeding generations. Authority confronts the selfish and self-centered focus of human nature and, through instruction and role-modeling, helps a person live for purposes beyond his own personal goals.

From a biblical standpoint authority entails the right to praise or to punish, to include or to exclude. Peter presents particular purposes for authority: "*Submit yourselves for **the Lord's sake** to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to **punish** those who do wrong and to **commend** those who do right*" (1 Peter 2:13,14). Paul puts forth the responsibility to protect the Body: "*When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, **hand this man over to Satan**, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord*" (1 Corinthians 5:4,5).

The operation of authority embodies a *jurisdictional limit*, or boundary. Within his jurisdiction the person in authority has certain supervisory responsibilities and a defined framework in which to function. For instance, the authority of a parent is limited to his or her household. A policeman in Colorado cannot arrest someone in

New Mexico. The President of the United States has no authority in France. This seems obvious, doesn't it? Yet in the church, the biblical lines of jurisdiction and authority have become blurred.

In the early Church, elders pastored the *men*, who then "pastored" their own families. The Bible states that a man has jurisdiction over his family: "*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior*" (Ephesians 5:22,23). Again, "*Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord*" (Colossians 3:18).

The incursion by clergy into a husband's jurisdiction has left many men feeling undermined as they have tried to carry out the biblical responsibilities for their families. The pastor, youth group leader, or Sunday School teacher displaces the father's spiritual influence in his family. *Fathers* are commanded to "*bring [their children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord*" (see Ephesians 6:4). If the church jumps in too readily to fill the need, why should a father bother? How much more biblical if an older man came alongside these men to train them to train their families!

Why are men so conspicuous in their absence from faith community participation? Not only do many men feel inferior when they compare themselves to their pastor or youth group leader, they also feel uncomfortable in settings in which people "spill their guts" in front of each other. While women often are able to share openly in any kind of gathering, men often are embarrassed to do so, especially in mixed company. To avoid discomfort the men just stay away from any church involvement at all.

Does this mean that wives and children whose husbands and fathers shun congregation participation have no "court of appeal" if they are suffering abuse? Not at all. Shepherding elders are responsible to protect and counsel those in distress. But clergy who lord their position over other men are treading on the jurisdiction of these individuals.

Biblical jurisdiction is an extremely important issue for God's shepherds to consider. The unchecked pattern of clergy elevation has

resulted in spiritual irresponsibility among husbands and fathers. Mike asked a number of church leaders if they used programs designed to compensate for fathers who were negligent in the spiritual training and oversight of their families. Everyone admitted that many of their programs were designed with that purpose in mind. Instead of coming alongside the man to shepherd him to be a biblical husband and father, the leadership substituted programs that interfered with his jurisdictional responsibilities. The personal investment of time and care that would have modeled godly home leadership had been replaced by increased knowledge dissemination that cost the leader nothing personally.

Authority in a Nutshell

Authority and leadership are not necessarily synonymous. Among God's people, all men who have authority should be able to lead. However, not all leaders have authority.

Biblically, both men and women are capable of leading. Yet *authority* is reserved for men within their jurisdictional boundaries. Consider this: A football coach has full authority over his team. The coach is the one who puts players into the game and takes them out. He decides who to include or who to remove from the team. Although the team captain may *lead* the team, he has no authority over the players. Similarly, deacons may lead by displaying God's charitable concern for people, but the Bible does not give them authority in their faith communities. A worship leader may facilitate worship, but he or she does not have authority over the people.

"Delegated authority" refers to the limited responsibility a person in authority grants. It should be commensurate with the task to be accomplished. The conditions and limits of this responsibility are normally stipulated in advance. For instance, a father has authority over his children. He may give a babysitter certain responsibilities commensurate with taking care of his children. But authority over the children always rests with the parent.

The foundational understanding of authority is summed up in the phrase, “The buck stops here.” In our faith communities and families our Father establishes those who are in authority: *“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God”* (Romans 13:1). He will *not* accept excuses from those in positions of authority who fail to fulfill their responsibilities. And He will not allow those who exercise authority to blame the ones in their care when they themselves have failed.

In officer candidate school Mike was taught the only acceptable response when confronted by a senior officer: “No excuse, sir!” After several years in the Navy, he began to read the Bible for the first time. One of the things he noticed immediately was that God didn’t accept excuses either. Moses had tried to use his speech impediment as an excuse to stay out of Egypt. When he pushed his point, *“the Lord’s anger burned against Moses”* (Exodus 4:14). From personal experience Mike could understand that kind of “heat.” When the Lord undertook to recruit Gideon to fight the Midianites, the fearful man offered an excuse: *“My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family”* (Judges 6:15). Yet armed with God’s assurance, he still ended up leading his troops.

Ponder these Scripture examples:

- When confronted about eating the fruit, Adam could have sought God’s forgiveness; that is, the buck of responsibility could have stopped with him. Instead, he forfeited his jurisdiction by blaming his wife, and they were cast from the Garden of Eden.
- King Saul was confronted by Samuel for failing to completely destroy the Amalekites. The monarch blamed his fear of the people for his act of disobedience. For passing the buck, Saul lost the kingdom, his jurisdiction.
- King David repented for adultery and murder when confronted by the prophet Nathan. By taking full responsibility through repentance and by *not* passing the buck, David kept his kingdom.

When parents habitually blame their children for the sorry condition of their own lives and excuse themselves for not having fulfilled their parental responsibilities, they risk the possibility of losing jurisdiction over their offspring. Cults today are filled with the children of Christian parents who forfeited their jurisdiction through negligence or blame.

Now think about how all this ties in with God's view of church authority: *"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you"* (Hebrews 13:17). This verse encompasses two areas of responsibility. First, the Lord commands *all his people* to submit to the authorities who render account to Him for their souls. These are the men who are willing and able to be where "the buck stops." God tests the humility and submission of His people by establishing a particular criterion: Do they make it a *joy* for those in authority to have them under their care?

Second, the Lord demands that those in authority, the men who are willing to be the "buck stoppers," render account to Him about *each one* over whom they watch. Any excuses for not knowing the condition of each person become grounds for removing their jurisdiction.

Do you have an intimate relationship with an older shepherd—a caring man who is rendering account for you as part of his flock? Pause to ask God how you might help to make his work a joy rather than a burden. Those who are entrusted with leadership are delighted to see members of the flock taking on joyful responsibility on behalf of each other. For those in authority there is great delight when the people for whom they are responsible seek and obtain God's wisdom: *"My son, if your heart is wise, then my heart will be glad"* (Proverbs 23:15).

Remember, submission to authority was nothing new to the Hebraic people. In fact, their ancestors themselves had submitted to the authority instituted by God among His chosen people: *"Choose some wise, understanding and respected men from each of your tribes,*

and I will **set them over you.**' So I took the leading men of your tribes, wise and respected men, and appointed them to have **authority over you**—as commanders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens and as tribal officials" (Deuteronomy 1:13,15). The need for order demands that authority and administration be entrusted into capable hands.

In light of this understanding, Peter could write to the believers scattered throughout the Roman Empire: "**Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right**" (1 Peter 2:13,14). Jesus had not raised up a church of revolutionaries or insurrectionists. On the contrary, in those matters in which the Word of God was not violated, his followers were to be models of obedience.

Jesus was pleasantly astonished to discover in the Roman centurion an understanding of deference to authority that paralleled His own relationship with His Father. That is why this man who had charge over a hundred could be commended by Jesus for his strong faith. When Jesus spoke, the soldier could readily identify His submission to His Father's authority. In that light the centurion was assured that Jesus' words would be accomplished.

*The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a **man under authority**, with **soldiers under me**. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith" (Matthew 8:8-10).*

Jesus was truly under His Father's authority, for all that He said and did was aimed at giving glory to His Father in heaven. This fact was readily recognized by the throngs. Throughout the gospels, whenever Jesus did a mighty work, the people *praised God*.

Because Jesus bore authority as the Anointed One of God, He could delegate authority to His disciples to drive out evil spirits in His Name—and the spirits, recognizing the authority in the name of Jesus, had to obey! *“He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness”* (Matthew 10:1).

Power in the spiritual realm comes from the One with the most authority. Therefore, the presence of the Spirit of Christ in each true follower of Jesus offers the same power today to drive out the workers of the enemy: *“I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you”* (Luke 10:19). Trusting reliance in the Person Who has given this authority to His people brings about victory in spiritual confrontations. (See our book *Demolishing Strongholds* for more on the subject of spiritual warfare.)

With the requirements of the atonement for sin fully and irrevocably fulfilled, the resurrected Messiah could leave His disciples prepared to receive spiritual power from on high. All they needed was His delegated authority to carry out His mission on earth: *“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’”* (Matthew 28:18-20).

Remember, without the authority of the Lord Jesus, these men were ordinary, unschooled laborers. That was obvious to the Sanhedrin whom they confronted (see Acts 4:13). Under His authority, however, these common men were able to shake the world.

Godly Submission: A Matter of Choice

At the retreat ministry, we led a singles group representing over fifteen congregations. When the group first began, most of the women lived alone, away from family or roommates. The average age of the ladies was around thirty, and most of them wanted to be mar-

ried. After several months we helped a number of the women realize that they had developed a strong attitude of independence and self-will when they had fled the protection of their father's authority. By allowing themselves to be available to almost any guy who called, many had become hardened to trusting God for the husband He was preparing.

Out of concern, Mike initiated an unusual requirement for the group: Before any man could date the ladies, he had to first ask permission from either the woman's father, her pastor, or Mike! At first there was some moaning, but soon the women began to feel cherished as jewels of the Lord. And their willingness to have an authority in their lives weeded out the men with wrong motives!

Another interesting point surfaced as the women were able to treat the men as brothers rather than as potential dates. A man needs to be *needed*. Independence from the protection that godly authority offers had actually proved to be a barrier to the very relationship the women desired, marriage. The women had unconsciously been training themselves to need *no one*. Many of the women moved back home to come under protection once again. Not too long after this change in the group's outlook toward godly authority, a number of weddings took place!

Submission to authority, even to those as publicly identified with God as were Moses and Joshua, does not come readily. Rebellion and hostility always seem to be lurking under the surface, prepared to attack God's shepherds:

Korah son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and certain Reubenites. . .became insolent and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council. They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" When Moses heard this, he fell facedown (Numbers 16:1-4).

When those in authority come under attack, their only prerogative is to turn to God. He alone is the Vindicator.

Yet God's people are commanded to submit to all authority, not just to those who are godly or just. For example, "benevolent" would hardly describe the rule of first century Rome. Oppressive and tyrannical, the Roman authorities could, and often did, steal, maim, or kill for little reason, particularly from those perceived as enemies of the State. Those such as Jewish believers Aquila and Priscilla were ordered along with all Jews to leave Rome (see Acts 18:2). It was in this severe environment that Paul could still write to the believers in the heart of that Empire:

*Everyone **must submit himself** to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which **God has established**. The authorities that exist have been **established by God**. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what **God has instituted**, and those who do so will bring **judgment** on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the **one in authority**? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is **God's servant** to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is **God's servant**, an **agent of wrath** to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to **submit to the authorities**, not only because of possible punishment but also because of **conscience**. This is also why you pay taxes, for the **authorities are God's servants**, who give their full time to governing" (Romans 13:1-6).*

These commands must have been particularly difficult for believers to comprehend, much less obey, given the subjugation and atrocities to which they were exposed. Yet Paul does not mince words. God's goal is much higher than fairness or personal comfort. By responding to injustice with loving trust in their Sovereign Lord, these early Christians were able to win over the hearts of many of

their persecutors and expand the Kingdom of God in a way that zealous rebellion could never have done.

So needed was this reminder about the proper place of authority in God's order that Paul reiterates the same message to Titus on the isle of Crete: "*Remind the people to be **subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good***" (Titus 3:1). Think how countercultural that message was to people who had a reputation as "liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons"! (See Titus 1:12.) Yet only through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit can people's character and nature be changed. Thankfully, our yieldedness to that Spirit is what He is really looking for!

Rejection and disdain of authority are counterproductive to God's will. Refusal to submit to God-ordained authority stems from rebellious self-will that chooses to make and follow its own decisions. Peter goes to great length to list the dreadful consequences for those in antiquity who refused to submit to authority: chains of darkness in hell for the rebellious angels; the devastating flood that destroyed the ungodly of the earth; the fiery devastation of unrighteous Sodom and Gomorrah (see 2 Peter 2:4-6). These rebels chose to "*follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and **despise authority***" (2 Peter 2:10).

We know from Scripture that Satan understands the concept of authority. In his dialogue with Jesus as they viewed all the kingdoms of the world, he could confidently say, "*I will give you **all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to***" (Luke 4:5,6). Because of the usurped authority that Satan had exercised over the sinful kingdoms of the earth, he could offer these to Jesus in exchange for worship.

Thus we see the danger of abusing authority. Jesus identified a particular area of training that the disciples would need before receiving power from on high: *humility*, learning to be servant-leaders. He therefore reiterated the difference between His Father's method of rule and the system of rule that Satan offers the world:

*Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles **lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authori-***

ty over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Matthew 20:25-28).

The pride that caused Satan to be thrown out of his heavenly home is exactly opposite to the humble service that our Father requires of His shepherds.

The commands for God's people to "*clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience [and to] bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another*" are all the more mandatory for those who have authority in His Body (see Colossians 3:12,13). Paul emphasizes the value of following the example of godly men. Elders who are caring for the flock should zealously desire to draw close to their Father so that their pattern indeed mirrors His heart.

Jesus led through example, humbly washing His disciples' feet. "Foot-washings" by today's elders may vary according to the Spirit's guidance. But there is one constant: Humility produces the leadership character needed for unity in the Body.

Because spiritual leaders are called to see themselves as servants, a sign of mutual submission to one another for the good of the flock will be *unanimity*. By looking to the interests of others more highly than to your own, humility can truly be a hallmark of your council of elders. Also, prayer and fasting can work wonders to bring about unity of heart and spirit.

The essence of leadership is having those who willingly follow. In our book *Restoring the Early Church* we mentioned two questions we've asked people within congregations and home fellowships:

- Name three people in your congregation to whom you would turn in time of deep trouble in your life.
- Name three people in your congregation with whom you would ask to do an activity.

When those who claim to be in authority barely show up in the responses, there is a grievous problem. A man cannot lead if there is no one following him. On the other hand, Paul commanded Titus to recognize by appointment the older men by whom the new Cretan converts were already looking to as leaders (see Titus 1:5).

Authority: Responsibility to Correct and Admonish

Because authority can so often be abused or misunderstood, Paul offers this insight: *“For even if I boast somewhat freely about the **authority** the Lord gave us for **building you up** rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it”* (2 Corinthians 10:8). The authority which represents our Father is seen by the Christlike fruit it produces.

With the privilege of authority comes the responsibility to discipline. Discipline covers a range that extends in degree from instructing in the way of truth, to a mild chiding, to admonishment, to expulsion and excommunication. Discipline is part of our Father’s loving design for training His people. His love for those in His Kingdom is displayed in His discipline:

*Endure hardship as discipline; **God is treating you as sons**. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had **human fathers who disciplined us** and we **respected** them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but **God disciplines us for our good**, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been **trained by it** (Hebrews 12:7-11).*

The painful discipline that our Father knows we need helps us to better understand His love and sovereign authority over us. This con-

cept flies in the face of current platitudes: "Love means high self-esteem," and, "A loving God wants me to be happy." The truly loving Father Whom the Bible depicts has ordained that the road to intimacy with Him means *self-denial*—trustingly picking up a cross of obedience each day to submit to *His* will, not our own. Yet mastering obedience comes by training that is repeated over and over in the classroom of submission to God-given authority. Jesus affirms the importance and goal of discipline: "*Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent*" (Revelation 3:19).

The first people to correct you are generally your parents. Part of the training process involves learning to respect their position of authority rather than giving in to rebellious self-will. Learning to bring joy to parents is valuable preparation for understanding the application of Hebrews 13:17, making it a joy for the elders who are over you in your faith community: "*The father of a righteous man has great joy; he who has a wise son delights in him*" (Proverbs 23:24).

