

Pastoring By Elders

***Shepherd/Teachers Who
Reflect The Heart Of
Our Heavenly Father***



by Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz

Restoration Ministries International

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2019

Pastoring By Elders was first published as a hard-copy book in 1998. Our goal was to help readers become aware of the vast differences between the relational intimacy and spiritual power of the earliest followers of Jesus, and the self-obsessed, lukewarm compromise with the world which represents so much of Christendom today.

Since that time we've expanded the contents of this book through deeper insights and materials to equip people to restore the way of life our forefathers in the faith experienced in their love-grounded, obedient trust. *Please use the links* to these various materials alongside this book so that the Holy Spirit may enable you to live a life that pleases your heavenly Father and lifts up the name of Jesus to a desperately needy world.

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Restoration Ministries International

- Restoring the *Hebraic*** Foundations of the Earliest Followers of Jesus
- Preparing Today's Followers of Jesus To Do Their Part In His Kingdom

** Following Jesus as LORD of your life with the trust-based determination of the first Hebrew, Abraham.

About Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz



Mike and Sue Dowgiewicz became followers of our Lord Jesus in 1977 while Mike was a career officer in the navy, having served three deployments during the Vietnam Conflict as a helicopter pilot. After being born again he realized that following Jesus was a response of overwhelming love toward his Lord, and he wanted to learn how he could more adequately present the life-changing work of His Savior to others.

Resigning from the navy in 1978, he attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary to study the roots of the many various denominations and sects throughout Christendom. There he was made painfully aware of both the division and the competition among the segmented religious establishment. Through his own ministry track, however, he learned how important interpersonal connection with one another is in discipling others to walk in Jesus' steps through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Sue attended seminary as well, focusing on studies in New Testament Greek and on effective ways to reach others from different cultures. In a way that only our Father could work out, both of these pursuits would feature heavily in their various ministries over the course of their lives together.

After seminary Mike and Sue ran a Christian retreat center where they interacted with over 5,000 people during a ten-year period. They were able to come alongside those who were hurting relationally within their families and experiencing frustration in their own faith walk.

While serving at the center, Mike was a counselor to religious leaders throughout southern New England. He was able to use the skills he'd acquired from his graduate studies in interpersonal relationships to encourage these leaders

to develop a unified concern among their congregations for the lost in their communities to encounter Jesus.

Sue found her heart's desire to work among people of other cultures by teaching conversational English to international students at a nearby university for six years. Through their time together these students became dear friends, and a number of them heard about Jesus for the first time.

Mike and Sue's combined 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?"

Following their retreat ministry they lived in Israel, where our Father revealed the Hebraic foundations to them. Restoration Ministries International has its basis in research and revelation they did while living in Israel. Mike and Sue are sharing our Father's re-establishment of the Hebraic foundations which both communally strengthened the early followers of our Lord Jesus and spiritually empowered them. Their present ministry through the internet is reaching people from 105 countries with a call to a life of loving and obedient trust in Jesus as their Lord.

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 as well as having taken several graduate courses at GCTS.

Our Father's Purpose For Restoration Ministries International

Restoration Ministries has its basis in revelation and research they did while living in Israel. For the past 24 years through Restoration Ministries International Mike and Sue have been sharing our Father's re-establishment of the relational priorities that strengthened the early followers of Christ to boldly reach and disciple others.

The core of the Hebraic Foundations is based upon prioritizing relationships, beginning from the center of the diagram [next page] outward. Restoration Ministries International was given the responsibility by our Heavenly Father to focus on the center three priorities.



[For further information on our Father and Jesus.](#)

[For further information on Your Home.](#)

[For further information on Fellowship In Homes.](#)

Each of the materials produced by Restoration Ministries International is interconnected with a family of information related to what our Father told us to call "The Hebraic Restoration". Each item is designed to stand alone to equip you to apply these foundational truths and principles to your life. Yet the real strength of each is found in its interrelationship to the other facets of the Hebraic Restoration.

Through these truths our Father is revealing to followers of Jesus the trust-based, obedient lifestyle of our father Abraham:

*"The promise comes by trust, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to **all Abraham's offspring**—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the **faith of Abraham**. He is the father of us all. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Romans 4:16,17; [see also Galatians 3:29](#)).*

Followers of our Lord Jesus are children of Abraham, the first Hebrew (Galatians 3:7). Abraham trusted God in love-grounded obedience, and was willing even to sacrifice his son at God's command.

Therefore, God called him into covenant union with Himself, and caused Abraham to be the father/role model for all followers of Jesus our Lord.

THAT MEANS YOU!

Pastoring By Elders Audio Segments

For audio listening of Pastoring By Elders, click on the links below:

- [Chapters 1 thru 3](#)
- [Chapters 4 thru 6](#)
- [Chapters 7 and 8](#)
- [Chapters 9 thru 11](#)
- [Chapters 12 thru 15](#)

Men Over 40: Our Father Wants You!

“Rise up; this matter is in your hands... so take courage and do it”

(Ezra 10:4)

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 and addiction 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 **exceeds** that of unbelievers. 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 as I am (age 73 in 2019), 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 public schools to Sunday school classes, **would pass along moral and spiritual values** to our children. We were wrong!

As Sue and I have traveled 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** by His Spirit to mend the hurt in our families and faith communities.

He is looking for men in Christ 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 His earliest faith family so intimate and powerful.

Pastoring by Elders amplifies the need to **equip wise, older men in their fatherly role** in faith communities that our heavenly Father is restoring. These men are being restored to serve in the **shepherd leadership** that elders exercised in both the Hebrew Bible (Older Testament) and the Newer 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 Christianity. 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.” But 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 as Lord of their lives.

Serving others as an “elder” goes far beyond holding a religious 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 church 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 whom our Lord wants to shepherd His followers, 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.

These are the categories for whom this book is written—especially those who are part of a faith family that has few or no biblically qualified elders.

In Bible times everyone understood that a good and effective 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.

Who is the Father recruiting to join Him in His restoration? **Everyday people** who will permit our Lord Jesus to shine through them:

“At that time Jesus answered and said, ‘I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes’”
(Matthew 11:25).

In these pages you will find a composite picture of scriptural elders, that is, shepherd/teachers who represent our heavenly Father in His compassionate care for His children.

And you will discern why strong, loving elders — shepherd/teachers — are needed so desperately today.

Chapter 1

Paganism's Assault on the Hebraic Foundations

Let's start with a surprise.

The clergy class that prevails throughout the Christianity of today does not find its basis in the Bible.

