

Becoming a Bible-Reading Leader

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 3

Welcome to a series that is very dear to my heart. I call this series "Becoming a consistent, persistent Bible-reading leader."

I. Holy Scripture and the Elders' Qualification for Eldership

Writing to Titus, Paul makes these very important statements:

"This is why I left you in Crete so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. . . . He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it." (Titus 1:5, 9)

1. To qualify as an elder, a person must "hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught."

A biblical eldership is an eldership made up of people who know the Bible, the Scriptures. They have to cling tenaciously to the Word as taught by the apostles in order to do two things: "to instruct in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. "

2. This starts with reading the whole of Scripture.

The Bible is a divine book. J.I. Packer says, *"The Bible is God preaching to us."* It is God's voice. God's sword. God's hammer. God's light. God's food. It's the monarch of books. It's the best-selling book in the world. It's a divine Book written by the Holy Spirit. God is the author of the Bible. That's why we need to absorb it and spend our entire life studying this Book.

If we are to understand this great Book, we have to devote ourselves to it. We have to make sacrifices. If we want our church to be mature, healthy, and growing, then the elders need to know the Book, love the Book, and be excited about the Book. *Weak elders produce weak churches.* Weak, ignorant elders produce biblically ignorant churches.

II. Holy Scripture and the Elder's Personal Growth

Our Lord said in John 17:17: *"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."*

We are all facing a tsunami of secularism and godlessness. It's washing over the whole Western world. How can we counteract this? We have to feed our minds on truth and on the purity of God's Word to make us a holy people and to mature in Christlikeness. We must absorb the Word into our minds and drink deeply of truth and of the sanctifying words of God.

Two major points about the Scriptures:

1. Scripture reveals Christ! We know nothing of Christ outside the Bible.

In the words of Jesus: *“And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, he explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures”* (Luke 24:27; NASB). If we’re to know Christ, to mature into Christlikeness, to walk with Christ, we must learn of Christ through the Scriptures.

2. Scripture transforms us into Christlikeness.

a) It does this by the new birth.

“For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.” (1 Peter 1:23; NASB)

Martin Luther said, *“No book teaches anything concerning eternal life except this one.”*

b) It nourishes the new life in Christ.

Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation. (1 Peter 2:2; NASB)

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17; ESV)

Note: God breathed-out Scripture is *“profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”* So, if you don’t know the Scriptures, you’re not competent to lead God’s people. You are not equipped for every good work.

John Stott writes, *“Do we hope either in our lives or in our teaching ministry to overcome error and grow in truth, to overcome evil and grow in holiness? Then, it is to the Scripture that we must turn. For Scripture is profitable for these things.”*

In his farewell to the Ephesian elders, Paul says, *“And now, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace which is able to build you up”* (Acts 20:32). Paul is leaving. But God will be with the elders, and the Word of God will be with them to build them up. The Word cannot build them up if they do not know the Word of his grace.

Acts 20:28: *“Pay careful attention to yourselves.”*

1 Timothy 4:16: *“Pay careful attention to yourself.”*

You have to be the kind of leader who knows how to care for your own spiritual life. How do you do that? The first fundamental way is consistent, persistent reading of the whole of the Scriptures.

Acts 20:27: *“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”* What is the whole counsel of God? It is Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22; it is the storyline of the Bible, the grand story of redemption. To teach others “the whole counsel of God” you need to read and know the whole of the Bible, the whole story, and know it well. Then you can teach and guide others with the Bible.

Becoming a Bible-Reading Leader (continued)

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III. Holy Scripture and the Elders' Work

The means by which we shepherd God's flock is the Scriptures, the Word of God. By means of the Word of God we protect, feed, lead, and care for God's people. God's Word is the guidebook to shepherding, the food for feeding the flock, the path for leading the sheep, and the balm for healing the sick.

1. Protect the flock by the Word of God.

Only by the Word of God can we even know what is true or false, or spot false teachers. So, it is by means of the Word of God that we protect the church and the gospel.

2. Feed the people the Word of God.

It is the duty of the elders to see that God's flock is fed on the Word of God and given "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

3. Lead God's people by the Word of God.

It is the duty of the elders to see that God's flock is led in the way of truth and the will of God. If we're going to lead God's flock properly, we need to be guided by God's Word, or we'll take the people in the wrong direction, which happens so easily.

4. Care for the flock by the Word of God.

There are many practical questions to be answered, people to be counseled, families to be guided, sick people to be comforted, and endless problems to solve. All this is to be done by means of opening the Word of God to guide, comfort, and encourage the people.

IV. Practical Helps for Reading Holy Scripture

I now want to deal practically with how we can become consistent, persistent Bible-reading leaders.

1. Develop a plan for regular, disciplined Bible reading and study.

If you have never read the whole of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, that's what you should do. Do it as quickly as fast as you can, like reading a novel; get through the whole book.

If you have read the whole Bible through, consider this plan. (1) Read the Old Testament over a two- or three- year period. For example, the first year, read the Pentateuch. (2) Read two gospels a year, e.g., Matthew and John the first year. (3) Read Acts and Revelation every year. (4) Read through the letters of Paul, John, Peter, James, and Hebrews twice a year.

2. Create a place and a time.

a) Have a regular place to read and study.

It is best to have a desk or table where you keep your Bible, notes, paper, pens, and Bible helps. This will help you to develop a consistent Bible reading habit.

b) Have a quiet place to read and study.

I cannot express enough the importance of being alone with God and learning quietness. We live with noise pollution all day. Thus, when you're reading the Word of God, you want it quiet, because this is, as J. I. Packer says, "God preaching to us." He speaks to us through his Word, so we need to be quiet and meditate on it.

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IV. Practical Helps for Reading Holy Scripture (cont.)

2. Create a place and a time.

c) Establish a regular time for your Bible reading.

We live in a very busy world today, so we need to fight back and push back and take control of our time. The time is there; we just have to use it properly.

How often should we read the Scriptures?

John Blanchard writes:

Surely, we only have to be realistic and honest with ourselves to know how regularly we need to turn to the Bible. How often do we face problems, temptations, pressures? Every day. Then how often do we need instruction, guidance and greater encouragement? Every day. To catch all these felt needs up into an even greater issue, how often do we need to see God's face, hear His voice, feel His touch, know His power? The answer to all these questions is the same: every day. So, we should strive to every day read the Word of God, even if it's for a short time.

Now, I'm realistic about life and I know you will not read every day, but let's be as consistent and persistent as we can.