Foolishness is hidden in the heart of all mankind. That is why the Bible so often repeats a parent's responsibility: "*Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul*" (Proverbs 29:17). Discipline develops in a person's life as he learns to conform his will to that of those in authority over him. When a willful spirit keeps the child from recognizing the importance of obedience, God's Word again has an answer: "*The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother*" (Proverbs 29:15).

If parents continue to offer excuses for their child's stubborn disobedience or blame parental weariness for their failure to correct their child(ren), destruction and pain are sure to come: "*Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death*" (Proverbs 19:18).

Consistent discipline of a child demands *self-discipline* on the part of the parent. Likewise, discipline development within the flock is a responsibility of elders: "*Now 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 high-*

est regard in love because of the work they are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:12,13, JNT)¹. Not only are elders responsible to serve diligently, but the spiritual family are commanded to respect and honor them for their service.

One point deserves special emphasis. Paul specifically instructs Titus to make sure that the elders he appoints "**hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that [they] can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it**" (Titus 1:9). Diligence in personal study and application of the Word is so vital. How else can these shepherds discern false doctrine and heresy, such as present-day gnosticism, Nicolaitanism, legalism, and antinomianism? By biblically confronting those in the flock who are not walking according to the true faith as outlined in the Scriptures, elders can admonish and exhort the errant ones to alter their course.

Those who receive biblical advice, counsel, or rebuke from their elders and mentors should render account by implementing what they have received. When brothers and sisters share with the fellowship what they have learned from applying the counsel they have received, the Body is edified and the elders are encouraged too!

"For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life" (Proverbs 6:23). Habitual failure to follow through is often indicative of a spirit of rebellion (remember Deuteronomy 21:18-21) or insubordination (see 1 Samuel 15:23). Recognizing wisdom, receiving it, and applying it are all vital steps in each person's pilgrimage: *"He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise"* (Proverbs 15:31).

Authority: God's Means of Character Development

On the next page you will find a comparison of biblical characteristics and natural human characteristics. The biblical characteristics that are listed may be viewed as facets of wisdom. The human characteristics may be summed up in the word "folly." The contrast of wisdom and folly is enormous: *"I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just*

as light is better than darkness” (Ecclesiastes 2:13). And people are born bent on foolishness: “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15).

As you go down the list, circle the number that best represents your own development level. Ask one or two people who are close to you to review your list with you. Discuss ways in which you can develop some of the godly traits.

<u>Biblical Characteristics</u>	<	versus	>	<u>Human Characteristics</u>								
Open-handed	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Tight-fisted
Joyful	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Depressed
Yielding	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Defiant
Accessible	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Aloof
Zealous	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Lazy
Courageous	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Fearful
Forgiving	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Bitter
Caring	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Selfish
Honest	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Deceptive
Confident	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Worried
Longsuffering	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Irritable
Trusting	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Cynical
Chaste	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Sensual
Thankful	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Grumbling
Organized	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Sloppy
Merciful	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Indifferent
Fair	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Biased
Humble	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Proud
Gentle	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Harsh
Submissive	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Bossy
Vigilant	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Careless
Hospitable	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Isolated
Frugal	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Wasteful
Generous	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Greedy
Prompt	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	0	Late

Your willingness to receive correction in characteristics that are lacking in godliness is a sign of wisdom. Paul reiterated the need for confrontation to Titus as one who was preparing elders for leadership responsibility: *“These, then, are the things you should teach. **Encourage and rebuke with all authority.** Do not let anyone despise you”* (Titus 2:15).

The ability for *anyone* to receive correction becomes increasingly more difficult in a rebellious society that does not abide by the commands of God. As our society turns its back on the standards of the God of Israel, biblical wisdom is disappearing from the public venue: *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but **fools despise wisdom and discipline**”* (Proverbs 1:7). No matter what society embraces, within the Church God has ordained corrective processes to restore reconciliation and order:

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for **teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness**, so that the man of God may be **thoroughly equipped** for every good work. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: **Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction** (2 Timothy 3:16-4:2).*

Family Authority: Developed in the Home

In 1960 children had a 90% probability of living in a two-parent home. A child born in 1980, however, had less than a 30% chance of being raised by both birth parents. In a very short period of time something important has been lost. We’ve failed to show our children how to succeed us in marriage.

Two factors in particular have contributed to the demise of healthy marriages: the diminished exercise of godly authority in the home, and failure to realize God’s purposes for marriage and child-rearing. Much of what has always been considered parental responsi-

bility has become the domain of schools, including Sunday schools. A father's leadership—his God-given authority and accompanying responsibilities to his wife and children—have been drastically undermined. His jurisdiction has been taken from him.

The Hebraic Restoration returns God's people to the issues that made our spiritual father, Abraham, acceptable to God our Father. Abraham was a man surrounded by a culture as pagan as ours. Why did God choose this man in particular? Genesis 18:19 gives a clue: *"For I have chosen [Abraham], so that he will **direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord** by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."*

As we mentioned earlier, Abraham believed God which resulted in a trusting faith that God credited to him as righteousness. Your trust in Jesus results in the same credit to you as His follower. Abraham was a man who lived out God's principles: He allowed Lot first choice of where he wanted to dwell (Genesis 13); he risked his own life to rescue Lot (Genesis 14:1-17); he gave a tenth of everything to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:20); he refused the King of Sodom's offer of goods in order to keep the pagan king from claiming credit for Abraham's success (Genesis 14:22-24).

Abraham's leadership qualities were based on a relationship with the Father that was so intense that it denied self-interest in order to uphold God's principles. How blessed is the man who has learned self-sacrifice during his own upbringing or from other older men before he takes a wife. Marriage is the arena and *agape* love the motivator for Christ-like qualities to be matured. Slowly the Church is recognizing that most contemporary men are not prepared for the sacrifice that marriage entails. To meet this need, some faith communities are creating environments in which younger men can have meaningful access to older men, such as early morning accountability groups.

The manner in which you treat your wife and children suggests the level of caring leadership you have developed: *"[An elder] must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with prop-*

er respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)" (1 Timothy 3:4,5).

In order to maintain order in the home as well as in the faith community, God has established certain principles of authority. He designed these to bring harmony to your marriage relationship and peace to your home. Just because His principles run counter to today's platform of gender equality in no way nullifies the words of scripture: "*Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God*" (1 Corinthians 11:3). Headship certainly does not erode dignity or worth—look at the example of the relationship between Jesus and His Father.

Some of the verses that pertain to a woman's place under authority are difficult to understand, such as 1 Corinthians 11:10, which deals with the "sign of authority" on a woman's head. However, anyone who submits to authority is submitting to the *position* ordained by God, not to the person *per se*. This makes submission to husbands, for instance, far easier for women who realize in their hearts that they are in this way observing the authority *of the Lord* that has been given to their mates: "*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord*" (Ephesians 5:22), and, "*Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord*" (Colossians 3:18).

During women's retreats we would often ask wives about their feelings toward their husbands. One of the more frequent statements indicated, "I *love* the man, but I don't *like* him." As we probed, it became clear that many women had a difficult time respecting their husbands. They failed to see in their husbands the humility and concern for God's principles required for family leadership.

Paul addresses the issue of respect: "*However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband*" (Ephesians 5:33). The command for a wife to respect her husband has too often been demanded unilaterally. Respect has to do with the *manner* in which a person leads; therefore it must be earned. Blessed is the wife whose husband is in relationship with older men who operate as fathers in his life, role-modeling and confronting him

to enable him change. This man is developing into a husband that she will find easy to respect! A man who lacks the wise counsel and advice of older men will thrust upon his wife the difficult burden of trying to respect a foolish husband. Remember, those in authority should also make it a joy for those in their care to mature with them!

1. *Jewish New Testament* by Dr. David H. Stern, p. 277.

Chapter 8

Deference: The Character of Jesus In His Followers

What is your personal responsibility to those in authority over you? Because authority comes from above, your Father requires that you submit to that position with an attitude of deference.

- Deference is shown when you avoid choices and decisions that would offend those in authority over you.
- Deference causes you to fulfill your responsibilities with a willing heart rather than as a burden of obligation.
- Deference is linked with *humility*, giving honor and esteem to those who have a right to them.

Deference is at the heart of God's command, "*Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord*" (Leviticus 19:32). Even in modern Israel young people on the bus rise to give their seats to older folks. Disregard for the elderly points to the downfall of not only a nation but also the Church (see Lamentations 4:16, 5:12). This culture's exaltation of youth and the exile of retirees into adult communities and convalescent homes have contributed severely to the broken homes and generational rifts now besetting our country and faith communities.

The Bible, on the other hand, commands respect for an older person by the younger generation. Deference is prominent in the command, "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth*" (Ephesians 6:1-3). Pleasant consequences are promised to those who learn this facet of obedience early.

Peter specifically addresses the need for character development to include deference: *“Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time”* (1 Peter 5:5,6). Paul emphasized the essence of deference when he wrote, *“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”* (Ephesians 5:21), and, *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others”* (Philippians 2:3,4). Deference sees beyond self-interest to the wider arena of interconnectedness.

Jesus lived in absolute deference to His Father’s will. His constant awareness and loving union with His Father made doing His will a joyful responsibility: *“So Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me’”* (John 8:28). Filled with this deference toward His Father, Jesus could readily recognize and rejoice in the faith-based deference shown to Him by the centurion discussed earlier: *“The centurion replied, ‘Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed”* (Matthew 8:10). The centurion understood the *spiritual* authority of Jesus and, in humility, deferred to that.

A person who has truly grasped the significance of deference in his heart will go to extreme lengths to uphold those who have authority. David displayed incredible deference to King Saul even as the monarch was trying to kill him. When David was hiding in a cave with his men, Saul entered alone. David could easily have slain him, and was even urged to do so by his men: *“This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.’ Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe”* (1 Samuel 24:4).

But even this seemingly inconsequential snip of cloth quickened guilt in David for having violated true deference. By stealing even a

portion of the king's robe David was proving that he had the power to remove the *whole* robe, in other words, to kill him and usurp his authority: "Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. He said to his men, 'The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord'" (1 Samuel 24:5,6).

On several occasions during our retreat ministry men would complain to Mike about the lack of respect from their children. Mike would respond by asking if the men had slandered or gossiped against their superiors in their work place. Their lack of deference on the job was perhaps reaping for them the same fruit at home. Over the years men would return to the center to share how they had asked forgiveness for the slander and gossip they had entertained. Sure enough, many would discover that the home climate had improved as well! Focusing on the Lord's perspective of the role of the authorities in your life will cause you to serve with joy rather than chafe in selfish irritation. And that attitude will overflow in your home as well.

Deference is the absence of wanting control over your life. It keeps you from protecting yourself from potential emotional hurt. Instead, deference enables you to "die daily" and to please God and those He has placed over you.

An attitude of deference does *not* mean blind submission, however. Living under the oppressive regime of the Babylonians, Daniel and his friends were forced into a decision of conscience. Rather than disobey those in authority over them, the young captives instead made an *appeal* to the guard to eat foods which did not violate their consciences. Because of that deference, the guard accepted their request:

*But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he **asked the chief official for permission** not to defile himself this way. Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel. . . So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away*

their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead (Daniel 1:8-16).

Deference is not just a matter of correct behavior. Deference is a *heart issue*. Those who receive your deference know whether they are being honored by your actions. Hundreds of people over the years have discovered a deeper understanding of deference from the following story. The humble have understood the wonderful love that was enacted. Those who are conscious of position or “correct behavior,” however, stumble over it.

Mike and his father enjoyed fishing together, especially very early in the morning before others arrived. Dad liked to anchor in the middle of the lake with a bait on his line that was bigger than most of the fish there. Mike preferred to fish along the shore, casting a lure into the shallow water. During one period in his life Dad had become cantankerous, driving away everyone who might fish with him except for Mike. (In retrospect we can see that Dad was going through the Wounded Warrior stage of his life, as discussed in *Restoring the Early Church*.)

One particular Saturday when Mike was about 13 years old, Dad stopped near the shore so Mike could cast his lure into the shallows. Soon Dad got bored and stood up to start the little outboard motor just as Mike hooked a beautiful bass. He shouted quickly to turn off the motor but Dad retorted, “Just shake the fish off.” Disregarding Mike, he began to move the boat out of the shallows. Mike’s line snapped and he lost his fish.

In one motion Mike grabbed his father by the belt and threw him into the lake, then turned off the motor. Dad spluttered to the surface bellowing expletives. Picture this 250-pound man in the icy water screaming at this 140-pound 13-year-old who had just thrown him in. If you were the 13-year-old, your mind was desperately scrambling for words. There was no place to hide. As he looked down at the father he loved thrashing in the water, Mike blurted, “You’re not getting in this boat until you start smiling.”

Dad realized that Mike's actions had not been prompted by rebellion but by a correct appraisal of how he had been treating people. Soon the expletives dissolved into unabashed laughter. Something wonderful passed between father and son that morning. A connection occurred that would become a special source of strength and comfort for both of them, a heart weave that would grow until the day Dad died some 25 years later. The culmination of that connection came a few years before Dad died, when he asked to embrace the same Jesus he saw in Mike.

The combination of godly shepherding by qualified older men and deference by those in the flock to bring joy to the shepherds is key to equipping the spiritual family for service and for fruit-bearing.

Deference to the Position of Authority

Let's face it: You will always be confronted with those who have authority over you. But it is vital that you separate the *position* of authority from the *acts* of that person. A position of authority (parent, boss, elder) is given to an individual by someone who is *above* him or her, either human or God. That position must be respected, honored, and obeyed. In the military you salute rank. A junior individual who meets a superior salutes first, indicating deference to the rank of the senior. Whether or not the junior likes the senior is irrelevant.

When a person in authority acts in a manner that is detrimental to those in his care, he must be given opportunity to repent and/or change his point of view. You cannot summarily discard a position of authority just because the man has erred or failed to meet your expectations. You didn't give that person authority, *God did*. Through a right spirit you can help him to correctly enact his authority. Even David, although he was king, repented when Nathan the prophet properly confronted him about his sin (see 2 Samuel 11 and 12).

What should you do if those in leadership mandate actions that are contrary to the commands of God? First, gird yourself with prayer so that you may have a humble, teachable heart. Carefully search the

Scriptures for passages that will clarify your reasons for objection. Then make an *appeal* to see if they will change their minds. If the appeal is rejected and there is no other position of authority to which you can appeal, then you must uphold God's command.

That was the case with Daniel's friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They refused to worship the false gods of Nebuchadnezzar and made an appeal based on their trust in the God of Israel. The king's response was a furious command to incinerate them. The young men knew that the king had the authority to do this and entrusted themselves to God's decision to rescue them or not. (See Daniel 3.)

Queen Esther, too, respected the authority of her husband but was willing to face the consequences of her unlawful intrusion into his presence in order to rescue her people. Both her example and that of Daniel's friends demonstrate that if necessary, you must make an appeal to authority no matter what the consequences.

You may find yourself in a situation like the apostles, who insisted before the Sanhedrin that "*we must obey God rather than men*" (see Acts 4:19, 5:29). Make sure that your heart is right and that your position is scriptural. If you feel compelled by conscience to act contrary to the will of the authority over you, it is vital that you have prayerfully received confirmation from two or three others who are mature in the faith. Then boldly obey God and be willing to face the outcome.

Jack, our next door neighbor many years ago, worked in quality assurance for a major corporation. Late one night as Mike was preparing for bed, the Holy Spirit prompted him to go next door to Jack's home. As Jack answered the door Mike could see that he was disturbed about something. Jack shared that as he was leaving for home that afternoon, his supervisor had approached him to pass some material the next day that did not meet specifications. Jack had never done this before and voiced his objection. The supervisor responded, "Do you want to keep your job?" Jack had been awake praying that God would guide him when Mike knocked on the door.

As he and Mike prayed and discussed the problem, they discerned that the appropriate place of appeal was with the personnel department. If the company backed the supervisor, Jack felt he could not continue working for a disreputable company. As only our Father can orchestrate, Jack came home the following evening as the new supervisor of quality assurance. The company wanted men of integrity!

Deference is often most challenging when it hits closest to home: honoring your parents. We used the following passage earlier as a means for developing deference: *“Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth”* (Ephesians 6:1-3).