The professional clergy class that so widely predominates Christianity does not have its origin in God's Word. The role of clergy was adapted from the *pagan practices of the Greeks and Romans* who depended on priests to stand between them and their gods as intermediaries. The very concept of a professional clergy class got its philosophical underpinnings from the teachings of Plato in the fifth century BC. And, bad ideas don't fade away — they just mutate.

During the second century, Christianity became infiltrated by 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."

To those who gave way to this unscriptural way of thinking, lofty spirituality was an ideal, a goal worth forsaking all other values to attain. But that meant the earthly concerns of temporal life (food, shelter, vocation) were vulgar and common, even though they were needed for existence.

Dualism stood in stark contrast to the *Hebraic world view* — the biblical reality 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;" and joined together 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 tried through their writings to *reconcile Platonic thought with the Bible*. This merger led to devaluing life in the here and now, and created an unbiblical "relationship" with a faraway God that was mystical and virtually unattainable.

Dualism set apart an exalted clergy class who follow a higher “spiritual calling.”

The dualist separation of clergy from any other followers of Jesus 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 who are engaged in secular vocations.

God, however, makes no such distinction between the sacred and the secular, because *everything* 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 centuries after Jesus’ ascension *despised manual labor* as degrading. The **Hebraic** culture, in contrast, *valued the worth* of manual trade. Even before the Fall, Adam and Eve worked in the Garden.

Even rabbis 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. They were set apart for the purposes of the one true God and understood that He hated compromise with worldly pagan ways.

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 Christianity 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. But personal withdrawal contradicted the family and community participation which exemplified the Hebraic outworking of faith as described in the Newer 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 Newer Testament, Origen realized that he could *allegorize* the Older Testament away from what he considered an “earthy” perspective. The original intent and meaning of the original authors was therefore abandoned. For example, the graphic description of marital love in the Song of Songs was allegorized into the relationship between Christ and the Church—and eager theological students from all over flocked to Alexandria to be infused with these Hellenist 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 these Hellenist-slanted writings became venerated as highly as the Scriptures, thereby nullifying any allegiance to stay true to what God actually intended for His people. 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 was greater than the authority of the Scriptures*. That meant 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 which were based upon the Scriptures alone, was restored in Christianity.

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 religious rituals which required 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 the wine cup as our Lord’s earliest followers had enjoyed as brothers and sisters in Him.

Dualism viewed bread and wine as too “earthly” to be the body and blood of Jesus; the *physical elements had to be spiritualized*. In this way a *sacrament* was born — a ritual practice 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 the ***communal priesthood of believers*** which Peter had emphasized as the role of every person in Christ (1Peter 2:5,9).

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

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 Christianity but in the Greek teaching tradition.



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

Chapter 2

Evil Nicolaitanism Subjugates Our Father's Children

Most Christians today are so accustomed to the clergy/laity distinction in their congregations that they are amazed or even angered when it is questioned. *Nicolaitanism* is a religious system of *control and power*, a ruling 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. So the Nicolaitan system **subjugates the people** by making "laity" out of them through raising up others who lord their position 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.

But 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 themselves 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 faith communities in the Book of Revelation, two of these groups are confronted with the issue of the Nicolaitans. The letter to the Ephesians 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 faith family 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 throughout Christianity today to *expose and cast off* that pernicious Nicolaitan influence. Clergy interfere with what our Lord envisioned for His followers, so He must oppose them. 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 He has handed over westernized Christendom.

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 (Yom Kippur) 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.

Aren't we who follow Jesus in the US today facing a similar need to eliminate a tradition which has blocked the enactment of *all believers* to serve as priests to His Father? 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? Because of the *Nicolaitan subjugation*!

This spirit's control over much of Christianity keeps Christ's followers from carrying out our Father's plans for us. Certain clues are evident when the Nicolaitan spirit is ruling:

- You discover that you are looking up to people you consider to be “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.
- *Ecclesiastical positions* in your faith family are reinforcing your spiritual infancy and irresponsibility — a “Care Pastor” who visits the sick on behalf of (and maybe instead of) your faith family, 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 on their special spiritual anointing. In either situation, the nature of Jesus is violated, because in position and anointing He came *to serve*, not to usurp.

- 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 accountability before God.

Rule #3 Bolstered Nicolaitanism



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’.”

An unfortunate result of applying this particular rule was that *Nicolaitan-supported ecclesiastical positions* were reinforced within Christendom. Bancroft's Rule #3 perpetuated a clergy class that had been neither intended nor indicated in the Newer 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. By maintaining the word “Church” with its *structural hierarchical* meaning, this rule of interpretation prevented a return to the more relational Hebraic understanding which was encompassed in “church.”

The earliest followers of Jesus related to one another as family. They congregated as *biological and spiritual families*.

Please note:

The Greek word, *ekklesia*, which is commonly translated “church”, literally means the “called-out ones”. The “church” is extended spiritual family who have been called out by Jesus to be His family of ambassadors (see 2 Corinthians 5:20) on earth and in heaven.

The church are those whom our Lord *called out from the world* as His own. So “Church” refers not to a place—“Let’s go to church” — but to God’s people—“We are the church!”

Paul penned a number of his letters to the “called-out ones” whose primary spiritual support was the loadbearing fellowship they shared in a fellowship of homes as extended spiritual family. In a sense, the tribal leader Abraham was the first “called-out one,” since God had called him out of Chaldea to the land of Canaan. Abraham trusted and obeyed God as the “called-out ones” today are called to do. In Jesus, His followers are a “spiritual tribe”.

Now let’s consider one of the examples of anti-Semitism that was 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). The name *James* never appears in either testament. The Hebrew name Jacob is translated by New Testament Greek as *Jacobus* — ie. Jacob! But the antiSemitic King *James* had to be appeased, so the name Jacob disappeared.

Keep in mind that “James” is addressing Jewish believers who are dispersed among the nations. That’s why 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 Newer Testaments instead of the more precise word “*shepherd*.” By this substitution 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 the more accurate 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 in this verse is placed 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* which are 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.” For instance, in Psalm 23 the related Hebrew word *ro’iy* (roh’-ee), translated “shepherd,” vibrantly depicts the *personal devotion* of the herdsman toward his charges in very specific ways:

“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” references appear in Zechariah 10:2: *“Therefore 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 substituting the word “pastor” for shepherd in certain select passages, a **clergy class** has *unscripturally been perpetuated in Christianity*. Regrettably, the *true shepherds* whom our Father has called to “pastor” His children in the intimate manner He has prescribed are most often prevented from doing so by clergy professionals who have no biblical basis for the position they occupy.



Additionally, to undergird a clergy/laity distinction in the Newer 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-mayn), meaning “shepherd,” been translated as such, this passage would have kept continuity with the other Newer 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.”