Now some of you are very, very busy—I know that—so you need to set aside a night or a Saturday morning or a Sunday evening that you have special time with the Lord and you get caught up on these things.

I really advise young men to have one night minimum that you are home, and after you're done with the family you have several hours with the Lord, catching up on your Bible reading, doing your Bible study, doing reading that you need to do.

3. Use a good, readable Bible and become familiar with it.

It's very important that you have a good Bible. Now, most of you are serious Bible students because you are leaders in the church. You need an essentially literal Bible.

I've seen people with Bibles whose print is so small, you would not want to read it. It hinders you from reading. Your Bible should have a good size print and as much white space as you can get so that your Bible's comfortable to you. It becomes familiar to you, and you'll love to open it. I've seen Bibles that I would never read in a million years. You have to have magnifying glass-like eyes to read the thing, and that's why people don't read it.

I like to mark and cross-reference my Bible. You may not want to write on your Bible, but I like to write in my Bible, and to make it very, very comfortable, and know where things are—so that's often what I'm trying to do with my Bible.

You don't want it to be a foreign book.

4. Read-meditate on the Bible.

Oh, this is a very important point. It's something that I enjoy most thoroughly. It's really one of my favorite things to do in the day, to read slow meditation on the Word.

Thomas Watson writes:

"The reason we come away so cold from reading the Word is because we do not warm ourselves on the fire of meditation," and "The tree of your spiritual life thrives best with meditation because it helps you absorb the water of God's Word."

You need to read through the whole Bible, but you also need to learn careful, quiet meditation on the Bible.

Spurgeon writes:

"You are retired to your private devotions. You've opened the Bible and you begin to read. It is always better to read a little and digest it as meditation than it is to read much then think you have done a good thing by merely reading the letter of the word. For you might as well read the alphabet backwards and forwards as read a chapter of the scripture unless you meditate on it and seek to comprehend its meaning. The business of the believer with his Bible open is to pray, 'Lord, give me the meaning and the spirit of your word or it lies open before me. Apply your word with power to my soul threatening and promise, doctrine or precept, whatever it may be lead me into the soul and marrow of your word.'"

And:

"In your private devotions strive after vital godliness, real soul work, the life giving operation of the Spirit of God in your hearts."

5. Use Bible reading projects.

Example: Pick a subject, or maybe a couple subjects, and build your own topical Bible concordance. When I wrote the book *Leading with Love*, this is what I did. I took several years of reading through the Scriptures, and I typed up every verse on love, all from the New Testament; and then I start to put them in categories, and I began to get a mental picture of the whole of Scripture on this topic.

6. Listen to the Bible.

A lot of people do not like to read. They're not good readers. Reading is difficult for them, and so listening to the Bible read to you is a good way to read the Bible.

7. Have someone hold you accountable for your Bible reading.

I read an article about dieting. In it, a scientist was quoted saying, “Send the message to yourself by your computer every day to remind yourself of what you want to do.” This is because you forget. The same goes for reading the Bible. Send a message to yourself through your computer or through a friend or spouse.

8. Pray the Bible.

Use your Bible to improve your prayer life. You can pray to God as you read the words of Scripture. You can pray the statements of Scripture back to God. You can also add new words and expressions to your prayers by adopting the words of Scripture.

Sometimes in our prayers we run out of words and it sounds like we just repeat the same old words, but by reading the Scripture and bringing the Scripture into your prayers it creates new terms and prayers.

You can memorize the Scriptures that impact you. Some people memorize whole books of the Bible so that they have the Scripture in their minds at all times.

The Psalmist said, “I’ve stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11).

9. Be doers of the Word and not just readers of the Word.

Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourself. If anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he’s like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror, for he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he is like. (James 1:22-24)

It’s not just a matter of reading and knowledge and learning; it is doing it, it is living it, it’s putting it into shoe leather. It is thinking, talking, speaking as the Scriptures teach us. It’s obedience to the word of God; that’s what he’s saying.

So let us be, as Christian leaders, persistent, consistent Bible readers. But even more importantly, let us be doers of the Word, practitioners, not just theoreticians.

Becoming a Memorizing Leader

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 2

I. Introduction

A. Our subject in this lesson is memorization.

1. I use the term “memorization,” but this lesson is really about *meditation* on the Word. Memorization is a significant means to meditating on God’s Word.
2. By meditation, we are not thinking of sitting around like Eastern mystics chanting a mantra in a state of semi-consciousness. We are talking about fully engaging the mind along with the heart in a deeper reflection on God’s Word.
3. If we want to spiritually influence people, we need to be men “after God’s heart,” as God says of King David. We need to be saturated with, infiltrated by, and marinated in the Word of God.
4. It is easy for elders/church leaders to get caught up in leading, planning, teaching, counseling, and countless other good things, yet neglect the deep reflection on the Word of God for themselves.
5. Memorization and meditation lead us to know God better at the mind and the heart level.

B. Shepherding God’s people is a big job. It requires more than you or I have.

1. It requires more wisdom and spiritual strength than anyone can bring to the task.
2. It requires more godly character, spiritual maturity, and supernatural transformation of sinful tendencies than we can create by ourselves.
3. It requires more than good books, commentaries, magazines, or journals.
4. It requires more than attending leadership seminars and shepherding conferences—even more than all the resources of BER.
5. Shepherding God’s people requires the Word of God woven into the very core of our lives—and that eclipses everything else in leadership training and development.

It is one thing to know this is a good idea, but another thing to be motivated to do it.

C. King David provides one of the greatest leadership examples of devotion to God.

1. This is the one person of whom God said, he is a “man after my own heart.”
Acts 13:22 (ESV) “I [God] have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.”
2. If I want to be someone who leads from the heart of God, I will follow David’s example.

II. King David Provides the Greatest Motivational Example of Meditation

Before we dive into practical ways to build memorization and meditation into our lives, we need to appreciate the strategic benefits for us as leaders.

Without this, we may never really get around to actually memorizing Scripture. Let's take a look at just a few of the benefits in Psalm 19.

A. King David was a man who consistently centered his life:

Psalm 19:7–14 (ESV)

⁷The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;

⁸the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;

⁹the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.

¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

¹²Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults.

¹³Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

B. Notice all the descriptors in Psalm 19.

1. The Word of God is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true, desirable, sweeter than honey.
2. What a list that is! Can all these things be said about any other book or resource besides the Bible? No!
3. It is our source book, owner's manual, law library, grace library. It is living, nourishing, enriching, and enabling.
4. It is to be studied, embraced, lived, and enjoyed.
5. It brings us into communion with our heavenly Father, who is the Author and Giver of life.