Note that God did not specify that they had to be wonderfully loving or godly parents in order to be honored. It is critical for children to honor the *position* of authority that God gives a parent, and to separate the God-given position from the way they carry out that role. Failure to give parents the deference that God requires results in children who suffer needless misery for years and wonder why. As promised in His Word, our Father will discipline the bitter and rebellious by ensuring that little goes well for them.

Some people are trapped because they can't forgive their parents in their heart for past sins or abuses. Others stay embittered because the parent(s) did not meet the child's expectations. Yet forgiveness *from the heart* is a non-optional command from the Lord: *“In anger his master **turned him over** to the jailers [tormentors] until he should pay back all he owed. This is how **my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother [or mother or father] from your heart**”* (Matthew 18:34,35).

The Bible tells us, and the early Church understood this point clearly, that the Father will not consummate His covenant with a bitter person: *“But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father **will not forgive your sins**”* (Matthew 6:15). Failure to forgive others indicates that you do not appreciate the preciousness of the blood Jesus shed to forgive your sins. Bitterness reflects pride, which forces the Father to oppose you (see James 4:6).

At the retreat center one of our neighbors had several sons who had moved far away before we arrived. This man (we'll call him Ted) was full of deep bitterness, always trying to dominate everyone around him. One day Sue said, "Mike, I really prefer that you not become Ted's friend." Sue had based her appeal on Proverbs 22:24,25: "*Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.*" So Mike agreed, and tried to maintain just a neighborly acquaintance with the man.

About two years after we moved to the retreat center, Ted's sons came home for the holidays. The day before they were due to leave, the oldest asked to meet privately with Mike. Angrily the young man shouted, "How can you take living near my father? He's driven his children and everyone else away. Mom has told me how he tries to hurt you. How can you stand him?"

Mike asked, "Do you feel like you have to draw your sword every time you're around your father?" His emphatic yes confirmed the intensity of his frustration and anger. He admitted that he and his brothers had fled their father in order to escape the emotional pain. Each one, though, felt guilty about what their mother had to endure. Mike studied him with loving concern, then asked if he'd ever seen the movie *Return of the Jedi*. In the movie, young Luke Skywalker duels with his father, Darth Vader, the second-most evil person in the galaxy. Then Luke realizes the futility of anger and, in deference to his father, turns off his light saber. This action ultimately wins the heart of his father, who joins Luke to defeat the evil Emperor. The moral of the story? If there is to be any healing between father and son, the child must in deference drop his sword first.

At the request of this son, Ted's children came together to see Mike. After he explained the biblical basis for his counsel, they agreed that restoration was God's will. Each one went to his father to ask forgiveness for his bitter attitude toward him. The boys' deference profoundly impacted the older man. A short while later he journeyed to the side of his own father just days before the old gentleman died, and asked forgiveness for the bitterness he'd held for so long.

Can you see how the poison of bitterness passes from generation to generation? Ponder this anecdote from our sheep flock. A local 4-H'er offered us his ewe. She was a good-looking sheep and we gratefully added her to our flock. Not too long after, we noticed she was limping. Close inspection revealed the shepherd's bane: foot rot. A highly contagious affliction, foot rot destroys the hoof tissue, crippling the sheep and hindering her ability to graze. To our dismay, the entire flock had been infected. How many hours were spent dipping hooves into copper sulfate and cutting away rotted tissue! The lesson we learned has spiritual implications: No matter how wonderful a sheep looks on the outside, if the infection of bitterness is present, you can be sure that others will be contaminated by it. Bitter people and infected sheep cause trouble and defile many! (See Hebrews 12:15.)

One of the most powerful treasures that God gives to man is the gift of humility. True deference cannot exist without humility. Humility looks to the interest of others to honor and support them. The word *honor* in Greek means to prize, revere, or value. You might not think you have much to revere in your parents but look at it this way: *they gave you life*. They were the vessels from whom the Father brought you forth. When you come to grips with that reality, remember that how you respond from this moment onward is up to you: "*So in everything, do to [your parents] what you would have [your children] do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets*" (Matthew 7:12).

A life of dedicated service to the Lord you trust honors your heavenly Father even if your parents don't know Him or care about Him. Your Father hears and answers the prayer of the righteous. He would love to surround your parents with a cloud of witnesses and circumstances that would reveal Jesus to them! And if your folks have already died, God would enjoy healing you when you release the sting of those painful memories by *forgiving from your heart*. In its deepest essence, forgiveness is the epitome of deference.

Chapter 9

Wisdom: The Essence of Godly Authority

Obtaining wisdom should be the life-long goal of those who would shepherd the Father's flocks.

In essence, wisdom sees life from *God's point of view*. Wisdom enables you to apply His principles to your life situations. Certainly the Hebrew sages who led their people knew the importance of wisdom in their leadership. Wisdom was essential if they were to fulfill God's plan to set apart the Israelites as His instruments to reach the world for Himself: "*See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. **Observe them carefully**, for this will show your **wisdom and understanding** to the **nations**, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'" (Deuteronomy 4:5,6; see also Jeremiah 3:15).*

Wisdom is not achieved in a vacuum. Your willingness to open your heart and mind to the influence of those who are wiser and more experienced in righteous ways separates a fool from a seeker of truth: "*The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man **listens to advice***" (Proverbs 12:15). The humility required for you to learn from others can change the course of your life.

Attaining wisdom is a process that begins early in life, ideally in the home. The book of Proverbs is full of gems that extol the virtues of wisdom, particularly if you can learn its value even from youth. And the people best in a position to foster opportunities for gaining wisdom are parents. Note the following proverbs of counsel from a father whose heart's desire is to see his child become a man who someday might be fit to shepherd his people:

*"The **fear of the Lord** teaches a man wisdom, and **humility comes before honor**"* (Proverbs 15:33). Learning from infancy that loving obedience to God precedes any other commitment or relationship prepares your heart to develop a humble dependence on God's will

alone. Genuine humility is key to preparing a man for leadership and any honor that might come. Those who feel that they have achieved success by the strength of their own hands will be deafened to the voice of God, for He resists the proud.

“Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding” (Proverbs 3:13). Finding wisdom entails a lifelong habit of teachability, a tireless desire for yieldedness to the mind of Christ. A vessel full of itself has no room for the living water that pours forth wisdom. Acquiring *understanding*, the sister of wisdom, is also a pilgrimage process. Weigh each new opportunity and experience against the standard of the truth of God’s Word. The blessing of ever-increasing intimacy with God comes as He opens your willing heart to continue to view circumstances from His perspective.

“Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7). In ancient times, as now, a battle rages within the soul between material worldly success and spiritual righteous victory. Young people three thousand years ago were just as tempted to seek after worldly pleasures as are today’s youth (remember the Prodigal Son?). Yet the more a child was exposed to the role model of godly virtuous parents who were willing to forsake material gain to prize that which pleased God, the likelier he was to cling to those values when he matured.

Young Jesus desired with all His heart to walk in intimate union with His heavenly Father. His earthly parents provided that righteous training ground for Him to exercise growth in holiness: *“And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. . . And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men”* (Luke 2:40,52).

The apostle Timothy was trained from early childhood to treasure the Word of God and to live to please Him. What valuable preparation this training was for the mission God had prepared in advance for his adulthood! *“[A]nd how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”* (2 Timothy 3:15).

Jewish parents knew how powerful the influence of relationships could be. That is why those who ruled their households well (and thus had taken the first step toward becoming an elder) were wise enough to train their offspring from childhood to discern good relationships from evil: *“He who **walks with the wise** [those who give and take advice] grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm”* (Proverbs 13:20).

Unless a child’s or new believer’s values are reinforced by those in authority, they will melt to conform with the values of the people with whom they keep company. Instead, teach children and babes in Christ to actively seek out as friends and mentors those who are walking with the peaceable fruit of righteousness evident in their lives. Then they will increase their likelihood to treasure and cling to the wisdom that comes from above. And as they grow in that wisdom, they will be able to reach out to the lost without being drawn into sinful snares in the process.

*“And he [John] will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the **wisdom of the righteous**—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord”* (Luke 1:17, quoted from Malachi 4:5). The rebellious separation between generations had been foreseen by the prophet Malachi. Hundreds of years later, Zechariah prophetically announced the significance of his son John’s birth to fulfill this mission of reconciliation. John would prepare the way for the coming Messiah so that division and strife would not have to rule either in families or in the Body of Christ. *Wisdom* would till the soil of their hearts to discern the truth of the gospel of salvation.

With so much to gain by seeking after wisdom, what might hinder the development of that which is so greatly extolled in the Word? Some definite clues are given in James 3:13-17 to distinguish between the growth of life-giving wisdom and the stunting of sinful self-focus:

*Who is **wise and understanding** among you? Let him show it by his **good life**, by deeds done in the **humility that comes from wisdom**. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do*

*not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the **wisdom that comes from heaven** is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*

It is easy to see that the search for wisdom and for godly application of it is a lifelong process. It takes many years for a certain level of wisdom and experience to develop. For those diligent in its development lay the prize and honor of “elder.”

Although we will discuss the issue of bitterness more extensively in Section 3, one point is appropriate to consider here. Far too many men and women fall by the wayside along their spiritual journey because of bitter envy and selfish ambition. Bitter envy is often a product of sibling conflicts. One sibling, due to either wrong focus or pressure from parents, grows up comparing his or her life with one or all of the brothers and sisters. This inappropriate focus called bitter envy keeps them trapped.

Embittered people often feel they have gotten “the short end of the stick.” Throughout their lives bitter envy will cause them to compare their lives with others they meet. Resentment or jealousy will grow if an acquaintance is considered better off or more accomplished than they are. John describes such people: “*But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him*” (1 John 2:11). To compensate for their ugly feelings, people with bitter envy will display selfish ambition by getting ahead any way they can.

A person driven by selfish ambition becomes an idol unto himself. He acts without any consideration of God’s will or the people he hurts. His life may exhibit a series of financial problems, wrongs goals and decisions, and severed relationships. He is living a lie yet cannot see it.

One common thread among the older and wiser is their ability to give and receive counsel and advice. The devoted relationships that develop among elders are born through this type of mutual give and take: “**Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise**” (Proverbs 19:20). A willingness to *listen* as well as speak was part of the Hebraic heritage. Thus the elders at the temple could marvel at the understanding and answers of even a twelve-year-old boy, Jesus!

Opposite to those who sought wisdom were the people who remained fools and failed to mature. Hebrew Scriptures denote a variety of words for “fool.” The *kesil* (kess'-il) is self-confident and set in his ways. His dogmatic strong will keeps him from learning from others: “*As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool [kesil] repeats his folly*” (Proverbs 26:11). No matter how many times you help him, he returns to the same pattern of mistakes.

The *letz*, on the other hand, is a mocking fool who knows better than those who try to correct him. His condescending attitude makes him difficult to speak with. *Nabal* (nah'-bull) is the Hebrew word for the fool who denies that the God of Scriptures is who He says He is: “*The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’*” (Psalm 14:1). Not an atheist, the *nabal* makes his god conform to the image he wants to worship. Therefore he fears no consequences to his disobedience.

The character of each of these types of fool blocks wisdom from impacting their lives toward godliness. They just grow older but are no wiser for the journey. And regrettably, the influence they exert on the less mature may be so detrimental that the elders must remove them before others follow their example of unrepentant folly.

Biblical Discussion:

Humbly Seeking *What's Right*, Not *Who's Right*

Because their decisions played such a prominent role in the life of the whole community, Hebrew elders needed to be *available* and *accessible* to the people. Since they were of an age that they no longer

worked at regular occupations, these men had the time to devote to matters of public and private concern within the community. In order for an elder to devote the energy and hours that such a role required, his own family must have already been taken care of. Therefore, the *zaken's* children were probably grown and living nearby or even under the same roof. Or, his extended family could provide help. Since eldership was so highly esteemed, it was an honor to meet his needs.

The willingness for a man to discuss his plans with others before he acts is an important litmus test for spiritual shepherds. Wisdom gleaned over years produces a humble walk that is open to counsel and advice. Men who are wise endeavor to listen closely and to interact with what they hear. Remember, "*The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere*" (James 3:17). Discussion, or what some call "interactive communication," is normal interplay among the wise. You get to know a wise man on a deep, transparent level. He is willing to share even the mistakes he has made and the wisdom he has gleaned from his errors.

Many old men who have spent their lives foolishly seeking knowledge rather than wisdom have a narrow communication radius. Most are uncomfortable in discussions where *what* is right is cherished above *who* is right. For narrow people, "knowledge is power." The information they possess is used to control others or to draw attention to themselves. These men *speak at* rather than *speak with*: "*Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up*" (1 Corinthians 8:1). It is difficult to get to know or to draw close to this type of person. His pride acts as a barrier, and his lack of love for others prevents him from shepherding the Father's flock.

There are also those who, for various reasons, have missed the corrective devices of life. Some, through divorce, negligent parents, working mothers, or death of a parent, escaped the corrective training of childhood. Others have consciously avoided authority figures, staying just out of reach of those who might confront them. Those who are shrewd may project a disarmingly pleasant demeanor, hoping to forestall reprimand. Spirits deceive their minds into believing that "correction is rejection."

Many old-but-foolish men are often great story tellers. By their lengthy, intricate tales they can prevent conversations from becoming interactive. Without interaction, listeners shut their minds off after awhile. You never get to really know these talkers, although your library of stories grows immensely.

Another type of older man who resists transparency is the one who has “hidden secrets.” He is outwardly friendly, but his conversations reveal little about his inner person. During a shipboard deployment Mike befriended another officer named Ralph. Ralph was a likable guy, easy to be around. After several months aboard the ship Mike overheard Pete, one of Ralph’s friends: “Ralph, you and I first met four years ago at Officer Candidate School. We’ve been stationed together ever since and I’ve been your roommate all these years. But Ralph, *I don’t know you!*”

Months later back in San Diego, Ralph and his wife invited us to dinner. After the meal, Karen suddenly broke into tears and blurted out, “We need your help. I’ve been married to Ralph for three years, but *I don’t know him!* If things don’t change I plan to leave him.” Mike immediately remembered Pete’s comment.

Until the wee hours of the morning we talked with this couple. Ralph kept giving excuses for why he didn’t reveal anything about himself. As Mike prayed to himself, the Holy Spirit revealed: “Ralph has been lying to you all evening.” Mike, tired and frustrated, announced, “The Holy Spirit just told me that you’ve been lying to us all evening. I’m leaving if you don’t start telling the truth!”

Breaking into tears, Ralph took the risk of transparency and revealed a secret about his past which he had told no one. He had always feared that if he began to share anything about himself with others, this “dark incident” would come out and people would despise him. We all sensed that this one thing had been destroying his relationship with others. Karen immediately embraced him warmly, as did we. Over the next few months Ralph’s relationship with Karen and with others changed dramatically for the better. Transparency that is shared with discretion is a powerful instrument in the Spirit’s hands.

Halakhahs: Display Your Father's Wisdom As You Apply His Word

By sitting in an established area in the city, the elders of biblical times were accessible to all who passed by during the course of the day. Everyone knew where the elders could be found if there was a problem or question to be addressed. By group consensus the elders would decide the correct *halakhah* (hah'-luh-kuh), the most appropriate biblical solution for that situation. Establishing a *halakhah* represented the best efforts of the community elders to discover and apply one of several true, biblical options. Their decision would then become a precedent for all generations to consider in future deliberations.

The Jewish people, and therefore the earliest Church, had long been accustomed to gathering to pray and to study the Bible. In these groups they regularly discussed the Word of God in order to determine how He wanted them to apply it. Most often the discussions were conducted in a style known as the *yeshiva* (yeh-shee'-vuh) method, a give-and-take dialogue. The deliberations were very democratic. Issues were settled by the confirmation of two or three or by a simple majority vote, whichever was appropriate for that situation. This process underscored the Biblical axiom that "*in the multitude of counselors is safety.*" (See Proverbs 11:14; 12:15; 13:10; 20:18; 24:6—with that many repetitions, God is trying to get our attention!).

One person was recognized as the moderator of the discussion group, the *nasi* (nah'see), or "prince." Rather than lording himself over the others or forcing his own opinion, the *nasi* represented equals. He was responsible for facilitating the dialogue until the group collectively reached an understanding of God's will on the issue at hand. *Plurality* of thought and input was an essential ingredient; in today's vernacular, all the cards were put on the table before a decision was reached.

