

Men Over 40: The Father Wants You!

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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 appreciate 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 find-

ing 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 churching and unchurching, 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.