I want focus in on just a few things from David's meditation here:

C. The Word restores our soul (v. 7a).

1. As elders we can be beaten down, physically tired, spiritually exhausted, and discouraged.
2. The apostle Paul knew what this was like. After a long litany of difficulties, persecutions, and hardships, he adds the most difficult of his struggles, the greatest weight:

"Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches." (2 Cor. 11:28)

3. Meditating, simmering in the God's Word, nourishes us deeply and restores a soul that is weary in well-doing, exhausted from shepherding.
4. Military personnel regularly take a leave from their tour of duty and go for R&R, that is, rest and recuperation. Christian leaders need to take R&R on a daily basis, spending time with our Lord in his Word.

D. The Word makes us wise (v. 7b).

1. It "makes wise the simple."
2. But elders routinely face difficulties and complicated issues. Relationship issues are often intertwined, and difficult to sort through. Sometimes we discover we are just not smart enough to solve people's problems.
3. Add to that, the examples in Scriptures often don't line up exactly with the problems we have to deal with.
4. Meditation on God's Word enables us to see with acuity, with a clearer understanding. We can gain the wisdom of Solomon as the Word drenches our minds and souls.

E. The Word anchors us to that which is enduring (v. 9a).

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever ...

1. The fear of God comes from the exposure to his enduring Word.
 - a. Because our prevailing culture constantly encroaches on the church with all kinds of novel ideas about doctrines and styles of ministry beating at our doors, we need to make sure that the new things we adopt are based on the Word of God.
 - b. Only then can we embrace change while continuing to be rooted in what is unchanging. When we do, then we will endure and outlive them all.
2. I think of the time when the true teachings of Jesus got difficult to accept; only a few of his disciples did not abandon him.
 - a. The Scripture says in John 6:66, "... many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore."
 - b. Jesus asked his disciples, essentially: Will you leave as well? (John 6:67)
 - c. Peter answered: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life." (6:68)
 - d. They had gotten a taste of Christ's teachings and did not want to walk away.
 - e. They were like David, who wrote about God's teachings: "How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps. 119:103)
3. The elder who enjoys the Word of God will keep on going no matter what.

F. Now, memorization is *not* listed as a qualification for elders.

1. But I believe it is essential for your ministry to be effective.
2. Would it not make sense for elders to continue doing what we encourage children and new believers to do? Would we not want to show by our example the importance of this?

III. Specific Benefits of Memorization for Elders

A. Memorization allows the Word to dwell in us—richly.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly ... (Col. 3:16)

1. Here is an illustration that helps me understand this. One can sit at a table prepared by the finest chef who has prepared the most exquisite cuisine using all of his expertise to create a meal that is tailored to your specific needs, desire and enjoyment. You can consume that meal in two different ways. 1) You can gulp it down in large amounts quickly and get full and get on to the next thing. Or 2) You can savor each taste, exploring the combinations of flavors, the interaction of the spices, the unique tastes of the individual items.
2. Meditating on the Word of God helps us see all the strains and nuances of truth, individual truths and as well as the broad sweep of the whole of God's truth. All this helps us as we see to apply Scripture to many diverse situations we face as leaders.

B. Memorization renews the mind—transformationally.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:2)

C. Memorization helps captivate “every thought”—obediently.

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. (2 Cor. 10:5)

D. Memorization brings Scripture into more areas of our life and ministry.

1. Memorizing helps us to stay focused.
2. Memorizing enables us to review Scripture without opening our Bibles.
3. Memorizing makes Scripture usable on the spur of the moment.

E. Memorization fosters self-control in other areas of life.

The practice of self-discipline in memorizing build our “self-control muscles,” and that affects other areas of our life that require self-control.

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IV. Suggestions for the Discipline of Memorizing Scripture

- A. Keep in mind**, memorization is simply a vehicle. The goal is meditation. Meditation happens while we are working on memorizing Scripture.
- B. Take it with you when you go.**
 - 3. Deuteronomy 6:7 speaks about keeping the Word of God in our hearts and teaching it to our children, when we sit in the house, walk in the way, rise up, and lie down.
 - 4. Jews wore phylacteries on their foreheads and wrists, little leather boxes containing portions of Scripture, symbolic of keeping the Word of God close.
 - 5. I find index cards are handy and can be found in any office supply store.
 - 6. Handwrite the verse on the card or use a computer.
 - 7. Find a Bible app for your smartphone.
- C. Select appropriate Scripture.**
 - 1. Topical memorization has the advantage of relevance to current interests. These are inherently easier to retain and use.
 - 2. We have included in our notes for this lesson suggestions of ministries that provide topical lists for memorization.
 - 3. But, overall, one of the best practices is memorizing extended passages/Bible books.
 - a. That may seem impossible to you or the realm of those with photographic memory.
 - b. That is what I used to think. But I have been able to do it with a number of the books of the Bible. And if I can do it, so can you. I started with smaller books.
 - c. I have a number of stacks of index cards I've printed from my computer of 1 Peter, 2 Peter, Galatians, and other NT books.
- D. Review passages until you can remember them by heart. Don't give up.**
 - 1. It is the constant reviewing process and trying to recite it back to yourself that is the trick.
 - 2. It's not a competition to see how much you can memorize. In fact, it is the process that you are after. Remember, memorization is simply a means to meditation.
 - 3. I have found through the exercise of memorization, I am in reality meditating on Scripture. As I roll the verses over and over in my mind, trying to get them right, I find myself scrutinizing details and noticing things I have never seen before.
 - 4. The old illustration is that of a cow chewing its cud—keep reviewing it over and over.

5. Eventually, you don't need the cards or the phone app; you are reviewing it simply from memory, and you can now do that as you drive your car (normally idle mind time), lying in bed trying to sleep, standing in line.

E. Set up accountability.

1. For many it can be helpful to do this with a partner, and at regular times recite your verses together.
2. But, at the heart of it all, you need an inner conviction to do it.

V.Road Blocks to Overcome

I have some barriers that hinder my efforts, and I have to continually overcome them. You may relate to some of these:

A. I'm too old.

1. This is all the more reason to work the memory muscle. We all know our home addresses through constant use. We can learn Scripture by memory through constant use.
2. Is your memory fading, or you worry about the possibility of Alzheimer's disease? All the more reason to make the Word of God among the last memories to go.
3. Research shows that mental stimulus and mental exercise can delay memory loss.