What a burden of heavy responsibility the elders faced as they administrated community life! Totally dependent on the principles of

the Hebrew Scriptures, they strained to apply God's truth correctly. Prominent in guiding their administration were the commands of Micah 6:8: "He has showed you, O man, **what is good**. And what does the Lord require of you? To **act justly** and to **love mercy** and to **walk humbly with your God**." In all their decisions the elders were responsible to uphold the Hebrew Bible and apply it to real-life situations.

For instance, say that a dispute arose over water rights to a stream that bordered two men's properties. In a land as parched as Israel, water was a commodity as precious as gold. The two men would state their cases before the elders at the gate, within earshot of curious onlookers. The elders would discuss the Mosaic laws and the precedents that had been established from similar previous cases or issues. The precedent *halakhahs* that best suited the present situation were explored, and the application of biblical truth that seemed most appropriate was then offered as a course of action. The plaintiffs could stand assured that biblical demands had been satisfied by the decision that had been reached, even if one or both were not completely satisfied with the outcome. A *halakhah* that stated how resolution had been reached in this situation was then written down as an application guide for the whole community in the future. (For more on the topic of *halakhahs*, see our book *Christian Halakhahs*.)

Note that the emphasis in all of this was not a *theoretical interpretation* of Scripture but a *correct application* of the truth to settle a real-life situation. Can we today find any greater source of wisdom than the Word our Lord has given His people?

Chapter 10

Vigilance: Keeping the Sheep In and the Wolves Out

Elders are watchmen, sure of the truth and courageous enough to stand firm in the face of ungodly opposition. To carry out this assignment they need a *shepherd's vigilance* to nurture and care for the flock and a *military vigilance* to protect those under their care.

Constant watchfulness is the mandate for those who shepherd the Father's flock. Have you ever seen a sheep that has been mauled by wild dogs? It's a gruesome sight. Yet how many in our congregations have also been mauled by demonic wolves who try to shake the very faith of the sheep?

Paul warned the Ephesus elders, "**Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them**" (Acts 20:17,28-30). Some individuals in leadership can fool the rest of the flock by personal charisma, deep knowledge of the Bible, or worldly position and power. Such distinctions are not, however, the qualities that make up the fatherly watchfulness of an elder.

What a tremendous difference there is between the individual who is overseeing the congregation as his occupation or obligation and one who is wholeheartedly devoting himself to training up reproductive, confident followers of Jesus! Jesus addressed this distinction: "**I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it**" (John 10:11,12). Wolves of deception and division are lurking on every side, and Satan can easily attack untended flocks. A good shepherd needs all the wisdom, experience, and trust in God that he can summon to ward off the enemy and love the sheep in such a way that they *want* to please their Father in heaven.

One day as Mike gazed over our pasture, God gave him a graphic picture of what the collective vigilance of elders looks like. The pasture was bordered by wooden fence posts that had been dug into the soil and spaced about twelve feet apart. They were connected to each other by woven fence wire. The ability of the fence to keep the flock in and the predators out was based on several factors. One was the *strength* of the fencing: how thick the wire was and how close together the strands of wire were. The tautness of the fence, that is, how tight the wire had been pulled between the posts, was also crucial. Tight fencing kept the sheep from pressing down on the fence to force their way out.

Essential as well were the fence posts: how sturdy they were and how deep in the ground they had been placed. The overall soundness of the fence, though, lay in the *corner posts*. Other posts leaned angularly against these to support the strain of the fence. Strong corner posts enabled us to pull the fence as tight as necessary to keep the fence upright.

In Mike's analogy, the fence posts represented elders who were connected through their relationships with each other. Some elders, because of the wisdom they had gleaned over years of obedience to Jesus, were corner posts. But it was the *combination* of these human fence posts and the *strength* of their relationships that enabled the fence to be effective. The fence marked a boundary of protection so that the flock could safely find nourishment and security. The fence also created a barrier to entry by whatever might be detrimental to the well-being of the flock.

True shepherds are constantly on the alert for the presence of enemies who might sway the people off God's course or subtly persuade them toward heresy. Spiritual warfare is raging around each believer and faith community. Individuals may fall if their leadership is not vigilant to train them to discern righteousness from wickedness.

Learning to *apply* the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, through personal *halakhahs* is a vital aspect of military training for these "warrior sheep." (There is a certain irony that followers of Jesus

who are so often referred to as dependent, needy sheep are actually called to be *soldiers* sheathed in the armor of God! Only the power of the Holy Spirit can accomplish this transformation.)

Elders can help or encourage each family to establish personal *halakhahs* to provide a wall of protection around their own home. By prayerfully exploring the Word, believers can discover the principles and standards that God reveals for questions about finances, child raising, marital roles, or whatever faces them. To establish and hold onto these “as for me and my household” decisions and choices, followers of Jesus need sound doctrine and load-bearing relationships that are accountable and encouraging.

Is the faith community learning to be spiritually alert—in a state of military readiness? Since Satan has declared war on every follower of Jesus (see Revelation 12:17), each believer needs to be trained in the use of the weaponry outlined in Ephesians 6:10-18.

It is not enough to be aware of your *own* weapons and gifts. These must be combined and coordinated with the “firepower” of others in your faith community if you are to make effective inroads into the kingdom of darkness. For example, your faith community may include a predominance of believers gifted with mercy and helps. As you look around your neighborhood you see a lot of latchkey children returning to empty houses. With that kind of need at your doorstep you might discern after a season of prayer that the Spirit wants to coordinate a group of you to man an after-school care center in someone’s garage. In this safe haven the children can be helped with homework, learn about Jesus and His Word, and experience His loving kindness from you.

Or maybe you discover that many in your faith community are gifted in evangelism. They just *love* to share the Gospel on the job or wherever they go! The Lord might nudge your Body into sharing sandwiches with the homeless and needy at a local park while presenting His truths through song, mime, and testimony. The *combination* of the gifts of evangelism, service, mercy, giving, and administration gives strength to this enactment of God’s love. Everyone in your

faith community has a spiritual niche to fill through the power of His Spirit to accomplish a Kingdom mission. (See our workbook *God's Instruments for War: Discovering and Coordinating Spiritual Gifts as Weapons of Warfare* for further discussion of this topic.)

One aspect of elder watchfulness is oversight of those who are infants in the faith and unaware of the battle or the nature of the enemy that is against them. If your faith community wants their prayers answered, it is vital that each member identify and renounce any spiritual strongholds that might hinder spiritual discernment or personal obedience. (If this is unfamiliar ground for you, please refer to our workbook *Demolishing Strongholds* for insights on spiritual warfare.)

God responds to the cries of the righteous. Those who are plagued by besetting sin can hinder others from growing in spiritual maturity. Jesus and His disciples never hesitated to cast out demons that would hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives. And Paul was not averse to expelling demons that interfered with his work, nor to warning congregations to be on alert against the work and workers of the evil one.

Nothing can devastate a faith community more than strife and division in its midst. If you have walked among churches for any length of time, you are probably aware of underlying currents of grumbling, complaint, and dissatisfaction that rumble just beneath the surface. People can sense tension even if they don't recognize the cause of it. The enemy of our souls is constantly on the prowl, seeking to devour people's love for one another and turn them against each other. Unconfronted grumbling can grow into a ground swell of disillusionment about the congregation as a whole and the leadership in particular.

Caring shepherds face discord head-on in prayer and biblical confrontation. Confrontation may seem negative or unloving to you. In reality, however, biblical confrontation addresses a person who is in error in a manner that is likely to bring about repentance and reconciliation. Both people and sheep find comfort and protection in knowing

their boundaries. Assurance that their sheepfold is not a playground for wolves to sow discord or false doctrine brings security to the flock. But if the wolves aren't confronted, distrust of the elders mounts because the sheep sense they are unprotected.

Loss of trust was painfully brought home to us a few years ago. One summer we planned a vacation. A single woman who had been at the retreat center many times offered to tend our sheep while we were gone. Because of her work schedule we ended up leaving on our trip before she arrived. On our return she left several hours before we got back, so we had no overlap with her at all.

After unpacking we went out to the pasture to check the flock. They ran away from us in a panic! Over the next few days they continued to avoid us. Their distrust greatly concerned us.

Four days after our arrival back, our neighbor stopped by. When we told her about the flock's fear of us, she asked, "Didn't you know that the person who was staying here let her dog loose every day to chase the flock?" No, we didn't! We felt hurt and ashamed that we had failed the sheep. Now we understood how much they had trusted us to protect them. Many difficult weeks passed before we could regain their confidence. How vividly this experience illustrated to us the sober vigilance shepherds need!

Eldering: Protection and Direction

Biblical elders shepherded God's people by offering protection in many dimensions. God had spoken through His prophets about the need for shepherd leaders who would faithfully guard His people: *"I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the Lord*" (Jeremiah 23:4). Decisions from the councils of elders in each town were designed to guard the dignity of the individual and establish justice for even the weakest member.

Since women were among the most vulnerable to injustice in biblical times, elders were responsible to uphold the reputation of those

who were maligned. Consider these two cases. The first involves a young bride whose husband decided he didn't want her after all. He schemed to lie about her chastity so that he could be legally free to divorce her. Note that the case results would become public knowledge so that others would be deterred from pursuing this man's course.

*Then the girl's father and mother shall bring proof that she was a virgin to the **town elders** at the gate. The girl's father will say to the elders, "I gave my daughter in marriage to this man, but he dislikes her. Now he has slandered her and said, 'I did not find your daughter to be a virgin.' But here is the proof of my daughter's virginity." Then her parents shall display the cloth before the elders of the town, and **the elders** shall take the man and **punish him** (Deuteronomy 22:15-18).*

Not only would the scheming husband's reputation be stained, but he would have to pay his father-in-law a substantial sum for trying to impugn that man's family honor. In addition, the husband would be forbidden to ever divorce his wife no matter how difficult circumstances might become. The elders were doing their job to protect weak sheep from unscrupulous wolves.

The second case also involves a woman in a precarious situation. The elders' decision would serve as a warning to the rest of Israel that those who treated God's commands lightly would not go unpunished. Think about the depth of humiliation that was intended by both the woman's words and her actions toward the guilty man.

*If a man does not want to marry his brother's wife [widow], she shall go to the **elders** at the town gate and say, "My husband's brother refuses to carry on his brother's name in Israel. He will not fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to me." Then the elders of his town shall **summon him and talk to him**. If he persists in saying, "I do not want to marry her," his brother's widow shall go up to him in the **presence of the elders**, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say, "This is*

what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line" (Deuteronomy 25:7-9).

Notice that the elders gave the offender every chance to repent, exhorting him to consider his responsibilities and the consequences of evading them. Still he refused. Therefore his penalty was the supreme public insult that could be administered by a woman. On top of that, any of his future generations would also carry the accursed name of "The Family of the Unsandaled" (see v. 10).

These issues were not dealt with privately behind closed doors. The corporate, covenant community of Israel was held responsible by God for obedience to His Word. As merchants passed through the city gates, they listened to these cases with great interest. The decisions made by the elders were sure to be passed along by word of mouth all throughout Israel.

The elders exercised such authority that they had power over life and death. Consider the situation of a person who had accidentally killed someone:

*[A]nyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally may flee [to a city of refuge] and find protection from the avenger of blood. When he flees to one of these cities, he is to stand in the **entrance of the city gate** and state his case before the **elders** of that city. Then they are to admit him into their city and give him a place to live with them (Joshua 20:3,4).*

The slayer could seek the protection of the city elders from the victim's vengeful relatives until he could stand trial. Again we see the intermix of justice and mercy that so defines God's relationship with His people.

During the seventy-year exile to Babylon in 586 BC, the land of Israel was nearly bereft of experienced leadership. However, despite the lengthy absence from their homeland, those who were older and wiser were still able to guide and counsel the people by means of the Hebrew Scriptures. It was during this exile period that gatherings for

Bible study and prayer became regular features of the Hebraic culture. By coming together corporately, the people of Israel were never without a testimony to God's faithfulness to those who love Him.

After the Babylonian exile Nehemiah was able to rebuild the fallen walls of Jerusalem. The elders of the people, led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua, then set about to rebuild the temple. Once that structure was completed, the Jews would truly know that they were home again: *"But the eye of their God was watching over the **elders of the Jews**, and they were not stopped until a report could go to Darius and his written reply be received. . . So the **elders of the Jews** continued to **build and prosper** under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo"* (Ezra 5:5, 6:14).

Under the divine power and approval of the Almighty, the Jerusalem elders were able to rouse up workers to fulfill God's plan for the temple to be completed. Then atoning sacrifices for sin could be offered. The whole family of Israel could once again express their loving obedience to their God in the way that He had commanded them.

Time and again the Jews failed to abide by God's commands to exercise justice tempered with mercy and humility. And time and again their failure brought judgment: exile, famine, plagues. Not only were the elders judged, though; the poor and lowly had to pay for the consequences of that disobedience as well: *"The Lord **enters into judgment** against the **elders and leaders** of his people: 'It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the **plunder from the poor** is in your houses'"* (1 Samuel 3:14). When those who lead go astray, the ones in their care suffer as well.

David offers a tragic illustration of catastrophe brought about by failed leadership. Seventy thousand Israelites were destroyed by plague when David misguidedly numbered his troops. His prideful motivation exposed, the penitent king mourned before God, *"I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. **These are but sheep**. What have they done? Let your hand fall upon me and my family"* (2 Samuel 24:17). Without wisdom in its leaders, a faith community can also suffer grievously.

Rhema: God's Guidance in Leadership

If you aspire to serve as an elder or are doing so now, *immerse yourself* in the presence of God through prayer and scripture study. That is the only way that you can increase in wisdom to correctly apply your life experience. Wisdom and experience are vital assets in helping you discern God's will for specific life situations. God is not short on revealing His *rhema*, His revealed will for specific purposes and situations. But He is seeking followers whose spiritual ears are listening and whose hearts are open to obediently follow through.

Have you ever heard the old saying, "Don't rest on past laurels"? In our context it means that shepherds cannot get by on practices and knowledge that may have been effective in the past. Just as God's mercies are new every morning, so are His plans and opportunities for spiritual growth. Constant diligence and willingness to gain wisdom are needed if you are to know the mind of Christ and model that for others!

Shepherds who do *not* diligently seek His guidance face dire consequences: "*The shepherds are senseless and do not inquire of the Lord; so they do not prosper and all their flock is scattered*" (Jeremiah 10:21). All men have frailties that fall short of Christlikeness. Yet wise is the man who recognizes how seeking *rhemas* for himself and his family is a training ground for future eldering.

When a man exercises domestic authority in a godly manner, he is preparing himself to walk in leadership of a faith community. Ephesians 5:25-27 reveals an important duty of a husband: "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*"

The statement, "*cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,*" indicates a husband's vital role in his wife's spiritual development. "Word" in this passage is *rhema*, not *logos*. The husband is not being enjoined here to teach his wife the *logos*, that is, the Bible. His

responsibility is far more than that. God wants him to discern the application of His truths, the *rhema*, to her life. As the priest in his home, he is commanded to uphold God's will and to teach his wife and family the path of righteous living that pleases God (see Ephesians 5:8-10).

Consider the implications of *not* having God's revelations for your family or faith community: "*Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint*" (Proverbs 29:18). Unrestrained people regress from sinful thoughts to "secret" sins to blatant, open rebellion. Elders must detect early on whether discord in the congregation is due at least in part to their *own* sloth or disobedience if they have excused or entertained sin among the flock.

Shepherds Who Are *Not* Shepherds

What are some of the pitfalls that might entice elders away from virtuous shepherding? Peter appeals to elders as a fellow elder: "*Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away*" (1 Peter 5:2-4).

Serving out of obligation because you feel no one else will do it or losing heart in serving the interests of the sheep means you need to consider stepping aside for personal reflection, renewal, or repentance. If you are a pastor, hoping to hold on to your financial remuneration should never supersede having a *father's heart* for the sheep. If the paycheck is that important to you, perhaps you should look into some other means of earning money. And if you find yourself more and more isolated from those around you, it's time for an attitude check. Are you the humble servant that God has called His shepherds to be, or are you thinking more highly of yourself than you ought?