Chapter 3

We Must Undo the Effects of Dualism And Rule #3

Buoyed by the dualism of the *Greek philosophers* and the fourth century *Roman organizational framework*, ecclesiastical leadership 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 Volume 3 of *Restoring the Early Church*, free from Apple Books or from our [website](#), for further discussion of Greco/Roman intrusion.)

Because of the anti-Semitic stance taken by religious leaders in the second and third centuries, many of the Hebraic foundations which were 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 time of Jesus on earth. That the Holy Spirit had inspired our Lord's first called-out ones to keep these practices so that they might be unified and mature is evident in Paul's letter to the followers of Jesus in Ephesus. 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 **shepherd/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*. This person not only shares the Gospel, but gathers together a faith family which he will leave in the *responsible care of the elders*. Timothy and Titus were both evangelists and faith family 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* or *nabi*/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/teacher**. (Heb. *zaken*/Gk. *poimen*) was a *gray-haired man of leadership* who imparted wisdom and counsel to a specific group of people. As a teacher (Heb. *rab*/Gk. *didaskalos*) he 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 laboring in speaking and teaching**” (1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17).

Mike was a counselor to religious leaders for many years in southern New England. Many of the men who occupied the position of “pastor” were really *evangelists*, faith family planters of the synagogue/first century variety. Many of these men experienced difficulties in their ministries because God’s call for them was to share the Gospel, plant the faith family, 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 individuals 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 in Christianity for centuries. Remember, the disavowal of Hebraic practices and the severance of Hebraic roots occurred primarily after Greek philosophers, errantly called “Church Fathers,” converted to Christianity.

The writings of such men as John Chrysostom, Justin Martyr, and Origen not only introduced Greek philosophical practices and thought into Christianity, 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 Christians 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 descendant 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 Christian persecution of the Jews. (See *Restoring the Early Church* for more on this.) Only in recent decades have

several Christian denominations repented for branding the Jews as “Christ-killers.”

It is difficult for Christians today to believe that God could relegate Christianity 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 in 1989, over 1 million Russian Jews have returned to the land of their forefathers! That’s almost one-sixth of Israel’s current population. To put it in perspective, imagine if a flood of fifty 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 earliest followers of our Lord Jesus 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 Christians 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 Newer 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 Older Testament. We propose that the *pastoring role of elders* was our Lord's plan for His followers 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 context and intent* of particular verses and passages as they were understood when they were being recorded.

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 of it:

"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 Christianity has inherited must be addressed in light of biblical precedents. 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 *revisionist* framework?

Revisionism, in contrast to apperception, *restates historical truth and facts to manipulate them to fit current, preferred social or cultural standards.*

A major attempt at revision in Christianity 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 ecclesiastical primacy as the Bishop of Rome. In so doing, Irenaeus ascribed *ecclesiastical power to Peter* which the *Bible did not support.*

Not long after, revisionist writings and councils convinced the religious leaders to adapt for its own structure the *autocratic system of the Roman government* with which it became enmeshed. Revisionism within Christendom has had a profound effect down through the centuries, reflecting customs, practices, and organization which are far different than 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 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 man-made religious 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 the difference between **apperception** and **revisionism** was shared by Dr. John Garr of Restoration Foundation.

Apperception

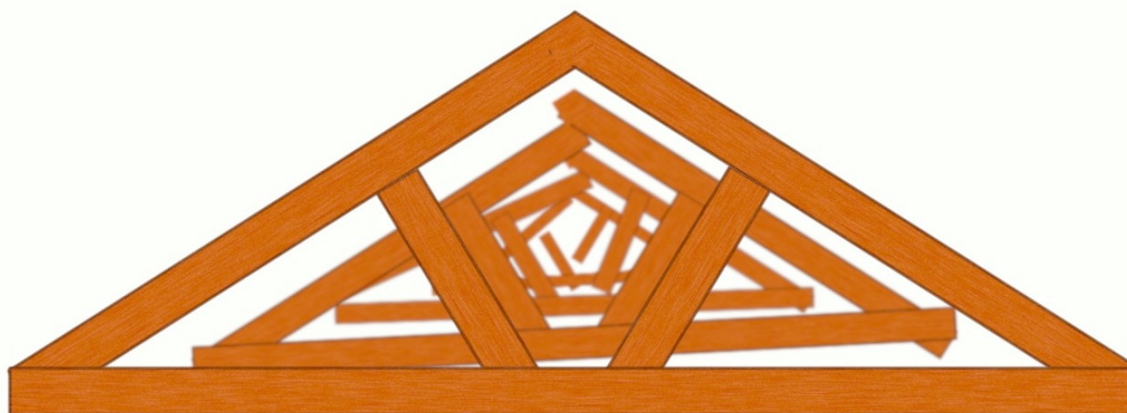
A man sets about to build a house. He carefully measures out a pattern for a roof joist and cuts it, then uses that joist as the pattern for the second one. For each and every joist, he *uses his original as the pattern*.



This describes *apperception*—going back to the pattern of the Word for every application and religious practice.

Revisionism

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 His children the practice of *shepherding by elders* which blessed our Hebraic forefathers. Shouldn't followers of Christ clearly grasp how the role of shepherding people was understood in the Hebrew Bible, the Older Testament? Ask yourself:

- How was the function of elder understood by Paul and the other Jewish believers of the first century?
- Was it really our Lord's intent that pastoring by elders evolve into the clergy hierarchy that is so prevalent throughout Christianity today?
- Did our Father allow pagan practices to be adapted from the Greeks and Romans because of Christianity's arrogance toward the Jews?
- Is the current system of clergy dominance a direct result of the Nicolaitan spirit which is warned about in the Book of Revelation?

For free articles we've written which expand on the unbiblical role of clergy and our Lord's chosen way of equipping His followers and extending His Kingdom, see:

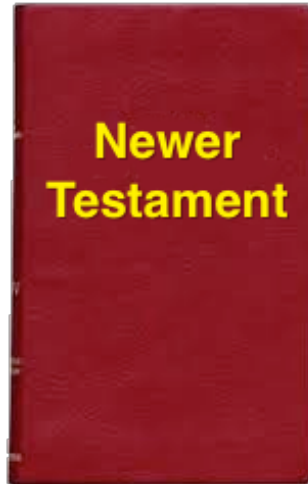
The Unsteeped Church – Upholding the Dignity of God's Children By Restoring Self-Supporting Faith Communities

I Hate Nicolaitanism

God's Clergy-less Kingdom

Chapter 4

A Shepherd/Teacher = Elder = Overseer



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 shepherd/teachers, what type of men were Paul and Barnabas seeking to lead these faith communities?