B. It requires too much discipline.

One of the qualifications for elders is self-control.

C. No time to fit in memorization.

You have lots of idle time during the day: driving, standing in line, lying in bed at night.

D. I forget what I memorize after a while.

That will happen. Review is the key to retention. But even if you forget, the process is still beneficial because you have been meditating on God's Word. It has become part of your life. If after a while you can no longer quote it by memory, you will still remember the sense of the verse and where to find it. You add it to the index of your memory into Scripture.

E. Sounds like a lot of work.

1. Begin small, with one verse. It is like lifting weights: start light and work your way up.
2. Remember, the goal is not to compete with others but to enrich your soul! To know God!

VI.Conclusion

A. I would encourage you to take on this discipline as you grow in shepherding God's people.

B. On our Biblical Eldership website are some sample verses for getting started.

- C. Also you will see links to resources to help you further develop in this area.**
- D. I invite you to begin the great spiritually enriching, ministry-enhancing, memory-strengthening discipline of memorizing and meditating on the Word of God.**

Becoming a Praying Leader

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 3

We are looking at the elder's personal life and growth in Christ. It is important for the elder to realize he must first of all guard himself spiritually. After he guards his own soul, he is able to guard the souls of other people. What we want to look at in our next three messages is the life of prayer as it relates to a shepherd elder and his shepherd ministry.

Acts 6:4: "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

The word "devote" connotes "a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action."

Note that the first thing the apostles say is, "we will devote ourselves to prayer." We often skip this first point.

Acts 2:42: "But they devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings and fellowship and to the breaking of bread and the prayers." The first church was marked by prayer. The leaders also have to be marked by and model prayer.

However, the first thing to go in a super-busy life is prayer. Thus, I want to look at a strategic verse for prayer for elders. But first the context: spiritual warfare.

Ephesians 6:10: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and the strength in his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."

Ephesians 6:12: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil and heavenly places."

If you are a pastor-elder, you are on the front line of spiritual warfare. And thus, everything you do in the Christian life is dependent on a life of prayer. Observe carefully how Paul ends his pointed message on spiritual warfare and spiritual armor:

Ephesians 6:18: "Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints."

I've broken this passage into six lessons for prayer. Lesson number one for a leader's prayer life:

I. Always Be Creative in Your Prayer Life.

Ephesians 6:18 says, "With all prayer and petition." In other words, with every kind of prayer and petition. There are all kinds of prayers, all kinds of positions and postures and circumstances:

"We may pray publicly or privately; in loud cries, or soft whispers, or silently; deliberately and planned or spontaneously; while sitting, standing, kneeling, or even lying down; at home or in church; while working, while traveling; with hands folded or raised; with eyes open or closed; with head bowed or erect. The New Testament, like the Old, mentions many forms, circumstances, and postures for prayer but prescribes none." (John MacArthur, Ephesians, 379)

Be creative in your prayer life. Don't fall into a prayer rut. Let me suggest some creative ideas from the prayer masters of how to bring new vitality to your prayer life.

1. Pray out loud.

To bring more life to your prayers, pray out loud. Don't just pray silently. Very often, it's hard to concentrate on prayer. Our minds wander; we think of all the busy activities we have throughout the day. Our minds go off, and we just repeat the same old words and phrases.

2. Walk and pray.

If you can, get out into nature and walk—under a tree, by a lake or a river, or on a mountainside. It will lift your heart in prayer.

3. Pray Scripture back to God.

If you feel you can't find better words or phrases to talk to God in prayer (you have fallen into the same old rut of vocabulary), remember that God loves to hear His Word prayed back to him. Take what you are reading in Scripture and use those words to speak to the Lord. You can't go wrong when you pray the Word of God.

4. Pray shorter prayers.

You don't have to pray eloquent, long prayers to please God.

5. Use a prayer guide or a prayer book.

There are wonderful prayers that have been written. You could use those to help you in your prayer life and bring new life and vocabulary to it. Don't be afraid to pray other people's prayers. Make them your own!

Also use a prayer guide to lead you in your intercessory prayer ministry, so you don't forget what to pray for.

6. Use hymns and Christian songs.

A wonderful way to enliven your prayers is to start by singing. Very often our hearts are cold, we are not ready for prayer, or we don't feel like praying. Start by singing.

The main thing is this: Do not fall into a prayer rut.

(cont.)

In closing, listen to this powerful quotation by D. A. Carson:

“What is both surprising and depressing is the sheer prayerlessness that characterizes so much of the Western church. It is surprising because it is out of step with the Bible that portrays what the Christian living should be; it is depressing because it frequently coexists with abounding Christian activity that somehow seems hollow, frivolous, and superficial.”

(D. A. Carson, *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, ix)

As shepherds of people, everything we do is dependent upon prayer. Guard your prayer life. Do not let busyness rob you of your prayers. Be like the Lord Jesus, a man of prayer.

Becoming a Praying Leader (continued)

Detailed Outline

Part 2 of 3

This is the second message on prayer and the second, third, and fourth lessons on prayer from Ephesians 6:18.

II. Always Be in a Spirit of Prayer.

The text says, “Praying at all times” (Eph. 6:18), literally at every opportunity. This addresses the frequency of prayer.

Acts 2:42: “They were continually devoting themselves to prayers.”

1 Thessalonians 5:17: “Pray without ceasing.”

Romans 12:12: “Constant in prayer.” (Also Colossians 4:2; 2 Timothy 1:3.) All of these verses speak of the absolute priority of prayer in the Christian life.

How does one pray without ceasing?

1. We are to be giving thanks for all things at all times.

The Christian life is a positive life of thanksgiving for every little blessing from God.

2. We are to confess sin right away.

The moment we identify sin in our lives—rotten attitudes, wrong speech, jealousy, or improper responses to life situations—we must confess it to God and claim the blood of Christ.

3. We are to ask for wisdom.

James 1:5: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all.”

4. We are to intercede for others.

There is the important ministry of intercession for others. Throughout the day, as we think of dear brothers and sisters suffering who need our prayers, we are to be intercessors. Think of yourself as a believer-priest. You are a part of a royal priesthood. It is our great privilege to be interceding for the Lord’s people at all times.

5. We are to be in constant communion with God.

There is the constant awareness that we live in the presence of our God. And we are to be in constant communion with him throughout the day.

III. Always Be Praying in the Power of the Spirit.

Jude 20: “Pray in the Holy Spirit.”