Consider what happens to a congregation whose leaders lack the Father's heart: *"They are dogs with **mighty appetites**; they never have enough. They are shepherds who **lack understanding**; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain"* (Isaiah 56:11). "Appetites" vary. Some look for position because it increases their self-esteem. Others are desperately seeking approval from significant people in their lives. Still others enjoy the power of control over other people's lives. (Thus we see Peter's warning to elders in 1 Peter 5: Don't lord it over the sheep!) Any motivation that is apart from exercising the Father's heart toward the sheep is impure and will eventually sink into self-promotion and self-gratification.

Even first century believers were warned to discern the difference between godly leaders and those who were in it to benefit themselves: *"These men are **blemishes** at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—**shepherds who feed only themselves**. They are clouds **without rain**, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, **without fruit and uprooted—twice dead**"* (Jude 1:12). Leadership traits that are exalted by the world can spell doom for a faith community.

The "rain" and "fruit" valued as life-giving in the Word are evident in a leader's life. Believers are nourished by his care and devotion. But intentions and promises that have no history of substance can make a man *seem* more spiritual than he really is.

No individual is (or should be) indispensable if he has lost his anointing. Brothers who are eldering together need to help one another to face pitfalls in order to find righteous resolution for the sake of the flock. Remember, newer followers of Jesus are looking to their elders as examples of maturity in Christ. What kind of role model are *you*?

*"Woe to the shepherds who are **destroying and scattering** the sheep of my pasture!" declares the Lord. Therefore this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have **scattered my flock and driven them away** and have **not bestowed care** on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil*

*you have done,” declares the Lord. “I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will **no longer be afraid** or terrified, **nor** will any **be missing**,” declares the Lord (Jeremiah 23:1,2,4).*

The pasture of the Lord is intended to be a safe, spiritual harbor for His people, not a gathering of disgruntled, suspicious “worshippers” who practice “fine” Christianity. Do you know what that is? The wounded and hurting respond “Fine!” when asked how they’re doing. They feel too vulnerable or unprotected to be honest and open. Woe to those shepherds who have not provided a sanctuary for the wounded to find healing in the Lord Jesus Christ!

Chapter 11

Eldership: New 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 for 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).

Since the Hebrew Scriptures are fairly silent about the qualifications for elders, what type of men were Paul and Barnabas seeking to lead these faith communities? Fortunately for believers today, Paul is quite explicit in his listing 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:

Here is a trustworthy saying: 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 and 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 New Testament, the words "overseer," "elder," and "shepherd" are used interchangeably. Peter confirms this in two verses: *"To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a wit-*

ness 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 uses the three words interchangeably in Acts 20: "From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church... Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be **shepherds** of the church of God" (Acts 20:17,28). The same men are being 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:

*The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and **appoint elders** in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be **blameless**, the husband of but **one wife**, a man whose **children believe** and are **not** open to the charge of being **wild and disobedient**. Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be **blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain**. Rather he must be **hospitable**, one who **loves what is good**, who is **self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined**. He must **hold firmly** to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can **encourage others by sound doctrine and refute** those who oppose it (Titus 1:5-9).*

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

Further proof of the importance of sound family leadership is corroborated by the writer to the Hebrews: *“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith”* (Hebrews 13:7). 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.

The Laying on of Hands: Caring Empowerment

While the actual process or ceremony of setting apart an elder for service is not clearly delineated in Scripture, we do see many precedents for laying on of hands. From the Hebrew Bible we see that *“Joshua son of Nun was filled with the **spirit of wisdom** because Moses had **laid his hands** on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses”* (Deuteronomy 34:9).

In earlier times Aaron the priest and his sons had laid their hands on the heads of sacrifices that were to be offered to the Lord (see Exodus 29:10, Leviticus 8:14 for examples). Jesus Himself laid hands on the little children to pray for them, just as it was customary for Jewish fathers to lay their hands on the heads of their own children to bless them each Sabbath evening (see Matthew 19:13-15). Jesus also healed many by laying His hands on them.

The earliest church at Jerusalem selected seven men to replace the apostles in caring for the widows. These seven were presented to the apostles, *“who prayed and laid their hands on them”* (see Acts 6:6). In the city of Samaria, the Spirit was given to the believers at the laying on of the apostles’ hands (see Acts 8:18,19). Paul himself was healed and filled with the Spirit when Ananias laid his hands on him (see Acts 9:17).

It would seem that there was some connection between elders and the laying on of hands, as Timothy was warned to not be hasty in doing this (see 1 Timothy 5:22). Timothy had received a gift from God that came into him through the laying on of Paul's hands, and another spiritual gift when "*the body of elders laid their hands on [him]*" (see 1 Timothy 4:14).

And finally, the writer of Hebrews seems to indicate that the laying on of hands was well-enough known to be referred to as an "elementary teaching" (see Hebrews 6:1,2). So was this deed actually a part of the "commissioning" of elders as they were appointed? We can't say for sure. However, this action certainly put a visual stake in the ground before witnesses that an elder was being set aside for specific responsibilities among the flock of God. The laying on of hands also evoked an anointing of the Spirit's power as it had with the seventy elders who assisted Moses.

Accusations Against an Elder

By what process did the first century Church consider an accusation against an elder? Scripture offers this command: "*Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by **two or three witnesses**. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning*" (1 Timothy 5:19-20).

It is significant that an accusation against an elder was serious enough a situation that two or three witnesses must bring forth charges. Even an accusation of crime which demanded death in the Hebrew Bible required the witness of two or three: "*On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness*" (Deuteronomy 17:6).

Note that an elder was not always the innocent party but that witnesses were required to corroborate guilt. The application of public rebuke as a deterrent apperceived the public punishment of the scheming husband and recalcitrant brother-in-law cited earlier from the Old Testament.

Because of the respected position elders occupied, gossip and slander against them were forbidden in the Word. Regrettably, the most commonly used demonic ploy against elders continues to be malicious talk. How important it is, then, for followers of Christ to guard their lips and ears from speaking or hearing slander or gossip.

Gossip and slander share similarities. Gossip passes along rumors about an individual. People who slander maliciously defame the reputation of the one against whom they are speaking. Neither slander nor gossip is redemptive, reconciliatory, or restorative. Therefore neither can be tolerated in any context among followers of Jesus.

So what should be done if an elder fails to be responsible in his care for God's flock? He is a brother in the Lord, and therefore should be lovingly confronted by a mature follower of Jesus. If he will not listen, then he should be confronted by two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, he must be dealt with publicly. God holds shepherds accountable for His flock. Fear of man should never prevent fellow believers from approaching an errant "family member" with the goal of righteous restoration and reconciliation.

The Role of Older Women

While older men exercised authority as elders within their faith communities, older women certainly played an important role among the people as well. The biblical precedent for a righteous woman of virtue was found in Proverbs 31:10-31. This passage was recited every Sabbath in the homes of both Jews and Jewish followers of Jesus to affirm a wife as a vital part of a man's reason for existence. Just as every devout man aspired to the wisdom of an elder or sage, so every righteous woman looked to the Proverbs 31 matron as her role model of an older, virtuous woman.

That this passage refers to a senior lady is indicated by verse 23: "*Her husband is respected at the **city gate**, where he takes his seat among the **elders of the land.***" Since the man is an elder among the people, his wife is most likely an older woman who has earned the respect of

her community: “*She speaks **with wisdom**, and faithful instruction is on her tongue*” (Proverbs 31:26). To expect a young woman with toddlers to fulfill the many responsibilities that were designed for a mature woman of means would be cruel and unrealistic. However, as a goal or ideal, the passage was encouragement for the future.

The widows and older women of each congregation whose husbands served as elders were perhaps the likeliest candidates to fulfill the assignment listed in Paul’s letter to Titus:

*Teach the older women to be **reverent** in the way they live, **not to be slanderers or addicted** to much wine, but to **teach what is good**. Then they can train the younger women to **love their husbands and children**, to be **self-controlled and pure**, to be **busy at home**, to be **kind**, and to be **subject to their husbands** so that no one will malign the word of God (Titus 2:3-5).*

Scripture often warns women against being idle busybodies and quarrelsome nags: “*The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down*” (Proverbs 14:1). How needful it was in biblical times (and even more essential today!) for women to have access to mature, godly women who were willing to speak lovingly and forthrightly about righteousness and obedience.

How each woman lives out the many passages that specifically address godliness in women requires the development of personal *halakhahs*. The older women in a faith community can help the younger ones study and apply Ephesians 5, 1 Peter 3, Proverbs 31 and all the other passages that deal with women. With this kind of scriptural guidance shared in relational love, each woman can incorporate the specific areas of application that God is prompting in her spirit.

If you are an older woman, are you willing to be accessible to the younger wives and mothers who are floundering on the shoals of selfish worldly values and standards? *Proximity* is key. If you are spending all your free time with your peers, are you removing yourself from availability for God’s greater purpose for your life?

Think of how Peter's mother-in-law set an example for her daughter by eagerly waiting on the Messiah Who had just healed her! Think of the spiritual conversations the two women probably shared while Peter was on his intimate journeys with Jesus, and how prepared that younger woman was to later accompany her husband on his missions for the sake of the Gospel (see 1 Corinthians 9:5)! Don't underestimate the powerful influence of an older saint to lovingly lead in righteousness a willing younger follower.

SECTION 3

Rebuilding the Ancient Paths

Chapter 12

Relational Cooperation Among Elders

Flying the Restored Church

Elders of the Restored Church are a reflection of the Father's care for His people. Their caring leadership and cooperation with each other will be the Father's testimony to the flocks they are serving. One way to describe the cooperation among the shepherds is to picture faith communities as formations of aircraft. (See the diagram on the following page.) Each formation consists of a lead plane with other planes flying in position behind it. Additional planes can then assume their positions in succession.

Each formation resembles a flock of geese in flight. Each individual in the formation is relationally connected to another person with whom he or she has a personal association. A believer who is discipling another person in the formation will have a closer relationship with that individual than will the others in the formation. New people enter a formation through their relationship with someone else in the flight. Several of these formations may fly together for encouragement and mutual support.

The earliest Church developed within a patriarchal society. Family members were accustomed to seeking counsel and direction from the family elders. In a similar way, relational connections were linked within the gatherings of Jewish believers. Their faith communities may have operated like formations, led by elders who were affiliated with each other through relationships.

For example, in the diagram below, each grouping may represent a home fellowship (A,B,C,D,E) that is led by an elder or elders (1). The elders are discipling those (2,3) who are discipling others (3,4)—indi-

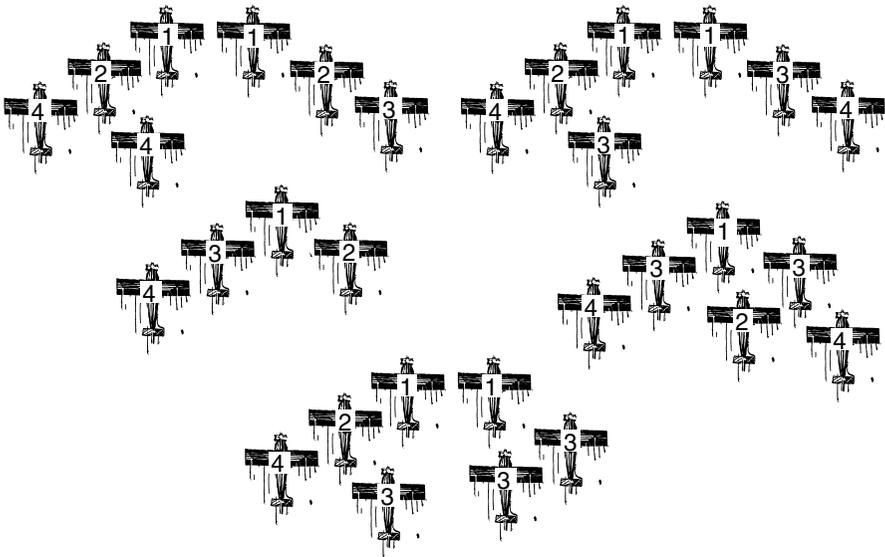
viduals who are flying in sequence behind them. In this manner the elders are preparing for their own succession.

As men mature and move forward to take their place of servant leadership, they can form other home gatherings that are kin to the first. Succession is based upon age and maturity, the development of shepherding characteristics, and a desire to serve by leading.

KEY:

HF Home Fellowship

- (1) Qualified Elder
- (2) Almost Qualified; mature in years, more character development needed
- (3) Men approaching maturity, continuing character development
- (4) Younger men



As man (2) becomes qualified in Home Fellowship A, B, or D by discipling others, he may form another home gathering with those who are flying formation on him. Note that men (2) in Home Fellowships C and E have no one currently being disciplined by them. There is no fixed pattern of how the multiplication of gatherings

occurs. It is critical that the number of people in each fellowship remain small enough so that rendering account to the Father for His people is possible. (A wonderful visualization of this principle of formations, succession, and growth is portrayed in the movie *Twelve O'clock High* starring Gregory Peck.)

Each flight (home gathering) is served by an elder or elders who maintain relationships on behalf of their group with other home fellowships. The home gatherings are able to combine as a single congregation for coordinated worship or for spiritual assignments that require the efforts of many. In effect, the elders *pastor*, or shepherd, the men, who in turn shepherd their own families. Single people, including widows and divorced people, are adopted into the whole family of relationships that are represented in the home gatherings.

These relationships are a seven-day-a-week commitment to each other. This is a *community* that is based upon knowing and living out common biblical convictions. Intrinsic to the whole process of relational responsibility and commitment is awareness: An elder can lead no faster than the slowest one in the group can travel. This means that someone in the body (preferably not an elder, so that others can grow in mature discipling) will be responsible to come alongside the less mature person to exercise spiritual wisdom and compassion.

When Mike was in Navy flight training, the “least pilot” concept of curriculum was developed. All training was designed to take into consideration the weakest person who had been accepted into flight training. The strongest was expected to develop a team understanding that enabled him to wait for the weakest pilot to catch up.

Relationships within formations of believers are linked in a way that is similar to those in a sheep flock. As we led our flock out from the barn or the pasture, the lead ewe, Precious, was on our heels. The other ewes “flew formation” on her according to their age or boldness. The lambs of each ewe effectively “flew formation” on their mother. Each felt secure knowing his or her position in the flock.

Mike was an elder in a congregation that was made up of home churches. He not only shepherded a particular home church but rep-

resented the people in it with the shepherds of the other home churches.

Those in our home fellowship had numerous contacts with each other during the week, both scheduled and spontaneous. Each Wednesday we gathered for a potluck and for whatever else seemed appropriate. No two evenings were the same. Sometimes we shared in worship, other times in deep repentance, and still other occasions in unabashed laughter and fun. These were special times for all of us. The children were always included with their parents. Spontaneous contacts during the week included phone calls, stopping by, babysitting, sharing errands—the sort of things you do with family.

As our home church grew in size, Mike mentored two of the men to prepare them to be shepherds of two other flocks when we multiplied. Thus we had three home churches all kin to each other. Mike stayed in touch with the two new shepherds and met with them weekly for mutual support. They also knew that they could call him at any time for situations about which they had questions.

The home churches of this particular congregation met each Sunday for worship together. Those in our particular home churches showed up over an hour early so that the children could play with each other. The adults enjoyed this time immensely. We all caught up with each other over prayer and coffee. We were such a close-knit family that during the time of worship it was impossible to tell whose children were whose. We often all sat together and the little ones nestled on the laps of their spiritual “aunts and uncles.”

On most Sundays different families from our fellowship would take part in activities together. Whenever we were together there was wonderful fellowship. And when we were apart, we all sought ways to reach the unsaved in our neighborhoods, campuses, and workplaces.

Differing Purposes for Home Fellowships

When several formations of bombers are sent into battle, they fly at different altitudes so that the anti-aircraft guns on the ground can't

“draw a bead” on them. Each formation may be assigned targets that differ from those of other formations. The planes in each formation may carry different types of bombs, depending on their target. This diversity is both necessary and desirable.