Fortunately for believers today, Paul is quite explicit in listing 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 family over to the elders/overseers/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 Newer 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 witness of Christ's sufferings and one who will also share in the glory to be revealed: Shepherd God's flock that is among you, 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** to **shepherd** the church of God”* (Acts 20:17,28).

The *same individuals* are being addressed by three different words. These words refer to **older men** who are 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 a shepherd/teacher, 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 family**.

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 the ones leading you, 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 among our Lord's earliest followers. 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**.

Accusations Against a Shepherd/Teacher

By what process did the first century called-out ones 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 a shepherd/teacher 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 reluctant brother-in-law cited earlier from the Older 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 a shepherd/teacher **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 fatherly authority as shepherd/teachers 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 family: *"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 younger 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 family 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 of Jesus.

Chapter 5

Shepherding By Elders (Zakens)



Proven leadership was key for the men of Israel who aspired 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 set their sights on. **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. 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 apt 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.” 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 11:16,24,25).

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 family 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 those who first put their trust in our Lord Jesus. His followers are 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. Shepherd the called-out ones 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 family 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 are seldom aware of 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 applause (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 Newer 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 Place of Honor in the Family and Faith Family

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.”

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 which are used over 250 times in the Newer 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 Newer Testament!

Just as each synagogue was autonomous, so too was each Newer Testament faith family—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 faith family communities.

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 family (see 1 Timothy 5:3-10). This **sense of connectedness** cries out for restoration. Families today, even within Christendom, 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 Family

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 exceptionally high divorce rate in Christendom 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 family 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 family places great emphasis on understanding the processes that are 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 family 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 encouraged 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 that is led by qualified mature men is absolutely vital for the ***accountability and encouragement*** that are so needed to develop future leadership.

Chapter 6

Shepherds/Teachers Care for Father's Children

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, we 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. The needs of sheep go on and on! 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, “For 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. These seasons of 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 encourage; 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 & 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 compassion and 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 faith communities 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.”

In the early 1980s a 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 people in a fellowship of homes 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 family grow larger than the shepherds can personally render account for to God.

Regrettably, some faith communities which are led by elders tend toward rule by oligarchy, or absolute rule by a few. This impersonal system offers control with *minimal* personal sacrifice. Through this type of closed leadership a small group can direct the affairs of a faith family despite inadequate personal knowledge of each individual in the flock.

Yet God is looking for more than well-run religious corporations. He is judging the so-called “shepherds” whose hearts are *not folded with their sheep*.

To Lead Is To Be A Role Model

👉 **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.***”

In contrast, the *converted Greek philosophers* introduced the concept of education based on *disseminating content*. The character and experience of the teacher were unimportant, a close 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 our Lord's earliest followers! The way a man lived reflected his true measure. The writer to the Hebrews reaffirmed this understanding: "*Remember the ones leading you, 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).

Hebraic 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 shepherd/teachers 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 shepherd/teachers 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)

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 David was anointed by the elders that he 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 would 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 family. 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 continually 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) actually a *culling process* by which the man himself chose to be culled? Look through the Newer 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).

Chapter 7

Shepherd/Teachers Have Our Father's Loving 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 a shepherd/teacher 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 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 Newer Testament by *agape* (ah-gah'pay), the Greek equivalent of *ahav*. In 1 Corinthians chapter 13 the whole issue of *agape* love is so important that Paul could state that *without it, “I am nothing.”*

Gifts, 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 also emphasized the essential quality of sacrificial love to the Galatians, who were besieged by agitators teaching them a legalistic perversion of the Torah:

*“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 self-sacrificial 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 *right heart* in his leaders, the heart of the Father. In contrast, 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*. Every command, statute, instruction and prophecy in the Hebrew Scriptures is based on the issue of love:

*“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* that is willing to represent his heavenly Father. 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 own spiritual fatherhood as he takes on the burdens of all his family of called-out ones: *“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 His own character as He describes shepherding from a father's heart perspective:

"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 shepherd/teachers 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. Smiley 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 Smiley was missing. It was lambing season and Mike suspected she must have wandered off to have her lambs. Frantically he prayed that God would forgive him for his hardness of heart toward that sheep and allow him to find her.

Suddenly, down in the woods he spotted faint wisps of steam: newborns! With streaming eyes he rushed down the hill and there Smiley 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 shepherd/teachers are very special men of God!

Suffering Is Indispensable

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 a shepherd/teacher. 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 shepherd/teachers should be training up each person in 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, shepherd/teachers 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 a shepherd/teacher 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.

Having Our 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 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 which 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 family*, not just the leadership. Busyness can create a short-sightedness that robs both the shepherd/teachers 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 family 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.

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 family, 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 religious leaders, Mike would occasionally ask the elders of a faith community, "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 Older 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 congregations 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.

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 8

Authority Is Our Father's Means to Develop Trust

The word “authority” can conjure up all sorts of images, either positive or negative depending on your framework. But 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. Within Christianity leaders even use the Scriptures as a series of regulations to control the flock. But authoritarianism will never produce responsible spiritual growth or mature spiritual discipleship.

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 includes these 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 within Christianity, the biblical lines of jurisdiction and authority have become blurred.

Among the faith families of the first followers of our Lord, **shepherd/teachers pastored the men >> husbands and fathers “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 religious establishment 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 family 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 religious 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 clergy 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 and changes men not at all.

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 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).

God 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, Mike 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 realm of 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: *"Let yourself be persuaded by the ones leading you and submit to them. They watch on behalf of your souls as those who will be rendering an account, in order that they may do this with joy, and not groaning, for this would be profitless to you"* (Hebrews 13:17, literal translation).

This verse encompasses two areas of responsibility. First, the Lord commands all His followers to defer 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 also 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.

Home fellowship families which become too large foster impersonal forms of control. Rather than leading and nurturing brothers and sisters, the elders see themselves as managing a group.

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 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 (e.g. John 5:19-23). 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 having been 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 Is A Crucial 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 married.

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).

And think of 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, the devil 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**, which meant learning to be **servant-leaders**. Jesus therefore reiterated the difference between **His Father's method of rule** and the **system of rule which 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 authority 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. Shepherd/teachers who are caring for the flock should zealously desire to **draw close to their Father** so that their pattern of motive indeed mirrors His heart.

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

Because spiritual leaders are called to see themselves as servants, an indicator of **mutual submission** to one another for the good of the flock will be **unanimity — agreement out of one heart and mind**. 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 guiding and serving people who **willingly follow**. In our book *Restoring the Early Church* we mentioned two questions we've asked people within congregations and fellowships of homes:

- 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 you would ask to **do an activity with**.

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 who is willing to follow his guidance. 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 Entails The 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** those who stray from God’s ways. Discipline covers a wide range that extends in degree from instructing in the way of truth, to a mild chiding, to admonishment, to expulsion and excommunication. All of these are pointed toward repentance and restoration of the offender.