Through the Holy Spirit we have access to God the Father (Eph. 2:18). The Holy Spirit is intimately involved in the believer’s prayer life. He inspires and guides our prayers. He makes our prayers more effective.

Romans 8:26-27 says that when we don’t know what to pray for or how to form our words because of a severe trial, the Spirit of God is working in our prayers with groans that cannot be uttered

There is a living quality to our prayer life because the Holy Spirit is inside of us and he aids our prayer to God. The Holy Spirit is illuminating your mind and moving your heart, giving you freedom of utterance, liberty of expression, understanding of things in the spiritual realm.

The opposite of Spirit-led prayer would be rote prayers or ritualistic prayers or forced prayer, lifeless, mindless prayers, repetitions. Listen to this quote from Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

Always respond to every impulse to pray. The impulse to pray may come when you are reading or when you are battling with a text of Scripture. I would make an absolute law of this—always obey such an impulse. Where does it come from? It is the work of the Holy Spirit; it is a part of the meaning of “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12, 13). This often leads to some of the most remarkable experiences in the life of the minister. So never resist, never postpone it, never push it aside because you are busy. Give yourself to it, yield to it (The Preacher and Preaching [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971], 395).

Remember this: Everything we do is dependent upon prayer. It’s a great privilege in the Christian life and a duty and obligation to pray.

IV. Always Be Watchful and Pray.

“To that end [to this purpose], keep alert with all perseverance and petition” (Eph. 6:18). We must be vigilant in our prayer life. This teaching on prayer is in the context of the Christian soldier, putting on the spiritual armor, and the warfare against spiritual powers of darkness. We put on the Christian armor, and then we have to be awake. Think of prayer in terms of Christian warfare. You have to be alert watching and praying.

The Christian soldier is a person who is watching and persevering in petitions to God.

It is a very serious matter to be prayerless as a Christian, but particularly as a leader.

Peter O'Brien makes clear that *[t]he Apostle wants them to realize that a life of dependence on God in prayer is essential if they are to engage successfully in their warfare with the powers of darkness (The Letter to the Ephesians, Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 484).*

Note the word *perseverance*. Watchfulness is to be accompanied by perseverance and petition. Why do we need to keep asking, knocking, and seeking? Well, there are different answers, and some of it is a

mystery. But I know this: *God has told us to keep asking.* As we persevere in prayer, our prayers are sharpened in their focus, and we are drawn into deeper fellowship with God. So whatever it is, persevere in prayer. Keep asking; keep knocking.

Prayer is essential to spiritual warfare, and it is essential to your leadership among God's people. You are a shepherd of people. You are to watch over their souls. What an awesome responsibility that is! You are to do it with prayer, interceding for them, watching over them, and over your own personal life.

Be a shepherd who prays. Let the people see you as a praying elder. What a wonderful thing if the congregation sees their elders as praying elders, warrior elders engaged in the battle, using the weapons of Christian warfare.

Becoming a Praying Leader (continued)

Detailed Outline

Part 3 of 3

This is the third message on prayer and the fifth and sixth lessons on prayer from Ephesians 6:18-19.

V. Always Be Praying for Others

Ephesians 6:18: "Making supplication for all the saints." The Christian has his armor on, and he's part of a large army of soldiers for Christ. Now, what do we do once we have the armor on? We pray for one another because the battle is severe. There's hardly anything better you can do for those under your pastoral care than to regularly and persistently pray for them.

1 Samuel 12:23: "Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you."

As shepherds of God's people, you need to know this verse. Samuel thought it was a sin not to intercede for the needs of the saints. This is especially important for leaders. They should be models of prayer. Elders are to be intercessors for others.

Have some kind of systematic, orderly prayer procedure so that you can say, "I pray for all the saints." Be a praying elder. Remember what the twelve apostles said: "We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

VI. Always Be Praying for Missionaries and the Gospel

Ephesians 6:18c-19: "Making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak."

Paul says, pray "for all the saints." Well, he's a saint too. Thus he says, "As you're praying for all the saints, pray for me. I need prayer."

If you look at Paul's epistles, we see that he believed firmly that the prayers of the churches directly affect his success, his liberty in the gospel ministry, his gospel mission. Thus he calls upon the churches to pray for the advancement of the gospel through his ministry.

Paul has two specific prayer requests:

- 1. Paul wants to proclaim the mystery of the gospel with clarity and with the right words and concepts (v. 19).**

Paul is surrounded by elite Roman guards, who are all polytheists. They are very proud of their Roman gods and proud of their long history. How would you tell them that a Jewish Messiah died on a cross at the hands of the Romans and that he is the Savior of the world? They didn't believe in a messiah or the Old Testament. How could you possibly convince them of the gospel?

2. Paul wants to proclaim the mystery of the gospel with boldness and courage (v. 20).

Even Paul sensed the need to be a bold and courageous ambassador for Christ before a Christ-rejecting world. He too needed to have courage to speak the Word of God to the enemies of the gospel.

VII. Practical Suggestions for Improving the Elders' Prayer Time Together

1. **Use a prayer guide for elders' meetings.**
2. **Appoint a prayer facilitator.** Someone needs to be appointed by the elders and authorized to take charge of the prayer meeting.
3. **Pray shorter prayers.** By praying shorter prayers, more get to pray. Long prayers can put people to sleep.
4. **Be alive and participate during the prayer time.** Don't sit there in silence, don't be passive. Say "Amen!" Say "Thank you, Lord!" See 1 Corinthians 14:16.
5. **Use prayer request cards.** Ask people to give you prayer requests.
6. **Break into small groups.** Maybe you pray for five or ten minutes and then break into groups of two and make it a special time to pray for one another and one of those families on your list.
7. **Sing together.**
8. **Be specific.** Pray for people by name.
9. **Be creative and energetic in your prayer time.**
10. **Evaluate your prayer time together.** Evaluate your prayer meeting in order to improve it. Be creative, be pressing forward.

Let me close with one of the greatest quotations I've ever read on prayer. It is by Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

When a man is speaking to God, he is at his very acme. It is the highest achievement of the human soul and therefore it is at the same time the ultimate test of a man's true spiritual condition. There is nothing that tells the truth about us as Christian people so much as our prayer life. Everything we do in Christian living is easier than prayer. (Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, 2 vols., [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 2:46)

An Elder's Personal Life and Growth

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 3

Potential elders often ask, "What do I do as an elder? What's my first duty? Where do I start?"