In a similar vein, not all sheep flocks are raised for the same purpose. Our sheep flock was initially made up of Suffolks, tall, hardy sheep bred for meat production. In the spring this breed normally birthed two lambs that could be fattened for meat in the winter. The only drawback of Suffolks was the inferior quality of their wool. Another sheep flock may be comprised primarily of Romneys. These are bred for their high wool quality but are not the best meat producers.

What is illustrated by the characteristics of the various sheep breeds and bomber formations has parallels for our faith communities. Synagogues, the locus of Bible study and prayer for Jews, were loosely affiliated with one another. These gatherings were not, however, clones of each other, for each was comprised of individuals with varying levels of interest in personal holiness. So, too, each early community of believers had a distinctiveness that was demonstrated in their obedience to the possibilities that God opened up to them for Kingdom expansion—the works God had prepared in advance for them to do (see Ephesians 2:10).

Too often, current congregations pretty much look and operate the same way. Pastors and/or leaders determine a norm for programs and activities, and the people are expected to fill the slots. On the other hand, fellowships that are strengthened by restoration truths can have dramatically different purposes depending on their maturity, gifting, and geographical location.

For instance, the needs facing an inner city fellowship may differ drastically from those confronting a suburban group. Elders who shepherd these gatherings must be aware of the uniqueness of the group they are serving. Often just knowing the variety of spiritual gifts present in a fellowship can tell you why God has brought this particular group together.

Neighborhood Home Fellowships

“Flying formation” with one another requires close contact. A home fellowship that gathers on a neighborhood basis provides the proximity needed for relational responsibility through more frequent spontaneous contact. Sociologists define a neighborhood in the U.S. as the distance covered in a five-minute walk from your house, or the radius of a quarter mile.

Contact with each other should ideally be relatively convenient rather than a strain. If you have to drive thirty minutes through irritating traffic to see others in your faith community, you’re less likely to initiate spontaneous encounters. Our Hebraic ancestors gathered in homes in their neighborhoods, and the Bible tells us, “*The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved*” (Acts 2:47).

If God impresses on you to start a home fellowship in your neighborhood, you may have to begin with a few committed load-bearers from outside your immediate neighborhood who share your burden for the lost. They will be able to pray with and for you as you wait for God to reveal who in your environs is open to your friendship.

Your initial neighborhood contacts may be purely of a social nature—a barbecue, sports event, dessert with the families. But you are building relational bridges that may develop into occasions to make the gospel come alive for them as they see the living Lord in you. Just make sure that you are not looking at these people as “targets” to tally up on an imaginary salvation list; they’ll see right through that motive.

Ideally, as home fellowships expand, every neighborhood will find a gathering of Christ-followers who are prayerfully taking responsibility for the souls there who are heading for a Christless eternity. Through intercession and neighborhood friendships, the kingdom of God can extend itself throughout a city. And the believers who have been nurtured in the pattern of relational responsibility will have been equipped to reproduce His love city-wide—and elsewhere if they move.

Spontaneous outreach and load-bearing relational responsibility may not be part of your spiritual experience. This is probably due to the centralized control and hierarchy system that operate at both the local and denominational levels of most congregations. Because of their *affiliation* with one another, however, each home fellowship can function separately with their own shepherds. And still, they are affiliated by their geographical location and spiritual family ties.

The concept of affiliation is illustrated in Acts 20 when Paul calls one last time for the elders of the church of Ephesus. He encourages these men to remember that he taught them both “*publicly and from house to house,*” where gatherings of believers met in one another’s homes. The church at Ephesus in its many congregations was held together by the relational ties of its leadership and by the connection of extended-family love produced by the Holy Spirit. Having the heart burden and capacity to extend those relationships beyond the spiritual family is your next step to weigh.

Chapter 13

A Journey Begins: A Destination and A First Step

You are on a spiritual journey to a glorious destination, the throne room of God. And along the way you've been privileged to carry out an encompassing assignment: to take the Gospel to all people. If you are an elder or almost-elder, your focus must be fixed on the power of Jesus in you to equip those in your care to fulfill this purpose. All other Body-life activities must support this goal:

*For **Christ's love compels us**, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the **ministry of reconciliation**: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the **message of reconciliation** (2 Corinthians 5:14,15,18,19).*

This earth will disappear, but what matters is this: Will you and the ones with whom you share Jesus find joy at the judgment throne by hearing your names read from the Lamb's Book of Life? Your faith community is part of the larger family of Jesus throughout the world. Your neighborhood is ground to be seized for the King. If you keep this focus with a compassionate burden for the lost, in time you will take your city for God's purposes.

If you are enlisted by the Lord into His service, there is no way for you to bypass your enemy, Satan. To share the Gospel means that you must fight the war for souls. Your entry into that battle calls you to fight, to win, and to hold on to what you have conquered in the Name of Jesus. This is your biblical responsibility. Elders who are serving the interests of the Lord must equip the soldiers in their faith community to attack. Failure to do this will result in believers who are like prisoners of war: alive but ineffective in serving the King.

Seizing Your Neighborhood for Jesus

Several important principles for reaching your neighborhood with the Gospel were discovered by evangelist Ed Silvoso as he and his team saw God move mightily in Argentina. We've adapted some of his insights as recommendations for those who desire to see spiritual inroads made in their schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods.

1. Establish a perimeter of holiness around each home of your faith community.

Remember, the primary reason to have fellowship in the face-to-face environment of a home is to be able to uphold righteousness. The early Church understood that God answers the prayers of the righteous. Pray for our Father to raise up Christ-followers in your neighborhood who are burdened in the same way.

From our Father's vantage point much of the Church today represents disjointed, glorified POW camps which pose no threat to Satan's domain. When you establish a perimeter of righteousness around the homes in your faith community, you put Satan on guard. The enemy all too clearly recognizes that through righteous, effective prayer our Father's will can be accomplished and His kingdom expanded.

Why is it so important for perimeters of righteousness to be established?

- Perimeters *secure a sanctuary* of spiritual refuge and nurture in the home.
- Those within the perimeters *experience unity* as they pay the price of forfeiting their own desires in order to please their Lord.
- By upholding communal righteousness within the perimeters, their *prayers will be answered*.

It is important for each person or family to establish *halakhahs* of righteousness for their home. When they have determined the biblical parameters for their families, they can then scrutinize their homes for any unholy items or practices that may be there. Sinful reading materials, offensive television programs, unholy music, even certain foreign souvenirs will hinder intimacy with God and the effectiveness of prayer. So will alcohol or drug abuse, rage, or self-indulgence in excess of any kind. Prayerfully examine your attitudes and behavior toward each other in your family. Is your home a sanctuary and refuge of love and peace for each family member and visitor?

2. Secure your perimeter and protect it from infiltration.

Securing your perimeter requires that the elders be vigilant. When holy perimeters are established, Satan will attempt to infiltrate them by any scheme or device possible. Sin will seek you out like never before as an active demonic weapon. Paul understood the intensity of this struggle when he lamented, *“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me”* (Romans 7:21).

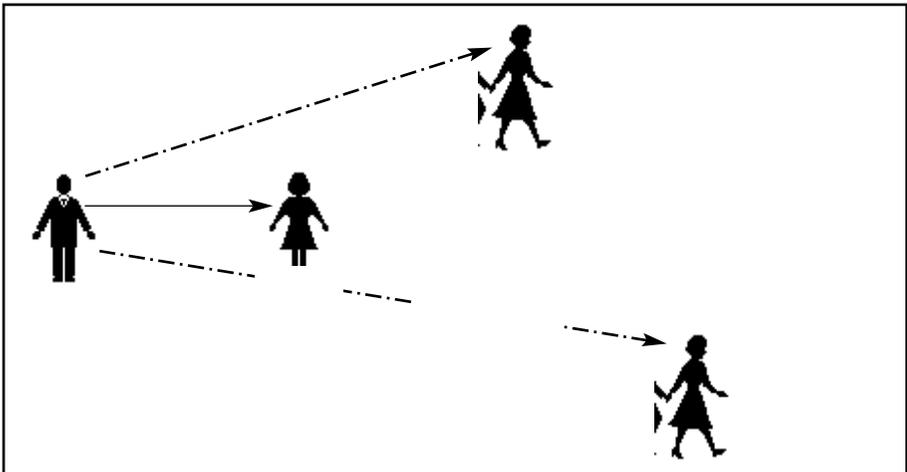
Satan’s most common weapon of war is bitterness. That is why Paul warned, *“In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold”* (Ephesians 4:26,27). God’s people can be used by Satan when they give him a foothold from which to operate. Those who are plagued by bitterness may appear to be needy, but in time they will defile others in your faith community: *“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many”* (Hebrews 12:15).

Bitterness operates like witchcraft to control, to manipulate, or to exercise power over others. The “grace of God” the apostle refers to is sufficient for a believer to choose to forgive. *Missing* that grace demonstrates a lack of appreciation for the preciousness of Jesus’ shed blood. Those bitter tentacles can reach into the lives of others in the faith community to cause grievous trouble in the whole flock.

The leaders of a certain missionary organization became very concerned because 50% of their missionaries were dropping out even before their first term was over. As the leaders investigated the causes, they discovered that 80% of those who had left were plagued by unresolved past bitterness with family members. The dropouts couldn't get along with colleagues because they reminded them of family members with whom they'd never learned to get along.

People project their unresolved family conflicts onto others with whom they will have close contact in the future.

- The same situation occurs when a person who didn't get along with his or her parents marries.
- The way a woman responds to her father's authority tends to be the way she will respond to the authority of her husband.
- The way a man treated his mother tends to be the way he will treat his wife. Mothers are usually very aware of their sons' shortcomings and may bring these up readily. When a man marries and his wife tries tactfully to do the same, his response to her is likely to be, "You're just like my mother!" He may even project the same resentment onto other women that he meets later in his life, whether in his workplace or in a church setting.



The same scenario operates in a woman's response toward men if she has unresolved bitterness with her father. Even unresolved conflicts with siblings will tend to cause negative reactions toward others she meets later in life.

When Mike was counseling church leaders, one shared this: "I like to watch the reaction of clergy to you. If they have a good relationship with their fathers, they get along with you. But if there is unresolved bitterness toward their dad, they speak against you. That response is how I recognize which ones I want to befriend and which ones to be careful of." Mike was surprised by this observation, but because of his caring relationship with his own father, he knew the man's comments were valid.

Bitterness is the foothold from which the spirits of antichrist and lawlessness operate inside faith communities. The antichrist spirit denies the Gospel of the Hebrew Bible (salvation by trust in God's grace and provision of a sin-bearer) that Jesus speaks of in John 7:38. The person influenced by this spirit fails to repent, to love, to trust, or to forgive.

Many who profess to follow Christ are in fact deceived and display no evidence of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. Without Jesus, they are a lawless people with no regard for the commands or the holiness of God. In fact, "*[The man of lawlessness] will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God*" (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Lawlessness appears in the antinomian attitude of those in the Church who abuse grace by believing that God excuses their sin through blanket forgiveness. Out of ignorance or defiance, they fail to understand that grace is a spiritual empowerment to repent and to obey God's commands in trusting humility.

Vigilant elders can discern three practices by which demonic spirits are deluding the Church today:

- (1) **False prophets** *manipulate* forecasts of the future for personal gain or recognition. Some claim special insight into "end time" scenarios. Yet Jesus advises, "*No one knows about that day or hour, not*

even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36). Other false prophets demand immediate response without providing time for those present to test what is shared.

Paul understood the danger of false prophecy (see 1 Thessalonians 2:2), and in two of his letters warns the people to weigh and to test what is shared: *"Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said"* (1 Corinthians 14:29); and, *"Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good"* (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21).

(2) **Misuse of psychology** imprisons believers in their past to explore the causes of their pain rather than to release the pain through forgiveness from the heart. Bondage keeps the sufferer from repenting for his or her bitterness and from relying on the grace and power of God to heal their emotions.

Many of those who counsel others to explore their bitter memories are themselves still prisoners of bitterness. The severe words of Jesus should be weighed: *"Woe to you, you make a person twice as much a son of hell as you are"* (Matthew 23:15). Our Father uses that suffering to develop the character of His Son Jesus in His children. Our past hurts are altered by Him to transform us, and should be viewed as "marks of ownership." Those who can accept this truth have been shown the beauty that is born out of their suffering, and the hope and patient endurance that the Father has brought about through the pain (see Romans 5:3-5).

(3) **Contrived worship**, especially through certain music and forceful incantations, conjures a soulful mood in the same manner pagans use. Worship leaders and facilitators who have "unclean hands and impure hearts" seek a form of worship that pleases *them* but not the Father. What kind of worship *does* please our Father? Scripture is clear: *"Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the*

*kind of worshipers the Father seeks” (John 4:23); and, “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a **broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:16,17).***

How can you recognize bitter people? They are so self-focused that they have little room for the needs and interests of others. Because of past experiences, they resent any form of criticism, even if it is meant to be helpful. Not having tasted restoration with the ones they blame or hate, bitter individuals agitate others who are in conflict rather than encouraging them to seek forgiveness and reconciliation.

Bitter tactics are satanic arrows designed to create disunity. Disunity among the Father’s children inhibits their growth in the character of Jesus. Factions and disharmony destroy any credible outreach to unbelievers. Note Jesus’ emphasis on unity in the Body: “[T]hat all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21).

Another tragic consequence awaits those who are trapped in the defilement of bitterness. They are subject to a spirit of delusion sent by God: “For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie” (2 Thessalonians 2:11).

Responsible elders are wary of such people and are willing to ask questions—to “look a gift horse in the mouth” no matter how biblically learned or charismatically endowed they may seem. Paul’s warning to Timothy is appropriate for all of God’s shepherds: “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure” (1 Timothy 5:22). A little leaven of bitterness can defile the whole flock.

Paul warns followers of Jesus about Satan’s manipulation through unforgiveness: “If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not

unaware of his schemes" (2 Corinthians 2:10,11). He who fails to forgive another opens himself up to be used by Satan. Don't underestimate how critical a secure perimeter is for effective spiritual warfare. A shepherd must encourage his flock to walk in holiness, forgiveness, and repentance. He should strongly emphasize their need to cleanse their homes of unholy things and practices. Wherever he detects tension or apprehension in marriages and other relationships, he needs to admonish these believers to restore intimacy before Satan can establish a foothold. And how vital to be ever mindful of personal righteousness and the power of prayer to release God's intervention. If he is diligent and vigilant, then his faith community will function from a position of strength. The perimeter will be secure.

A note of warning: In your zeal to walk in spiritual freedom and to help others do the same, don't seek to become an expert in demonology. Satan may cause you to become so fascinated with spiritual warfare that you lose your focus on God's goal of a victorious spiritual life that produces much fruit. Deal with the enemy wherever he gets in your way, but *don't concentrate* on him. Keep your focus on Jesus.

3. Expand your perimeter.

In keeping with our Father's goal of reconciliation with the lost, expand your perimeter. Pray for your neighborhood, school, workplace. Establish relationships with unbelievers to reach their hearts. Those in your faith community should be using their homes as the primary place to represent Jesus to the world. Inviting a person into your home is one of the most affirming actions you can take. The relational connectedness you develop as you befriend an unbeliever will be the foundation for the connection needed when, as a believer, that person is welcomed into your faith community.

Bringing unbelievers into your faith community in the hope that there they might get saved is not the biblical pattern for spiritual

reproduction. *Your relationship* with that individual is the key for his eyes to be opened to the holiness of God as he sees Jesus working in and through you. Those personal times of sharing outside of the fellowship will prepare your curious friend to become a sincere seeker.

When the unbeliever eventually yields his life to Jesus, the effort you've expended to befriend him will even be more appreciated when you can share true spiritual fellowship. People need to be connected to *other individuals*, not to a group *per se*. A home fellowship is a formation of connected relationships, and your friend will be connected to the others in the formation through you.

Because Christ died for sinners, He calls everyone who is known by His Name to be part of His purpose. Relationships with unbelievers enable you to establish beachheads in enemy territory. To wage effective warfare:

- Make a prayer list of the unbelievers with whom each person in your faith community has contact and is burdened for their salvation.
- As a community, intercede for each unsaved person on a regular basis. Weaken the power of the enemy through prayer for those people.
- As a follower of Jesus, you have authority over the spirits that will try to interfere with the salvation of the ones for whom you are praying. As you pray, bind the spirits in the name of Jesus. You can experience the same faith-filled confidence as your forefathers in the faith: "*Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name*" (Luke 10:17)!
- If you have the courage, request those in your faith community to put a sign on their homes indicating that this is a house of prayer and that you will pray for any of the needs in the neighborhood.

