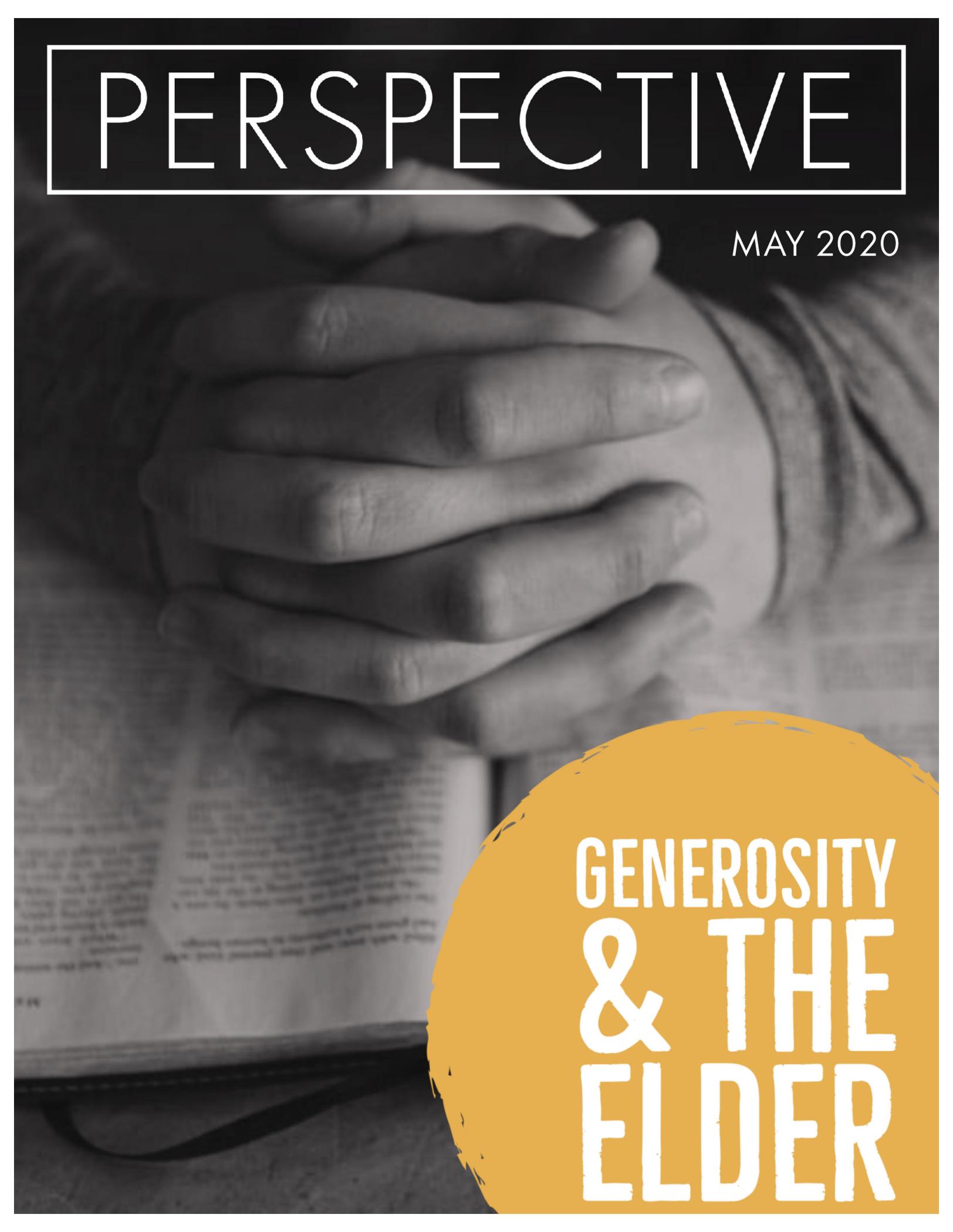


PERSPECTIVE

MAY 2020



**GENEROSITY
& THE
ELDER**

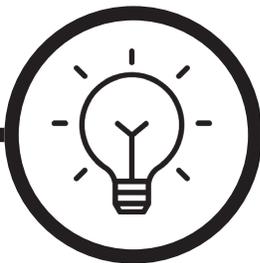
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Generosity & The Elder

A few days ago, I received an email from a former pastor and mentor in Texas that began with the following words:

Knowing that it is a Saturday night in the life of this bi-vocational pastor, I knew I would be up past midnight and have just one last thing on my to do list before heading off to bed. I have finished preparations for ministering tomorrow as best as I am able and have spent time praying for you and others I know getting ready to lead worship and direct people to our Lord in the morning in these strange and challenging times. And the last thing for me to do is to pause and wish you a happy birthday!

In the lengthy email that followed, he proceeded to share words of encouragement and exhortation that greatly blessed my soul. The timestamp on the email read 1:41am, 12:41am Texas time.