The answer is Acts 20:28: "*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.*"

I. Guard Yourself

You cannot care for souls of others if you cannot care for your own soul.

Paul says the same thing to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16: "*Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.*"

Both of the above passages are in the context of false teachers, the agents of Satan. Paul is talking about spiritual warfare. He is talking about being on the front line of battle. The first thing you have to do as a Christian soldier, as a shepherd of the souls of God's people, is to guard your own spiritual life and doctrine.

Richard Baxter:

Take heed, then, for the enemy has a special eye on you. You are sure to have his most subtle insinuations, incessant solicitations and violent assaults. Take heed to yourselves, lest he outwit you. The devil is a greater scholar than you are, and a more nimble disputant. . . . And whenever he prevails against you, he will make you the instrument of your own ruin. (The Reformed Pastor [repr. Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace, 1971], 7)

How do you care for your soul?

1. Guard what you read.

Whatever you read will inevitably change your thinking and attitude. So be careful what you are reading, whether it is secular material or spiritual material.

2. Guard who you listen to.

Carefully guard who you listen to as teachers, whether they are political pundits or Bible expositors. Remember, we become like those who teach us.

3. Guard your prayer life.

Carefully guard your prayer life, because that is always the first thing to go when we are hyper-busy.

4. Guard against unconfessed sin.

Carefully guard against unconfessed sin that will cause your heart to become cold and resistant to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Deal with sin right away.

5. Guard your life from weights that will impede the Christian race.

Hebrews 12:1: *"Lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."*

A weight is not always sin. It is something that impedes the Christian race or bogs down your advancement in the life-long race before you.

6. Guard your sexual life, your marriage, and your children.

If you are an elder, you put your marriage at risk and your children at risk, because you are a very busy person. Satan is winning many, many victories in this area of the sexual life. Guard your sexual life.

7. Guard your love for God.

Guard your love relationship with God, your affections for God.

Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God with all your being, and then to love your neighbors as yourself. They are inseparable commands. So you must guard your love relationship with the Lord.

8. Guard your growth in Christ: always be growing, learning, maturing.

The key issue is this: you are either growing in Christ or you are stagnating. You cannot be neutral. God will not allow it.

If you're stagnant spiritually, the church will be stagnant spiritually. If you're coasting spiritually, the church will coast. If you're living off the past, the church will not move into the future. If you are not excited about your Bible, world vision, your ministry of shepherding people, not excited about the church and where it is going, the church will also be neutralized and stagnant spiritually. A local church gets very little beyond what its leaders are like.

One way to guard your soul and make your personal ministry to people more effective is to see that you're constantly growing and maturing, pressing forward in the Christian life.

Let's look at what the Scripture says about our personal growth and maturity in Christ.

II. The Biblical Mandate to Grow in Christ

1. 1 Timothy 4:7-8

Rather train [exercise or discipline] yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds the promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

The apostle Paul likes the image of the athlete. We are spiritual athletes. The idea is this: keep on exercising and continue to exercise yourself to godliness.

When we think of this metaphor of exercise or training, we should be thinking of what an athlete goes through: strenuous effort, self-discipline, self-denial, sacrifice, concentration, a scheduled program, knowledge of how to improve, plan for improvement.

Philip Towner gives a good definition of godliness:

Authentic Christian existence . . . the interplay between the knowledge of God . . . and its observable outworking of behavior that is appropriate to that knowledge. (The Letters to Timothy and Titus, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006], 174.)

Godliness is authentic Christian behavior, attitude, speech, lifestyle that is in accord with gospel truths.

D. A. Carson warns that athletes do not drift into excellence, and neither do Christians drift into godliness:

People do not drift towards holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate towards godliness, prayer, and obedience to Scripture, faith, and delighting the Lord. Instead, we drift towards compromise and call it tolerance; we drift towards disobedience and call it freedom; we drift towards superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of loss self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated. (For the Love of God, Volume 2: A Daily Companion for Discovering the Riches of God's Word [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006], 23)

We are to exert effort into exercising and continuing to exercise ourselves to godliness. Don't stop exercising; don't stop training and disciplining yourself to godliness. Be a growing Christian. Exercise your spiritual muscles.

2. 1 Timothy 4:15

"Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress."

Paul wants *everyone* in the church to see Timothy's spiritual progress and growth.

Does your family see you progressing spiritually? Does the church see you progressing spiritually? Are you going forward for the Lord? Let everyone "see your progress."

Douglas Smith:

When leaders are learning and growing, everything about them communicates the same opportunity to other people. They're excited; they do things differently. One of the most profound—and unusual—experiences people can have on the job is to see their leaders grow. (John Carver, Boards that Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations [San Francisco, CA: Wiley and Sons, 2006], 212.)

Let me assure you people want to see you pressing forward—reading, learning, getting fresh vision. It will excite the church. The church will follow you! People want good leadership.

Dr. J. Robert “Bobby” Clinton has investigated every Biblical character in the New Testament. He says only one fourth end well. Here is his conclusion:

*We have observed that most people cease learning by the age of forty. By that we mean they no longer actively pursue knowledge, understanding, and experience that will enhance their capacity to grow and contribute to others. Most simply rest on what they already know. But those who finish well maintain a positive learning attitude all their lives. (Paul D. Stanley and J. Robert Clinton, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life* [Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992], 222.)*

If you want to be a Christian who is growing and going forward, you have to have a positive learning attitude all of your life.

An Elder's Personal Life and Growth (continued)

Detailed Outline

Part 2 of 3

II. The Biblical Mandate to Grow in Christ (cont.)

3. 2 Corinthians 4:16

So we do not lose heart. Though our outward nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

Notice, Paul doesn't say weekly, monthly or yearly. Every day there is this inner growth, this conforming to Christ. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul says we are being transformed "from glory to glory." In other words, there is this daily Christlikeness formation within us. What an exciting life the Christian life is! We are to be consistently growing in our lives and moving forward and being transformed into Christlikeness.

This is the vision we need to have as leaders. We are going to be leaders who continue to grow, press forward, mature, and become more like Christ until the day we die.

4. Philippians 3:13-14

But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul is a man who is continually pressing forward, looking forward, going forward, never backward. The most natural thing for all of us is to slow down, to lose our zest for learning, to lose our thirst for Christ and the knowledge of Christ. That's the most natural thing. But here is a man in his sixties, pressing forward, looking forward.

Paul also talks about helping others press forward: "I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith" (Phil. 1:25).