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 concept 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 shepherd/teachers who are serving you in your faith family: *“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 the will of those in authority over him. When a willful spirit keeps the child from recognizing the importance of obedience, God's Word again has a remedy: *"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 shepherd/teachers:

"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 highest regard in love because of the work they are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:12,13, JNT).

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 shepherd/teachers 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 help them alter their course.

Those who receive biblical advice, counsel, or rebuke from their shepherd/teachers and mentors should render account by **putting into practice 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 Is Responsible For Character Development

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 a man 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 God’s commands. 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).*

But no matter what rebellious, self-obsessed course our society embraces, our Lord has ordained **corrective processes** to restore reconciliation and order:

*"All Scripture [Paul is referring to the Hebrew Scriptures, the Older Testament] 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).*

Godly Authority Is Developed At 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. (And in more recent years, broken homes have proliferated.) In a very short period of time something important has been lost. We’ve failed to show our children how to **succeed us in a lasting and godly 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 recognize and practice God's purposes for marriage and child-rearing**.

Much of what has always been considered parental responsibility has become the domain of schools, including Sunday schools. A *father's leadership*—his God-given authority to lead and to serve, and his 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. The Hebrew Abraham was a man surrounded by a culture as pagan as ours. Why did God choose this man in particular? Again, 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 of righteousness 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 **rejected 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 is the motivator for Christ-like qualities to be matured. Slowly some sectors of Christianity are 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 proper 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 family, 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 unchanging nature of God’s infallible ways: *“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 the dignity or worth of those who are being served by their head—look at the example of the relationship between Jesus and His Father.

Some of the verses which 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 a 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 which are required for family leadership.

Paul addresses the issue of respect this way: *“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 by the man. But 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!

Following Jesus As Lord Requires Your Deference

What is your personal responsibility to those who serve 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 a nation (see Lamentations 4:16,5:12). This culture's **exaltation of youthfulness** 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). Note that **pleasant consequences** are promised to those who learn this facet of obedience early.

Peter specifically addresses the need for character development to include deference:

"Likewise younger men, submit yourselves to older men. 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).

In other words, 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 we 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 clearly 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 our **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. Deference also keeps you from protecting yourself from potential emotional hurt. Instead, deference enables you to **"die daily"** and to choose 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 our book, *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 Dad 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. And a few years later, when Dad’s spirit left him as he passed from this life, Mike was holding his hand.

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 have people 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 person 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 mind.

If your 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 related 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 our 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).

Jesus reveals to us today a reality which His first followers understood 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).

When you refuse to forgive others, you're proving 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 essence of deference**.

Chapter 10

Wisdom Is Essential For A Shepherd/Teacher

Obtaining wisdom should be the life-long goal of those who would shepherd our 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 through His grace at work in you.

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 that is 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!

“And 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 good 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.”

Sadly, 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 shepherd/teachers 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 shepherd/teachers must remove them before others follow their example of **unrepentant folly**.

Biblical Discussion Is 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 a shepherd/teacher 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 shepherd/teachers were so highly esteemed, it was an honor to meet their needs.

The willingness for a man to **discuss his plans** with others before he acts is an important litmus test for spiritual shepherds. Wisdom that’s been 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 people **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 in the pattern of Jesus.

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 their 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.

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 followers of our Lord Jesus, 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 free 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 11

A Shepherd's Vigilance Keeps the Wolves Out

Shepherd/teachers are **watchmen**, men who are sure of the truth and courageous enough to **stand firm** in the face of ungodly opposition. To carry out this assignment in the pattern of David, they need a **shepherd's vigilance** to nurture and care for the flock and a **soldier's vigilance** to protect those under their care.

Constant watchfulness is the mandate for those who shepherd 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 faith communities have also been mauled by demonic wolves who try to shake the very faith of the sheep? That heart of vigilant watchfulness motivated Paul to declare this sober warning to the Ephesian elders:

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd 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 drag away disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30).

Some individuals in leadership can fool the rest of the flock by their personal charisma, deep knowledge of the Bible, or worldly position and power. These factors, however, are not the qualities that make up the **fatherly watchfulness of a shepherd/teacher**.

What a huge difference there is between the individual who is overseeing the faith community as his **occupation or obligation** and one who is **wholeheartedly devoting himself** to training up reproductive, confident followers of Jesus! Our Lord Himself addressed this distinction:

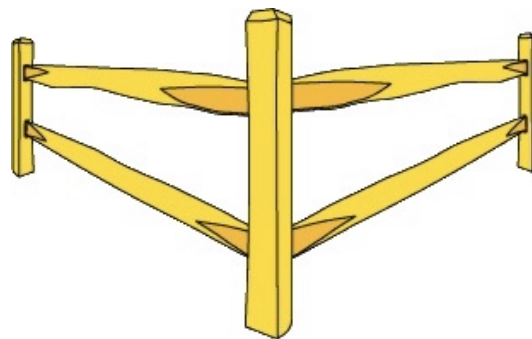


“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it” (John 10:11,12).

Wolves of **deception and division** are lurking on every side, and Satan can easily attack untended flocks. A good shepherd needs all the grace, 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 against 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 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 faith family off God’s course or subtly persuade them toward heresy.

Spiritual warfare is raging around each believer and faith family. 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’s 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 indwelling Holy Spirit can accomplish this transformation.

Shepherd/teachers 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 family learning to be **spiritually alert**—in a state of military readiness for spiritual warfare? 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 family if you are to make effective inroads into the kingdom of darkness.

For example, your faith family 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 family are gifted in evangelism. They just **love** to share the Gospel on the job or wherever they go! The Lord might nudge your collective family 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 family 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 more on this topic.)

One aspect of shepherd/teacher 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 family 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 in Christ**. People 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 faith communities to be **on alert** against the work and workers of the evil one. Nothing can devastate a faith family more than **strife and division** in its midst. If you've been around Christianity 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 faith family 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 among our sheep flock was painfully brought home to us many years ago. One summer we planned a vacation. A single woman who had been at the retreat center numerous 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!

A Shepherd Provides Protection And Guidance

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 **collective 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:

"Anyone 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 well 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 collectively, 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 **grateful obedience** to their God in the way that He had commanded them.

Time and again, however, 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 family can also suffer grievously.

Father’s Shepherds Must Have His *Rhema*

If you aspire to serve as a shepherd/teacher 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 **eagerness 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 of humanity has frailties that fall short of Christ-likeness. 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** as a loving servant leader, he is preparing himself to walk in leadership of a faith family. 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 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 family: "*Where there is no revelation, the people **cast off restraint***" (Proverbs 29:18).