Ask each fellowship family to keep a prayer notebook with four columns in it: date, petitioner, prayer request, date answered. Then have each one ask their neighbors for specific prayer needs that they can note down and pray about. (They should urge those neighbors to let them know when and how the prayer was answered so they can write that in the notebook!) As believers walk through their neighborhood, they can intercede for these people and renounce the spirits that interfere with the Father's purposes. Consider the same plan for your workplace and school.

4. Destroy Satan's perimeter by multiplying your faith community.

Any goal that does not include provision for new faith communities to be formed is an exercise in futility. Plan ahead for new communities that could accommodate new converts. Our Father, in the name of His Son Jesus, has given us the power and authority to plant new faith communities. Shepherds need to be purposely training successors to protect, train, nurture, and equip the new flocks.

As your faith communities multiply, they can remain affiliated and coordinated through the relationships of the shepherds and the friendships that exist among the believers in the multiplied groups. Remember, in your expansion you are developing extended spiritual family or kinfolk. The different fellowships can gather if they like for any number of purposes, be they social and/or spiritual, just as extended families do.

Revisit these four steps—establishing your perimeter, securing it, expanding the perimeter, and destroying Satan's perimeter—each time a new gathering point is prayed about and put into place. Then you can be confident that the roots will go deep and the believers will be nurtured in safety.

Chapter 14

Practical Considerations for Shepherding a Home Fellowship

“This is my family” is the core understanding that each shepherd and individual in your faith community needs to have. *Relationship*, not organization, is the critical factor. Your gathering times are “family gatherings,” not church services held in a home. These are opportunities to eat together, to enjoy one another, and especially to get to know each other. Because children are not second-class citizens in the Kingdom of God, their presence should be the norm rather than the exception.

As with gatherings of your relatives, everyone doesn’t always sit together in a circle the whole time. There is an ebb and flow in the activities. And keep in mind that God created people in two genders. Many studies have revealed how important that discussing issues with others of the same sex can be.

Men need the example and help of other men to establish wise *halakhahs* for their homes. This time together may happen naturally during the “family” gathering of the home fellowship. Or the men can meet outside the family gatherings. Mike was part of a small group of men who met once a week in the morning before work to discuss issues that are pertinent to men. One of the fruits of those discussions was that they fostered increased interaction with their wives and children. When heads of households meet together to establish *halakhahs*, they are practicing mutual submission as they share ideas, deference, and respect for each other.

Women, too, need meaningful time with other women. Older women are best able to help younger ones through the complex situations that they and their families are encountering. Older women can help the younger women to learn to laugh at life’s circumstances. They can also help them deal with the fear and anxiety that come with the roles of wife and mother, and the loneliness and worry that may plague those who are single.

The Gatherings Are Not The Time To Spill Your Guts

Do you remember when sensitivity groups became popular in the American therapy culture during the sixties? In these groups, participants sat in a circle and were urged to be transparent with one another. They were encouraged to share everything about themselves, no matter how personal. Over time, many home fellowships have found themselves unwittingly replicating sensitivity groups.

Scripture offers no basis for this methodology in extended-family gatherings. Confessing your faults “one to another” as is commanded by James does not involve the presence of the whole faith community. In that particular context, the elders were anointing a sick person who may or may not have had sin at the root of his illness.

Personal information that is shared with a wide audience may, sadly, end up being used as slander or gossip against the individual. In fact, when such “transparency” occurs on a regular basis in home gatherings, children subsequently get ushered out due to the “adult” nature of the conversation. Thus, instead of encountering spiritual family, the children feel expendable.

Home fellowships are not designed to be therapy sessions. But this is why connectedness with one or two who can come alongside to pray, fast, and counsel with a distressed believer is so vital. Vulnerability in private with load-bearers is certainly appropriate and needed. If information about you encourages a brother who may be going through the same situation in which you have received victory, then share it. Sometimes people just need to know that there really is light at the end of their particular tunnel. But their journey will be all the harder if they become dependent on you rather than on God. Keep this in mind as you come alongside a struggling brother: True fellowship is believers *trusting God together*. True ministry is one believer helping another to *trust God more*.

Gatherings of extended spiritual family are times of jubilation and loving expression to our Father and to each other. There are times, however, when a brother or sister has encountered a negative

situation just prior to the gathering. Seeking appropriate help from an individual or from the group may be your most loving course of action. The Lord Jesus affirms this: “*If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?*” (Luke 14:5).

But when believers hold on to problems for days so that they can dump them on the faith community, they are violating the spirit of relational responsibility. Those who see the gathering as a forum to focus on self rather than on God or on others need a private rebuke and assistance. Body life is a seven-day-a-week connectedness. Family members can call on the individuals with whom they are most connected at a time when help will be most conducive.

Talk Things Over

Those in the faith community should sense a freedom to suggest spiritual practices and activities to the rest of the Body. Take the time to discern the scriptural basis for each matter and pray for God’s *rhema* as to whether that particular practice or activity is His will. Discussion and apperception create a give-and-take humility that is conducive to the growth of Christlike character in each person. An elder or some other designated person can function as the *nasi* to facilitate the discussion so that each participant is assured an opportunity to offer input.

Beware of Communication Killers

The U.S. has developed into a culture that spends more time talking *at* each other than talking *with* each other. People share facts and information, but spend little time in interactive discussion learning the values and insights of the other person(s). In order for the *yeshiva* style of interactive discussion to be regained in our faith communities, certain hindrances need to be corrected, and helpful styles of communications taught.

Common hindrances you will probably encounter at some point in your gatherings include: people who talk too much or too little; who cut off others or end their sentences for them; who launch into sarcasm or lengthy criticism of others; who fixate on a topic or shift to an unrelated topic; who dwell in the past or fantasize about the future. Shepherds, the communication climate of your faith community demands your utmost concern!

Avoid Disagreements Between the Sexes

Any discussion with your faith community that has the potential for tension should be tabled until the men can gather together privately. It is far better to be willing to wait for God to make a situation plain than to create a breach in fellowship: *“Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out”* (Proverbs 17:14; see also 13:10).

It is also wise to keep strong differences from occurring between a man and another man’s wife. An argumentative man may inadvertently violate Peter’s words, *“Husbands, in the same way **be considerate** as you live with your wives, and **treat them with respect** as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers”* (1 Peter 3:7). Make every effort to keep other men in your faith community from violating a husband’s consideration of his wife. Too often men press their point and go too far in their discussion: *“Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against **quarreling about words**; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid **arguments**, because you know they **produce quarrels**”* (2 Timothy 2:14,23).

On the other hand, if a controlling or quarrelsome woman insists on arguing, her husband (if he is present) should ask her to stop. If she is single, the elders should ask her to refrain. Men who are confronted by controlling women whose husbands fail to speak up may eventually drift away from the community in frustration. It is a “no win” scenario to deal with the contentious wife of another man: *“Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.*

Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife" (Proverbs 21:9,19). A contentious woman is best helped by the mature women in the community who can come alongside her on a consistent and caring basis.

Healthy Home Fellowship Indicators

Check out the spiritual health of your faith community by considering the following five indicators:

1. Prayers are being answered. John sums it up best: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name"* (John 15:16). Your fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus spurs you on in your hunger for righteousness. Answered prayer displays the Father's approval.
2. Members are using their discretionary time to bless others in your faith community and to reach those who have yet to follow Jesus. Non-discretionary time, such as work, sleep, and school, represents the activities that must happen on a regular basis. Discretionary time gives you the freedom to choose what you want to do and with whom you want to spend it. Significant contact throughout the week by faith community members who use their discretionary time on behalf of each other is a healthy sign. Personal desire to choose fellowship with one another strengthens the connectedness of the relationships and removes pressure from the elder(s) to be the only ones who can minister God's grace.
3. Another wholesome indicator is when the children are comfortable with the adults, especially with the men. If a stranger visited your gathering and couldn't figure out whose children were whose, that care and acceptance being given to the children by

the entire faith community would get his attention. And folks whose children are grown would probably relish the idea of a little one to cuddle or read to.

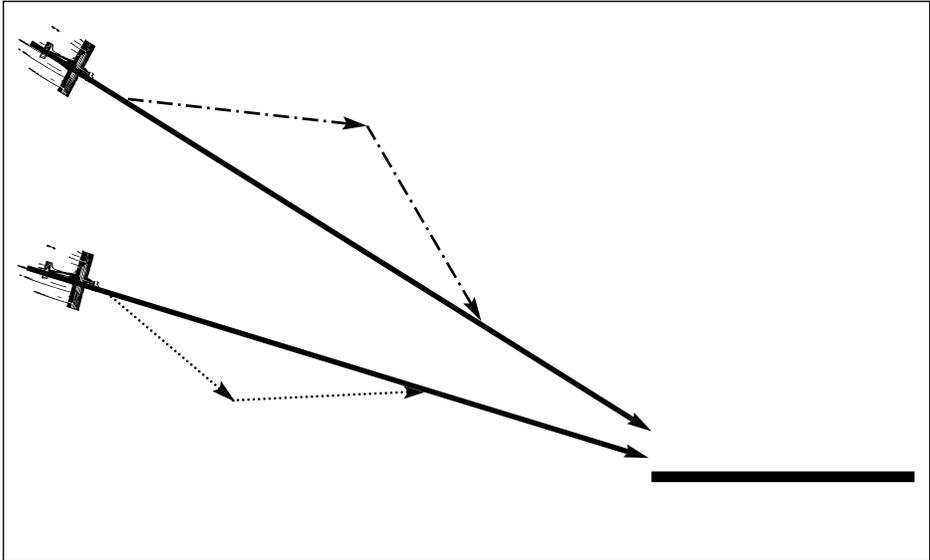
4. Judge every man by his wife's eyes. If he is fulfilling his role to be considerate of her, her face will reveal it. The Bible commands a man to (*agape*) love both the Lord his God and his wife. The love he claims to have for God should be readily apparent in his actions toward her. If an elder fails to see appreciation and love in a woman's eyes when she speaks with or about her husband, he should step in and ask questions. This wife might need to talk with another woman, and her husband might benefit from the wise counsel of an older man.
5. People who love God thirst to know His Word. They consistently read and study the Bible in their own homes. Teaching in a faith community should center around *application* or *clarification* rather than just Bible content. Each extended-family member will then have some spiritual nugget or question to contribute so that no one individual will be in a position to dominate the gathering with a lengthy monologue.

A Pictorial Reminder of the Shepherding Process

As Mike learned during his ten years as a Navy helicopter pilot, the only place to land at sea is on a ship with a flight deck. Weather conditions for flying were not always ideal. In fact, they were often marginal due to fog or storms.

When Mike approached a ship under marginal conditions, he had to rely on the ship's radar. A radar operator aboard the ship would guide the helicopter to the ship's flight deck using what is known as a Ground Controlled Approach (GCA). On the operator's radar screen were two lines which converged at the flight deck. One line represented the glide slope that the helicopter would need for a safe

descent to the flight deck. This was usually set for a 500-feet-per-minute rate of descent. The other line indicated whether the helicopter was left or right of a line that led to the flight deck, *i.e.*, if the pilot was “on course.”



As the helicopter approached the ship, the radar operator would direct the pilot to maintain 500 feet of altitude until he intercepted the glide slope. When the radar return from the helicopter showed it touching the glide slope on his radar screen, he would radio the pilot, “On glide slope.” The pilot would then reduce power to set up a 500 ft/min. descent on his cockpit instruments. If the radar return, or blip, showed the pilot on both lines, the operator would radio, “On course, on glide slope.” If everything went perfectly, those were the words the pilot would hear until he reached the flight deck.

But conditions normally are *not* perfect. Crosswinds and other factors normally force the pilot to make corrections during his descent. For example, if the blip dropped below the glide slope during the approach, the radar operator would radio the pilot, “Below glideslope.” The pilot would add some power to intercept the glide slope once again, and the operator would report, “On glide slope.” Upon

hearing these words, the pilot would then reduce his power again. But, since his previous power setting had resulted in the helicopter going below glide slope, experience taught him to keep a little more power than before but not enough to cause the helicopter to start going above the glide slope.

Flying to the Father

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

(2 Timothy 3:16,17)

The Hellenist, or Greek, worldview saw life as a series of victories and failures. Our Hebraic forefathers viewed life as a pilgrimage requiring occasional course corrections. It is with this understanding that Paul penned the above words to Timothy. Let's parallel this passage of Scripture with the same process orientation that is required to land aboard a ship with GCA requirements.

The flight deck represents our growing relationship with the Father. A man's relational growth will require many “approaches” over a period of time. The radar controller is one of the shepherds of a faith community. Through life experiences he has come to know the Father and what the men he is mentoring must do to know Him as well.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching” is represented by the glide slopes. The Scriptures are the unalterable truths given to us by our Lord to lead us into lives that please Him.

“Rebuking” is required when we are off glide slope in order to stop us from going further astray and endangering ourselves. An elder, like the radar controller, can see the younger man's error most clearly. Being rebuked is not always a pleasant experience, yet, *“rebuke a wise*

man and he will love you" (Proverbs 9:8b). A man who delights in wisdom will change his behavior or attitude in accordance with the rebuke. Rebuking does not put the person back on the glide slope; it only heads him in the right direction. Just as a pilot himself must take the necessary steps of adding or reducing power, the younger man must change his behavior or attitude.

"Correcting" reflects the words that are crucial when the person is back on glide slope. Without these corrections, the one being disciplined will meander all over the place and miss the character development the Lord desires him to achieve. Too many frustrated souls give up altogether. A person who is properly instructed needs to know when he is back "on glide slope."

"Training in righteousness" is a repeated process. Each cycle of rebuke and correction that a man seeking wisdom goes through increases his experience and makes him wiser. Knowing the goal of an increasingly intimate relationship with the Father augments his willingness to embrace rebuke and correction. Teaching, rebuking, and correcting are all part of the process of wise instruction: *"Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning"* (Proverbs 9:9).

"That the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" refers to the need for sound training to be passed along to the next spiritual generation. No shepherd should ever forget the importance of developing successors who will carry on and expand the Lord's faith communities: *"It is enough for the student to be like his teacher"* (Matthew 10:25).

The equipping process requires intimate knowledge of both our Father and the person being disciplined. Just as the radar operator brings the helicopter and the flight deck safely together, so, too, the shepherd brings the Father and His children together. Humility and love garnished with patience will produce the mature spiritual growth in the flock that will prompt a shepherd to say, "It's been worth it all!"

Chapter 15

Going Back for Your Future

*“Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings”*

(Isaiah 58:12).

The truths of the restoration are filtering into a church culture which has vacillated from authoritarianism to anarchy. The Lord has shown and confirmed for many that these truths are being poured forth in advance of the darkest moments this country has yet experienced. There is coming a time when many will repent and turn to God.

As these converts gather together to fulfill the “one-anothering” verses in the New Testament, we can expect the Nicolaitan spirit to again attempt to assert its dominance. The sacerdotal, intermediary role of individuals influenced by this spirit will be self-evident: They will attempt to control what God will be doing and will desire personal pre-eminence in it. The restoration message stands in opposition to this spirit. The nameless and faceless followers of Jesus who radiate *His* countenance will be the ones the Lord will use.

The Gospel of the dark period to come will not be the “easy believe-ism” of most so-called “gospels” found in the US today. Unbelievers will reject these for what they are, shallow and man-made. Times will be so desperate that seekers will want the Gospel that Jesus spoke of: “‘Whoever trusts in me, as the **Scripture** has said, **streams of living water** will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who trusted in him were later to receive” (John 7:38,39). The Hebrew Bible was the only Scripture in existence when Jesus spoke these words. Thus, today’s followers of Jesus must study the Old Testament to discover what that saving trust encompasses.