5. 1 Peter 2:2

Like newborn infants, long for [or crave] the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.

Peter uses the analogy of a newborn infant who craves milk, the sustenance of life. We too are to crave the pure spiritual milk which is the truth of the gospel recorded for us here in Holy Scripture. We know nothing of Christ, nothing of the gospel or the great truths of the gospel outside of the Word of God. And so, like that newborn baby who craves milk, we are to crave the very sustenance of life, which is the Word of God.

6. 2 Peter 3:18

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Here's a direct biblical charge to grow in the amazing grace and knowledge of our wonderful Savior. Throughout life, we are to be pursue learning about our great Savior, this great salvation he provided, and the wonderful truths of the gospel. This is to be a lifelong pursuit.

"Leaders need to model growth." People are like trees that grow their entire lives. There is no such thing as a full-grown tree. The day a tree stops growing, it starts to die. We are to grow all our lives. It has been said: "When you're through improving, you are through as a leader." A leader is a learner.

7. Hebrews 5:11-12

About this [Christ's high priestly ministry] we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food.

What a terrible, awful thing it is for a Christian to be dull of hearing the Word of God, hearing God's voice. Peter O'Brien states that the reason these believers became dull of hearing is that they refused to grow. As a result of resisting growth, they became dull of listening to the Word of God, a most terrible condition for a believer in Christ.

Frederick Bonfils: "If you live in the past, you won't have a future."

III. Growing Christians Influence Others for God.

Only growing Christians influence others for God. Oswald Sanders wrote, "Leadership is influence." (*Spiritual Leadership* [Chicago: Moody, 2017], 29).

You cannot be contagious for God if you are not growing in your faith and knowledge of Christ. If you are not excited about your faith, you cannot stir up others. If your mind is not expanding and if your heart is not growing, how can you affect the next generation, the hearts and the minds of our young people?

To be a good leader you need energy, a lot of energy. So, I have to ask you this: do you get energy by growing and maturing in the knowledge of Christ? Do you have fresh knowledge of Christ and the Scriptures? Do you have fresh vision for the world and world missions? Do you have fresh ideas? Do you like to grow and press forward? Do you like to change, or are you in a spiritual rut?

Nothing encourages me more than seeing men and women in their fifties, their sixties, their seventies, and their eighties going forward for God and constantly learning and changing. That encourages me.

E. Stanley Jones:

There are scars on my faith, but underneath those scars there are no doubts. The song I sing is a life song. Not the temporary exuberance of youth that often fades when middle or old age sets in with their disillusionment and cynicisms ... No, I'm eighty-three, and I am more excited today about being a Christian than I was eighteen when I put my feet upon the way.

F. B. Meyer: "I do hope my Father will let the river of my life go flowing fully till the finish. I don't want it to end in a swamp."

Effective Christian leadership starts with your relationship with Christ and your growth in Christ.

An Elder's Personal Life and Growth (continued)

Detailed Outline

Part 3 of 3

IV. Practical Ideas for a Leader's Growth in Christ

1. Pray for a desire to grow and mature.

Since the time of the fall, man has been hiding from God. Spiritual things are difficult for us. Thus, we have to pray that we do not lose our thirst for the Word of God, or lose our desire for worship, prayer, service, and the fellowship of the Lord's people.

Oswald Chambers:

A great fear has been at work in my mind and God has used it to arouse me to prayer. I came across a man whom I knew years ago, a mighty man of God, and now ten years have gone and I meet him again—garrulous and unenlivened. How many men seem to become like that after forty years of age! The fear of sloth and indulgence has come home with a huge fear and fairly driven me to God to keep me from ever forgetting what I owe him.

How natural it is to lose our thirst for knowledge, for study, for truth, and for expanding our minds and our hearts. Let us pray daily about this. Whenever we see the waning of interest or love for God, let us immediately confess it and pray for a fresh energy and interest in love for him and his precious Word.

2. Protect your prayer life.

We are all very busy people. Hyper-busyness is a part of the new modern age. We are travelling at warp-like speed, and the first thing to go in the Christian life is our prayer life. We get so busy for God we have no time to pray. We don't have time for God.

In Acts 6:4 the twelve apostles declared that "we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Here at the dawn of Christianity, the twelve apostles lay down the principles for pastoral elders: devotion to prayer and the Word of God. These priorities the apostles learned from the Lord Jesus. He was a Man of prayer.

Let me also encourage you not only in prayer but in worship and in singing to God.

3. Protect your Bible-reading time.

The greatest treasure God has given us outside of his Son is the treasure of his Word, the Bible, the very words of God, the Truth and the Light.

As leaders, we all need to be Berean Christians. Acts 17:11: "Now these Jews . . . received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." Let us be Berean-like elders, searching the Scripture daily.

It is said, “You cannot be too busy driving to stop for gas.” You too need to fuel your tank (your heart and mind) with the Word of God like the Bereans did.

Colossians 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another.”

4. Listen to audio messages.

This is a wonderful way to grow spiritually and to fuel your tank as you spend yourself in ministering to other people.

Most of us spend a lot more time driving in a car than we realize. Or we go for a walk or go to the gym and exercise. During these periods of time, we can listen to great Bible expository preaching by some of the world’s greatest teachers. You can literally get a Bible school education in several years by just listening to audio messages.

5. Go to good conferences.

Going to good conferences can be excellent training for future and present elders. Conferences are not only occasions for education, but key opportunities to acquire new resources (books and audio messages) for the church body at home. Use conferences to educate your eldership and to become aware of what is going on in the worldwide church of Jesus Christ.

6. Raise your consciousness about the world around you.

Our Lord gave the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). He gave a global commission to disciple *all nations*, baptizing and teaching new converts to obey everything Jesus had taught them. We are thus internationalists. We are globalists.

A Christian leader should be a Great Commission leader. We have a big gospel, not a tiny gospel. A healthy church is a missions-minded church. A good Christian leader is a missions-minded leader. We should be interested in world news and events that affect the advancement of the gospel and the work of our missionaries.

As a leader among God’s people you also need to be aware of important cultural shifts in society, new theological and philosophical trends, and changing moral values. These trends are affecting the minds of your young people. You may not care about these things, but your young people are involved in them daily at school, and eventually these trends come into the church.

Acts 20:31: “Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.” An elder who is preoccupied with the world or his own personal interests, distracted from the work of God, is not alert and will not be able to protect the church or prepare young people for living the Christian life.