Unrestrained people slip backwards from sinful thoughts to "secret" sins to blatant, open rebellion. Shepherd/teachers 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*:

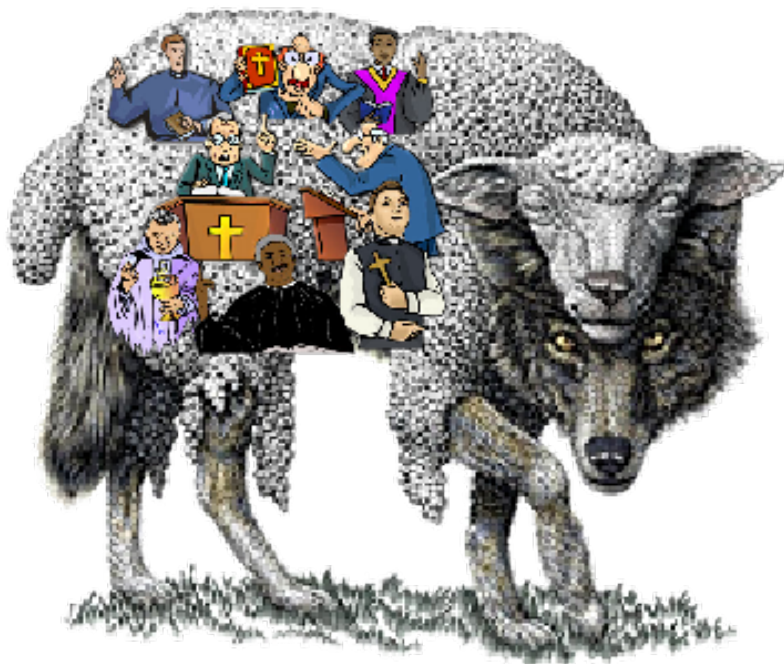
*"Shepherd God's flock that is under your care, serving as **overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not exercising lordship over those in your care, but becoming examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory**" (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, make sure that holding on to your financial remuneration never supersedes 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? Think about the inner motives of leaders who **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 Father's heart toward the sheep is impure and will eventually descend 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 which are **exalted by the world** can spell doom for a faith family. The “rain” and “fruit” which are 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 shepherd/teachers 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 “worshipers” 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 12

Collegiality Exemplifies Father's Shepherds

Nobody greater than and nobody less than.



Shepherd/teachers are a **reflection of a heavenly Father Who shows no partiality**. These men of compassion and wisdom practice **collegiality**: a Spirit-breathed companionship and cooperation among themselves as colleagues who share a mutual responsibility.

Their mutual regard for each other and their servant-based cooperation demonstrate that they are brothers in Christ who are together in their determination to serve their faith families. It's through their **caring leadership and cooperation** with each other that Father testifies to His Spirit's work among the faith families they are serving.

One way to describe the cooperation among shepherds and their respective faith families is to picture faith communities as flocks of geese in flight.



The earliest followers of our Lord were Jewish and raised within a patriarchal society. Family members were accustomed to seeking counsel and direction from the family elders. The typical Jewish farming village at the time of Jesus consisted

of 10 or 15 close-knit families who depended on each other. They were like one large family, and what affected one affected the other. Their relational dependence was vital for their survival.

In a similar way, **relational connections were linked** within the gatherings of Jews who first followed our Lord. Today you could envision their faith families operating like formations led by shepherd/teachers who were affiliated with each other through relationships.

Emanating from their Hebraic roots, relational connectedness among our Lord's first followers could be most accurately depicted as a **spiritual tribe**. It was within the small, clan-sized groups of home fellowships that individuals and families received the mutual support and accountability that was needed for successful Kingdom living.

Relational connectedness was the hallmark of Israel and our earliest forefathers in Christ. As was the Hebrew way, the **elders** were the ones who were leading these faith families. The elders knew personally the men for whom they were immediately responsible, and purposely prepared younger men among them to succeed them in leading when they matured.

Faith Families Flying Formation

Whether it's the military or historic Israel or in faith families, you'll always find the need for succession to train up leaders who will serve with compassion as they lead with wisdom. Preparation of leaders involves two ongoing elements:

- A **promotion** of leadership. Men of maturity and wisdom were recognized and given greater responsibility.
- A **succession** of current leadership. Younger men were trained to succeed the current leaders as the latter were promoted or died.

In a fellowship of homes each individual is **relationally connected** to another person or persons with whom he or she has a personal association. A person who is discipling someone in the "relational formation" will have a closer relationship with that individual than will the others in the formation.

New people enter a "fellowship formation" through their **relationship with someone else** in the flight. Several of these formations may "fly together" for encouragement and mutual support.

A fellowship of homes can also be viewed as **formations of aircraft**. Each formation consists of a **lead plane** with **other planes flying in position** behind it. **Additional planes** can then assume their positions in succession.

For example, in the diagram on the next page, each grouping (HF) represents a fellowship of homes (A,B,C,D,E) that is led by an **elder or elders (1)**.

The shepherd/teachers are discipling those (2,3) who are discipling others (3,4) — individuals who are flying in sequence behind them. In this manner the elders are **preparing for successors**.

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 spiritual maturity**, the **development of shepherding characteristics**, and a desire to **serve by leading**.

KEY:

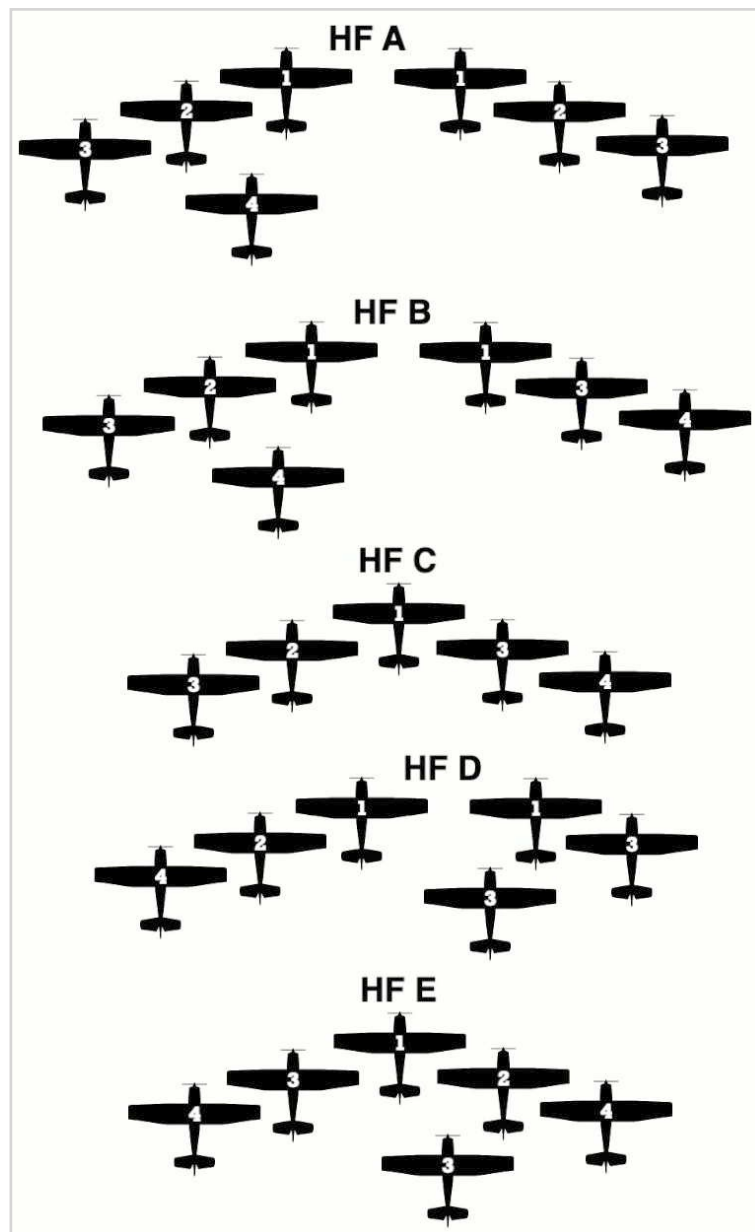
HF = A fellowship of homes

(1) Qualified Elder — Shepherd/Teacher

(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 Fellowship of Homes A, B, D, or E by discipling others, he may form another home gathering with those who are flying formation on him. (Note that Fellowship of Homes C doesn't have anyone yet who is discipling others.)

There is no fixed pattern of how the multiplication of gatherings occurs. But 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 classic *Twelve O'Clock High* starring Gregory Peck.)

Each flight (home fellowship gathering) is served by an elder or elders who maintain relationships on behalf of their group with other fellowships of homes. The home fellowship 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 fellowship gatherings. These relationships are a **seven-day-a-week commitment** to each other. This is a **faith family** that is based upon knowing and living out common biblical convictions.

Intrinsic to the whole process of relational responsibility and commitment is **awareness**. A shepherd/teacher 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 fellowships. He not only shepherded a particular fellowship of homes but represented the people in it with the shepherds of the other home fellowships. Those in our fellowship of homes had numerous contacts with each other during the week, both **scheduled and spontaneous**. Each Wednesday our fellowship family 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 fellowship of homes grew in size, Mike mentored two of the men to prepare them to shepherd two other flocks when we multiplied. Thus we had three home fellowships 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 fellowships of homes of this particular congregation met each Sunday for worship together. Those in our particular home faith family showed up over an hour early so 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.

Each Fellowship Of Homes May Differ In Purpose

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 be 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 that 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 of homes 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 family may differ drastically from those within 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 that are present in a fellowship family can tell you why God has brought this particular group together.

A Fellowship Of Homes In A Neighborhood

“Flying formation” with one another requires **close contact**. A fellowship of homes 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 family, 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 fellowship of homes 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 locale is open to your friendship.

Your initial neighborhood contacts may be just 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 fellowships of homes expand, every neighborhood will find a gathering of Christ-followers who are prayerfully taking responsibility for the souls there who are heading for a Christ-less 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 fellowship of homes can function separately with their own shepherds. And, 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 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 followers of our Lord Jesus in Ephesus were connected 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 Fellowship Of Homes Engages In Spiritual Warfare

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 of Christ to all people**.

If you are a shepherd/teacher or almost-elder, your focus must be fixed on the power of Jesus through His Spirit 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 family 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 combined 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 **spiritual war for souls**. Your entry into that battle calls you **to fight, to win, and to hold on to** what you have conquered by grace in the Name of Jesus. This is your biblical responsibility.

Shepherd/teachers who are serving the interests of the Lord in His love must equip the soldiers in their faith family to **confront the enemy of souls**. 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 family fellowship.

Remember, the primary reason to have fellowship in the face-to-face environment of a home is to be able to **uphold righteousness** through repentance and one-anothering. The earliest followers of our Lord Jesus understood that our heavenly Father **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 Christendom 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 family, 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 will and desires in order to please their Lord.
- By upholding communal righteousness within the perimeters, their **prayers will be answered**.

It's 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 or internet websites, 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 family: *“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. But **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 family to cause grievous trouble in the whole flock.

The leaders of a certain missionary organization became very concerned because **half** 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 live in harmony.

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

- 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.

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 religious leaders, one told him, "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 **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 **refuses to repent, to love, to trust, or to forgive**.

Similarly, 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** within Christianity which **perverts 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 through His Spirit.

Vigilant shepherd/teachers can discern three practices by which demonic spirits are **deluding Christians today**:

(1) **False prophets** *manipulate* forecasts of the future for personal gain or recognition. Some claim special insight into “end time” scenarios. Yet Jesus warns, *“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).

- *“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 **fully 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 carefully weighed: *“Woe to you, you make a person twice as much a son of hell as you are”* (Matthew 23:15).

Our Father uses suffering to **develop the character of His Son Jesus** in His children. Through His indwelling Spirit our past hurts are altered to **transform us**. **Our perspective is changed** to be able to see our suffering as His “marks of ownership.” Those who can accept this truth have been shown the beauty that is born out of their suffering, as well as the hope and patient endurance that Father has brought about through the pain (see Romans 5:3-5).

(3) **Contrived worship**, especially through certain seductive or rousing music and forceful incantations, conjures a **soulish mood** like pagans produce. 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 worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks”* (John 4:23).

•“*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 humbly 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: “*That 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 shepherd/teachers 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 also 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 person 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** in lifestyle and the **power of prayer** to release God's intervention. If he is diligent and vigilant, then his faith family 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 in Jesus 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 family 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 family.

Keep in mind that bringing unbelievers into your faith family 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 and hears about **Jesus working in and through you**. It's those personal times of sharing outside of the fellowship that will prepare your curious friend to become a sincere seeker.

When an 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 fellowship of homes 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 family 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 family 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 in the name of Jesus **renounce the spirits** that interfere with Father’s purposes. Consider the same plan for your workplace and school.

4. Destroy Satan’s perimeter by multiplying your faith family.

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 fellowships of homes**. Shepherds need to be **purposely training successors** to protect, train, nurture, and equip the new flocks.

As your fellowships of homes 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

of homes 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.