Even now this Gospel is being embraced by more and more people. Many were at one time deceived. They had been told that acknowledging the truth of certain Bible verses would be sufficient for salvation even if no evidence of the Spirit's work was noticeable in them. Those who believed that counterfeit gospel are painfully aware that their lives were not changed. They have continued in frustration and sin all this time. But how overjoyed they are when they hear the Gospel of the Hebrew Bible and realize that *true repentance* chooses to *turn away from sin* and *walk in righteousness* by the power of the Holy Spirit!

Repentance grieves you that you have grieved God. You hunger for the forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration that only Jesus can give. The believer who is indwelt by the Spirit of God *continues* to repent at the Spirit's prompting in order to bear Kingdom fruit.

The true Gospel puts you in relationship with all other followers of Jesus through the covenant in His blood. His shed blood has paid the penalty of your sin. Yet He also specifies this requirement on your part: to forgive those who have sinned against you. Jesus Himself declared, "*If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins*" (Matthew 6:15). How can you hold onto unforgiveness when the King of glory has offered you *His* forgiveness? Think about it.

You choose to forgive by continually yielding your rights so that you can fully and wholeheartedly love God. Obedient love trusts God to work in you to will and to act according to His good purpose (see Philippians 2:13). Those who put their trust in Jesus as the Scripture has said *will* shine with His presence in the dark days to come.

Patience and Preparation

God is calling the followers of Jesus to be patient and to hold onto their loving trust in Him. *He will build* the Church of His plans. You can join His labors by discovering His assignment for you. That which is being restored has not been seen since the early centuries. Although many are being prepared by the Spirit through different facets of the restoration, no one person has the full picture.

Cooperation and coordination will hallmark the togetherness of the Church of the dark days to come.

God's command to Restoration Ministries was to *share this message* of restoration. Other followers of Jesus are being prepared and called to plant the faith communities of the *Restored Church*, and still others to lead them as biblical elders. As restoration truths are being revealed, prepare yourself to fully follow the Lord by doing your part.

First, make sure that you have embraced the true Gospel of Jesus, one in which evidence of the Spirit's vitality in you flows like living water through your life. This is a Gospel of God's power to reach your *heart*, not just your intellect. It is a life walk that demonstrates a loving-trust, not a decision of reason that has been added on to a life of self-determination. One of the fruits of this Gospel is a trusting abandonment to the Lord and to His will, evidenced by a growth in righteousness, humility, and sacrificial love.

Second, a good portion of the Bible has been written using *plural* word forms. Remember that our Jewish forefathers in the faith were conscious of their communal self-awareness. Their very identity was based on an *interconnectedness* with all other followers of Jesus.

Communal awareness is a critical feature of the Restored Church. For instance: "*Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose*" (Philippians 2:12,13). The words "your" and "you" in this passage are plural, not singular. Our Father wants us to work out our salvation *together*. Like links in a chain, a faith community is no stronger than its weakest person. Relational responsibility demands that our love translates into action.

Elsewhere Scripture highlights the community/family aspect of following Jesus. Through biblical truths, the Holy Spirit:

- Enables us *together* to grow in *our* relationship with *our* Lord (Colossians 1:10-12).
- Holds us *together* and strengthens *our* relationships with each

other (Hebrews 10:23-25).

- Heals us *collectively* (Isaiah 53:5, 1 Peter 2:24).
- Equips us to share the Gospel *together* (1 Peter 3:14,15).
- Encourages us to fight *together* in the battle and fortifies us to persevere *together* (Ephesians 6:10-18, James 1:2-4).

The intensity of individualism in the US is so strong that people can be part of a group yet have no sense of intimate belonging. Because of this singular mindset, believers can study the Bible for *personal* edification but give no thought to how it applies to *community* purposes. Yet many passages of promise are given *collectively* rather than individually. Even the leadership of a faith community is a group, or collegial, effort. The level of *group awareness* and *belonging* that you experience with others motivates your interaction—your one-anothering—with that body of people.

Many biblical passages command you to carry out certain loving activities toward others. Even spiritual gifts have not been given to benefit yourself, but are God's means to bless His people *through* you. You are God's conduit into which He pours the grace that is meant to flow out of you onto others.

Nothing in the Bible supports the individualist, isolationist view of American Christianity. Only the power of the true Gospel can compel followers of Jesus to live out the *relational belonging* the Bible calls for. This Gospel is being restored to the Church today. But what will the *extended family* groups born as a result of this Gospel look like? How will they function?

Transition to the Restored Church

Initially, as people embrace the restored Gospel, new gatherings of Christians may come together without spiritually mature men who are prepared to shepherd them. Because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, however, guidance will come from Him. As in the early Church, confirmation of God's revelation and guidance for the group

will incorporate the collective process of agreement by two or three who are mature in Him. Because the indwelling Spirit has apportioned gifts to each believer, the faith community can work in a coordinated manner.

As our Father recruits them, elders will be raised up for fatherly role-modeling and leadership. In the early Church, those who came from a Jewish background as synagogue leaders were often able to carry over their wisdom and experience into the new congregation setting. The Church today does not always have the luxury of wise, experienced spiritual fathers. The leadership of the future may need time to develop into mentors who reflect the Father's love.

Each newly planted church gathering is recognized as a "church body" even if there are not yet elders. The priority need, however, is for mature men to be trained up to exercise protection, instruction, and oversight. The ancient synagogues had functioned autonomously even while aware of their larger family context. So should each faith community live out Scripture on behalf of one another locally, yet maintain an ever-present concern and regard for the Body of Christ around the world.

The Right of First Refusal

The percentage of the population represented by people over forty in the U.S. has grown substantially in recent decades. At the same time, their influence and leadership are barely felt in our faith communities. What a valuable, untapped resource is available to the *Restored Church*! How they are needed to take their rightful place of leading, mentoring, and equipping.

Some senior believers may not be aware of the biblical role that qualified older men played in pastoring the faith communities of the early Church. And the younger men who are currently leading faith communities while struggling to balance career and/or family needs must be willing to yield to the sages in their midst.

Qualified older men must have the "right of first refusal" to

assume their proper places of authority, service, and influence in their faith communities. Some older followers of Jesus may have squandered their time and missed some of the character development God had intended for them. These, too, must have the opportunity to repent and to be mentored by the true elders. Men who are approaching the age of *zaken* and have been serving others with a shepherd's heart need to be given special attention so that they can be prepared to lead faith communities when the time comes. Remember the principle of succession!

If You Want to Get Involved, We Recommend:

The Institute for Biblical Eldership

Restoring the Heart of the Father

A 5-Day Conference

*Equipping Our Seniors to Reflect His Love
in Mending Their Families and Faith Communities*

On behalf of your family and faith community you will learn how to:

- Mend torn relationships
- Restore intimacy and spiritual power as seen in the early Church
- Use the Hebraic style of teaching to train others
- Identify and correct the impact of generational strongholds
- Establish a multi-generational spiritual family (home fellowship)
- Nurture spiritual giants for the next generation

Sponsored by:

ElderQuest Ministries
178 Palmer Drive
Florissant, Colorado 80816
1-800-265-8351

RESTORATION MINISTRIES

Equipping the Church to Go Back for Its Future

***There's a Movement throughout the World to
Restore the Foundational Principles of the Early Church.***

Why Now?

Because God Keeps His Promises!

It hasn't gone unnoticed in the last fifty years that God is fulfilling His promises to the Jewish people as He restores them to Israel. *"Therefore say: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again"'"*(Ezekiel 11:17).

Through His compassionate mercy, the Lord is also restoring the Hebraic foundations of the early Church. Jesus the Messiah came in the fullness of time *"to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven"* (Luke 1:77,78). Now, in conjunction with the "tender mercy of our God" to the Jewish people, He is restoring the Hebraic foundations to a Gentile Church around the world.

Who is the Father recruiting to join Him in His restoration? Everyday people who will permit Him to shine through them: Jesus said, *"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you concealed these things from the sophisticated and educated and revealed them to ordinary folks"* (Matthew 11:25, Jewish New Testament by Dr. David H. Stern, pp.15,16).

The Purpose of Restoration Ministries

"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" (Acts 3:19-21).

1. Awareness

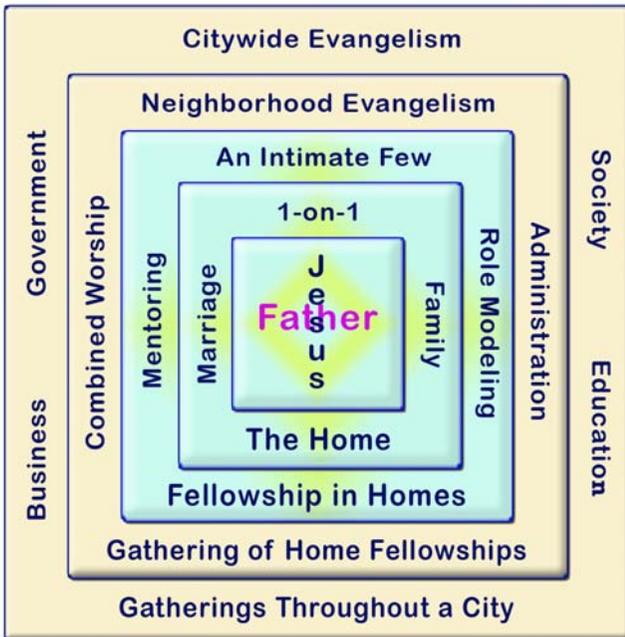
Proclaiming through written word and instruction the Hebraic foundations of thought and practice upon which the early Church was built.

2. Equipping

Enabling God’s people to live out the restorative truths so that His purposes may be fulfilled in and through followers of Jesus.

Each of the books and training materials produced by Restoration Ministries is one segment of a *family of information* related to the restoration. Each publication is designed to stand alone and to equip the followers of Jesus to apply these truths and principles to their lives. The real strength of each publication is found in both its content and its interrelationship to the other facets of the restoration.

The Hebraic Priorities of the Early Church



The diagram represents the Hebraic priorities of the early Church. These priorities begin with Jesus at the center and flow out from there.

PRIORITY #1 — JESUS AND YOU

A biblically Hebraic understanding of your relationship with Jesus as a *pilgrimage* begins with the day you lovingly put your full trust and reliance in Him as Lord of your life. The publications of Restoration Ministries are worthless to you without the centrality of a Spirit-empowered loving trust in Jesus as the focus of your life.

Please stop and pray! Establish a foundation of loving trust in Jesus Christ and assurance in His Gospel before you read on.

PRIORITY #2 — YOUR HOME

A. Marriage — The essence of a Hebraic-Christian marriage of the early Church could be, *“If you want to know the extent of my relationship with Jesus Christ, look for it in the love He has given me for my spouse.”* Marital love is a visible representation of a couple’s relationship with Jesus. God has designed a husband to draw strength from his wife, his nurturing companion and suitable life partner to complement him as they follow God’s purposes and plans together.

B. Family — God is restoring the *home* as the primary building block for Christian growth within the family. The Jewish believers of the early Church recognized that their relationship with their Lord and the relationships in their homes were inseparably linked: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up”* (Deuteronomy 6:5-7).

PRIORITY #3 — YOUR HOME FELLOWSHIP

God is reestablishing a key element of the early Church: the home fellowship as an *extension of the home* for spiritual growth and supportive relationships. The earliest believers met in homes with glad and sincere hearts to break bread and to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24).

Home fellowships are a seven-day-a-week commitment to one another to uphold righteousness and to develop increasingly supportive relationships that point each one toward greater dependency on God. Within this environment of sacrificial, load-bearing relationships, older men are taking their rightful place as shepherds, representing the Father’s caring concern for His flock. These men are mentors and role models who have lived a life for Christ and can guide those younger in their walk with the Lord.

The nation of Israel’s ability to respond to God’s purposes was based on their relational progression from individual, to family, to clan, to the twelve tribes that comprised the nation. At each relational level elders shepherded the people, guiding them with courage and wisdom.

Following this pattern, the Church is built on the individual, family, home fellowship, congregation, and congregations throughout a city (and ultimately worldwide). The ultimate outpouring of this relational model into their city will enable congregations to impact their society, education system, business spheres, and government.

The Jewish People

God has promised great blessing to those who bless the seed of Abraham, the Jewish people. Over 80% of His promises to the Jews regarding their restoration to Israel have already been fulfilled. When God pours out on them a “*spirit of grace and supplication*” (Zechariah 12:10), they will be cleansed and will see Jesus the Messiah as Lord.

The Gentile Christian community must remember Paul’s warning; “*I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come*

in” (Romans 11:25). Gentile believers can pray, and through humility, work to undo the past injustices carried out by the Church against the Jewish people.

Hebraic Practices of the Early Church

“I will bend Judah as I bend my bow and fill it with Ephraim. I will raise up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and make you like a warrior’s sword” (Zechariah 9:13).

Throughout the world the Lord is sending forth a Hebraic spirit to undo the Greek philosophical spirit that has held the Gentile Christian Church captive for centuries. By the third century the teachings and influences of converted Greek philosophers attempted to reconcile Plato and Christianity, replacing the Hebraic foundations that had strengthened the early Church.

Paul warned the Church against forsaking their trusting and obedient relationship with the Lord of life: *“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ”* (Colossians 2:8).

Many of the so-called doctrines that now divide God’s children are a result of the infiltration of Greek philosophy. These man-made doctrines have divided the Church for centuries. The doctrines of Jesus are understood by what His followers are willing to die for, not despise and kill others over. The Hebraic outlook also focused on personal obedience and trust in God’s sovereign intervention: *“All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained”* (Philippians 3:15,16).

Living Out God's Word

A Hebraic-Greek Comparison

Hebraic

Active—appeals to the heart

Motive

- Love of God and others
- Life viewed as a pilgrimage leading to ultimate culmination
- Suffering seen as necessary for development of Christ-like character

Process Oriented

- Stresses direct participation
- Emphasizes age and wisdom
- Role modeling , mentoring, and discipleship indispensable
- Leadership by personal example
- Character of leader essential
- Personal relationships imperative

Biblical Application

- Doers of the Word
- Bible—reality that must be confronted
- Goal—to develop Christlikeness

Ministry Activity

- Small intimate groups
- Leader as facilitator
- Cooperative, participatory planning
- Spiritual gifts shared
- Frequent scheduled and unscheduled gatherings

Fruit

- Love, acceptance, forgiveness
- Transparency encouraged
- Active participation
- “How you serve” vital
- Each believer trained to serve
- Produces mature believers

Greek

Cognitive—appeals to the intellect

Motive

- Pursuit of self-interest and knowledge
- Life viewed in circular terms, to someday achieve a higher state of existence
- Suffering to be avoided; people and activities weighed for self-gratification: “How does this person/event benefit me?”

Program Oriented

- Heavy program prominence
- Emphasizes education
- Relies on speaking skills, oratory, programmed materials, information conveyance
- Leader's personal life immaterial
- Personal relationships optional

Biblical Application

- Belief without personal cost
- Bible—data that must be taught
- Focus on rules—do's and don'ts
- Emphasizes distinct denominations

Ministry Activity

- Large impersonal groups
- Leader-directed and controlled
- Organizational roles important
- Acquisition of knowledge emphasized
- Reliance on scheduled gatherings

Fruit

- Mutual toleration
- Transparency discouraged
- Passivity and lethargy
- “What you know” vital
- Trained professionals utilized
- Produces spectators



Mike Dowgiewicz, president of *Restoration Ministries International*, and his wife Sue administered a church retreat center where for ten years they taught over 5,000 people from a variety of churches and denominations. While at the center, Mike was a counselor to church leaders throughout southern New England. Their ministry was recognized by the Associated Press in an article that was published nationally. Mike also was featured in an article in *New England Church Life*, "Who Pastors the Pastor?"

Before his retreat center ministry, Mike was a career officer in the Navy, having served on three deployments to Vietnam as a helicopter pilot. While he was in the Navy he gave his life to Jesus. Sue made that same commitment a few months later. They have one son, Sean Michael. Restoration Ministries has its basis in research they did while living in Israel for three months during 1993-94. Through Restoration Ministries they are now sharing God's re-establishment of the priorities that strengthened the early Christians.

Mike holds a B.A. in Economics from the University of Connecticut, an MBA from California Lutheran College, and a Master of Religious Education from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Sue holds a B.S. in Education from the University of Connecticut.