7. Watch for distractions.

Sociologists say we live in the age of distractions, unlike any other age. This is particularly true with the technological distractions and traps—Facebook, email, text messages, video games, and movies. People

are becoming addicted to these things. Sadly, they are not addicted to the Bible or world missions. They are addicted to machines, movies, TV, and sports.

Many people today are amusing themselves to death, wasting the short life they have been given by God upon this earth.

8. Be concerned about your ongoing education as a Christian leader and an eldership group.

You want your children to continue to learn, don't you? You send them to school; you spend a lot of money on their education; you want them to learn, grow, and prepare for life. Why then should *you* stop growing? Why are you not interested in your own education?

An eldership should be learning, growing, and concerned about ongoing development in the things of God. Talk about this as a group of elders, how you will educate yourselves.

Be a learning, growing pastoral eldership!

An Elder's Motivation

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 2

Introduction

What motivates you to want to be a leader? What's behind your desire to shepherd God's people? Is it money, is it fame, is it a need to be publicly recognized, is it control over people? Is it some kind of self-image that you have of yourself that you are a born leader? Well, the Bible speaks to this issue, and the apostle Paul reveals what motivates him to give his life in the service of the gospel and for the care of the Lord's people.

I. The Motivating Power of Christ's Love and Sacrifice

2 Corinthians 5:14-15:

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Paul is telling the Corinthians, and us, what is the motivating force of his life. Why does he sacrifice himself so totally for the gospel and for the churches? Why does he allow himself to suffer so much and be persecuted? The answer is "the love of Christ"! It is the knowledge of Christ's love for him that "controls" his life. He could never get over the amazing love of Christ giving himself as a sin offering *for us* so that we could be saved from the wrath to come.

C. T. Studd wrote, "If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him" (Norman Grubb, *C. T. Studd: Cricketer and Pioneer* [Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1933], 132). If Christ did all of this for me, there is no sacrifice I could ever make that could make up for his sacrifice.

Isaac Watts wrote, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all" ("When I Survey the Wondrous Cross"). Paul is saying a similar thing: such sacrificial love demands from me the giving of my life for him who loved me so.

Ephesians 3:17-19:

So that you . . . may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth [of Christ's love], and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

The love of Christ is so vast and so incomprehensible, you need divine strengthening from above to truly grasp it. Although it surpasses knowledge, we are still to grasp it by God's help—not just intellectually but experientially, personally, intimately, directly—so that it grips us and moves us and motivates us. It is to be something that drives us. It is the motivating power of our life and why we serve as elders.

Harold Hoehner:

The very fact that Christ's love expressed itself in his willingness to die on behalf of sinners is in itself beyond one's comprehension. The reality of Christ's love is overwhelming to all believers ... No matter how much knowledge we have of Christ and his work, his love surpasses that knowledge. The more we know of his love, the more we are amazed by it (Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], 489-490).

We need to pray this prayer that we will be gripped, motivated, and driven by his love for us.

A pioneer missionary Mr. William Quayle said:

I feel the woes of the heathen: I know the bitter barrenness of their lives; but this would not suffice to keep me among them. One gets used to heathenism and grows callous to its desperate tragedy. Not the love of man sufficeth to keep me away from my wife and my children through these years. Only the love of Christ is competent (The Pastor-Preacher, ed. Warren W. Wiersbe [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], 39).

John Stott: "The cross is the blazing fire at which the flame of our love is kindled" (*What Christ Thinks of the Church: An Exposition of Revelation 1-3* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003], 33).

The hymn "How Great Thou Art" says, "And when I think that God, his Son not sparing, sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in; That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin."

Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf saw the picture *Ecce Homo* ("Behold the Man") portraying Christ upon the cross and the crown of thorns upon his head with the statement below: "I have done all this for you. What have you done for me?"

1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

We don't belong to ourselves. Christ has bought us; he has sacrificed himself for us; he gave his all for us. What can we possibly do in any way that will equal what he has done for us? This should be the motivating force of our service for Christ and for giving our lives to shepherd his precious sheep.

An Elder's Motivation

Detailed Outline

Part 2 of 2

II. The Motivating Power of the Value of God's Flock

Acts 20:28: "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for [to shepherd] the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."

Paul gives the Ephesian elders two powerful motivating reasons for guarding God's flock from wolves:

1. It is the church of God.

The church we shepherd is not our church. It is God's church, God's own people. They are not the elders' or apostles' people. God brought this flock of people into existence. He cares for it. He sustains it. He provides for it. He will be with them forever. Revelation 21:3 makes very clear that the Lord has wanted a people for his own throughout eternity.

This means that the work we do is serious work. We don't want to lose any of his people, so let us remember: it is "the church of God" we shepherd.

2. It was obtained with Christ's own blood.

The second motivating force is even more powerful. Paul says that the church is that which Christ obtained with his own blood. Here he is giving us the incalculable cost of these people. They have unspeakable worth. Christ pays for them with his own blood.

David Gooding writes: "With this we touch the mainspring of all true defense and shepherding of the church: the cost at which God bought it" (*True to the Faith: A Fresh Approach to the Acts of the Apostles* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990], 360).

The price we are willing to pay for something tells us something of its value and its worth. Think of the worth of the church of God. There is no measurable worth. There is no price tag we can put on it. It is "his own blood."

Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Christ loved the church. He gave himself upon the cross for the church. We too should give ourselves for the Lord's people and be quite willing to sacrifice our life, our health, our everything, if he gave himself.

Richard Baxter:

Can you not hear [Christ] saying, 'Did I die for these people, and will you then refuse to look after them? Were they worth My blood, and are they not worth your labor? Did I come down from Heaven to seek and to save that which is lost, and will you refuse to go next door, or to the next street or village to seek them? How small is your labor or condescension compared to Mine! I debased Myself to do this, but it is your honor to be so employed. Have I done and suffered so much for their salvation, and will you refuse

that little that lies upon your hands?’ (The Reformed Pastor [repr. Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace, 1971], 55).

It is of a great value to God when you care for his people. How important it is to understand the worth of the church of God. Thus, it is an immense honor to shepherd the church of God “which he obtained with his own blood.”

Hence, it is a very serious matter when we are inattentive and do not carry out our duties properly to shepherd God’s flock.

Remember, God is no man’s debtor. Peter tells us clearly that he will reward every shepherd when he appears (1 Peter 5:4). There is nothing you have done for Christ that he will not reward in a far greater way.

In the church of God, there are no little people and no little places. You are involved in a great and eternal work in which the Chief Shepherd will someday fully reward you.