How To Maintain Committed Relationship

“**This is my family**” is the core understanding that each shepherd and individual in your faith family 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 fellowship of homes. 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.

Don't Spill Your Guts In Public

Do you remember when sensitivity groups became popular in the American therapy culture? 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 fellowships of homes have found themselves unwittingly replicating sensitivity groups in people publicly blurting out their problems and past painful experiences.

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 family. 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. So instead of encountering spiritual family, the children feel expendable.

A fellowship of homes gathering is **not** designed to be a group therapy session. 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 or sister: Gatherings of extended spiritual family are times of grateful 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. 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 they can dump them on the faith family, 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** with others in the extended spiritual family. 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 family 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 exploration of Scriptures together create a give-and-take humility that is conducive to the growth of Christ-like 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 or texting** each other than **talking with** each other. People share **facts and information**, in brief tweets and texts, 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 communication 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 family demands your utmost concern and involvement!

Avoid Disagreements Between the Sexes

Any discussion with your faith family 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 family 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 don’t 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 faith family** who can come alongside her on a consistent and caring basis.

Indicators Of A Healthy Fellowship Of Homes

Check out the **spiritual health** of your faith family 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 family and to reach those who have yet to follow Jesus. **Non-discretionary time**, such as work, sleep, and school, represents **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 family 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 shepherd/teacher(s) to be the only ones who can minister God’s grace. That’s why all in a faith family are called to serve!

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 family 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 a shepherd/teacher fails to see appreciation and love in a woman’s eyes when she speaks with or about her husband, he should privately **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 family should center

around **application or clarification** of scripture texts rather than just talking about Bible content.

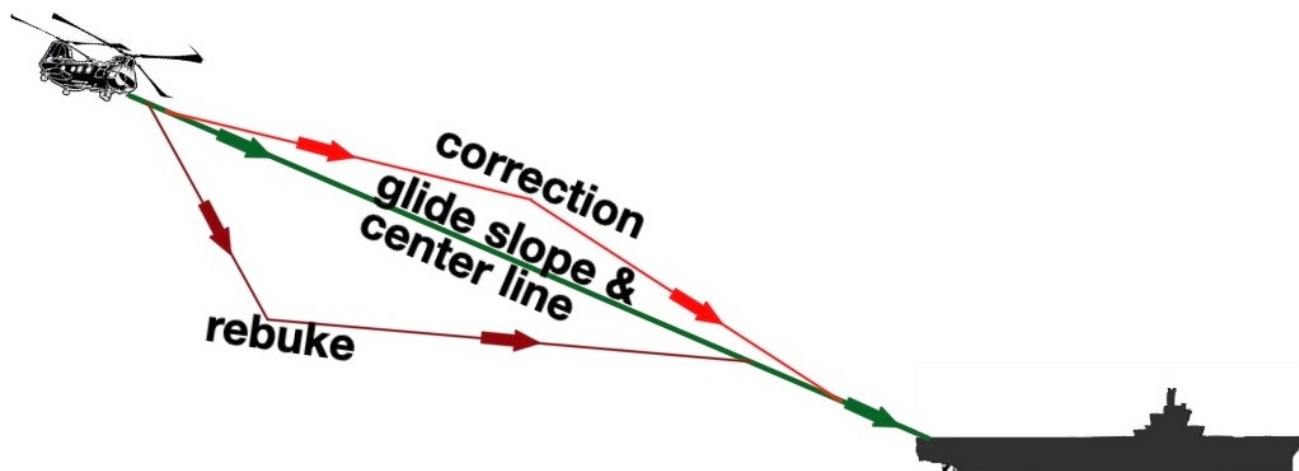
Each extended-family member will then have some spiritual nugget or question to contribute so that no one individual will be in a position to dominate the gathering with a lengthy monologue.

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 was a line representing 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.



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 everything went perfectly, “on glide slope” were the words the pilot would hear until he reached the flight deck. But conditions normally aren't 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 glide slope.**” 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. In contrast, 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 family**. 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 much like a stop sign. It’s required when we are **off glide slope** in order to stop us from going further astray and endangering ourselves. A

shepherd/teacher, like the radar controller, can see a 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 9:8).

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" is similar to a warning sign. It reflects the **words that are vital** — instruction given before a situation gets to the rebuke level.



Timely corrections help the one being disciplined to **avoid danger** and/or to develop the character development the Lord desires him to achieve. Without timely corrections, or having to hear too many rebukes, a disciple will become frustrated and give up altogether. And a person who is properly instructed needs to be commended 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!”

Shepherd/Teachers Must Look Back for Their 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 Christianity which has vacillated **from authoritarianism to anarchy**. But our 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 Newer 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 what’s taking place.

The **restoration message** stands in opposition to this spirit. The **nameless and faceless followers of Jesus** who radiate His countenance will be the ones our 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 and ineffectual for salvation**.

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 **Older Testament — the same Scripture which Jesus knew and spoke of** — 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 turns away from sin and walks 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 follower of Jesus who is indwelt by the Spirit of God **continues to repent** at the Spirit's prompting when they sin. That's so they can then by grace **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 all who follow Jesus as Lord to be patient and to hold onto their loving trust in Him. 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 faith families in the dark days to come. God's command to *Restoration Ministries International* was to **share this message of restoration**. Other followers of Jesus are being prepared and called to **plant the faith families**, and still others to lead them as **biblical shepherd/teachers**.

As restoration truths are being revealed, prepare yourself to fully follow your Lord by doing your part. First, make sure that you have **embraced the true Gospel of Jesus**, the 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 **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**. They viewed themselves **collectively** as a people set apart by God. In fact, their very identity was based on an **interconnectedness** with all other followers of Jesus.

Communal awareness is a critical feature of faith families. 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 family 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).

Yet in this **self-dominated** culture, 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 family 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 today. See our article, "[The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation](#)."

Initially, as people embrace the restored Gospel, new faith families 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 with our Lord's earliest followers, 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 follower of our Lord Jesus, the faith family can work in a coordinated manner.

As our Father prepares them, shepherd/teachers will be raised up for **fatherly role-modeling and leadership**. Among the earliest faith families, 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.

Christianity 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**.

The priority need 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 family live

out Scripture on **behalf of one another locally**, yet maintain an ever-present concern and regard for the collective **Body of Christ around the world**.

The Right of First Refusal

The percentage of the population represented by **people over forty or fifty** 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! 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 being shepherd/teachers of faith families. 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!**

For further insight into the role of the shepherd-teacher, see our video series:

[Jesus In Your Home Bytesize](#), Fellowship In Homes (videos 90 thru 139)

Or, use the parallel pdf lessons, [Discussing How To Restore The Early Church](#), [Fellowship In Homes](#) (lessons 45 thru 50)