As I read his email that Sunday morning, I was overwhelmed with a sense of thankfulness and gratitude to the Lord for his kindness in granting me the privilege of knowing and being shepherded for a season by this brother. His impact on my life and ministry has been profound. I was also blown away by the fact that he would take the time at the end of a full week of work, and after a long day of sermon preparation to write to me. But I wasn't surprised. One of the things that has marked this brother's ministry for as long as I have known him is his generosity. Whether it's staying up late to pray for write a word of encouragement or pray for others, giving up his evenings to meet with and disciple church members, or offering to get groceries for those who are unable to get out during the COVID-19 pandemic, he is a pastor who is joyfully open-handed with what he has for the sake of those he loves. And, praise God, he's not the only one. The ministry of *every* elder is intended by God to be a ministry of generosity.

As Mount Vernon continues to spend 2020 meditating on the topic of generosity, it may seem somewhat odd to devote an entire article to considering generosity as it relates to the office of elder. To be honest, it seemed odd to me when I was asked to write the article. What do we as a church have to learn from thinking about generosity and the elder? More than we might expect. The topic *reminds* us of the generosity of God toward his people, *equips* us with a better understanding of the calling of an elder, and *encourages* us to be more generous toward the elders that God has so generously given our church.

ELDERS REMIND US OF THE GENEROSITY OF GOD

The impact of COVID-19 on the church has been significant. As I write, Mount Vernon has been unable to gather for six weeks and it appears we have a few more weeks to go before we will be able to gather again. When it became clear that we would have to suspend our gatherings for a season, our elders met to talk about how best to shepherd the church. Having twelve elders made the decision relatively easy. We would divide the church up into twelve shepherding groups, each assigned to an elder, in order to ensure that everyone was well cared for spiritually and physically while the church was scattered. Our ability to quickly and easily make that decision led me to reflect on God's generosity in providing the church with a plurality of elders, something he has done for his people from the very beginning.

God generously gives a plurality of elders for the good of his people. Imagine for a moment what it would have been like to be Moses standing before the people of Israel the day after they crossed the Red Sea. In retrospect, the thought of crossing the sea behind him likely seemed far less daunting than the thought of leading and shepherding the sea of people in front of him (2.4 million by at least one estimate!). Yet, Moses didn't shy away from the task. In those early days in the wilderness, he sat alone day after day, laboring to shepherd God's people from morning to evening (Exod 18:14). It must have been exhausting. And, given the number of people, it certainly wasn't sustainable.

In his kind providence, the Lord sent Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, to Moses as he and the people camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai (Exod 18:5). Jethro observed Moses' daily routine and said what Moses must have already been thinking: "What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone" (Exod 18:17–18). One man couldn't bear the burden of leading and shepherding God's people alone. He needed help. God graciously and generously, provided the help needed. Following the advice of Jethro, Moses chose able, God-fearing men from among the people to share the burden of leadership (Exod 18:21, 24–25). This generous gift of a plurality of shepherd-leaders would be a great blessing to Moses *and* to Israel (Exod 18:23).

Fast-forward to the New Testament and we see the same principle at work as God generously provides a plurality of shepherd-leaders to each local church.² The call to willingly and eagerly shepherd the flock of God (1 Peter 5:2) is a burden too heavy for any one man to bear. Is

it possible for one man to shepherd a local flock? Yes. But, to use the words of Jethro, it is “not good” for him or the church. God graciously and generously intends each local church to have a plurality of elders to share the weighty responsibility of shepherding and exercising oversight over the flock. He does this, not only for the good of the elders, but for the good of the church.

God generously gives each elder unique gifts for the good of his people. We also see the generosity of God in the way the Spirit uniquely gifts each elder to shepherd the flock. My grandfather took up woodworking as a hobby when he retired. I was always amazed by the sheer number of saws and other tools he kept in his workshop. But, watching him work, it didn't take long to realize that it takes a variety of cuts and tools to turn a pile of wood into something sturdy and beautiful. The same is true of the building of the church. It takes a variety of gifts. And the Father generously provides the leaders of each church with the gifts necessary to ensure that she is equipped to endure and built up into a thing of beauty. Though all are gifted to shepherd and exercise oversight over the flock, no two elders are exactly alike. Some elders excel in counseling. Others are uniquely gifted teachers. Others are amazing encouragers. Their unique gifts, given for the good of the church, are intended to point us to the generosity of the Giver.

The ability to easily divide up our congregation into shepherding groups and to know that every group would be well cared for during the COVID-19 pandemic was and is a great blessing. More than that, it's a reminder of God's generosity and his love for the church. The fact that he's given Mount Vernon not just one, but twelve men uniquely gifted to serve as her elders should lead us to give him praise and thanks as we marvel at his kind and generous provision.

ELDERS GENEROUSLY SHEPHERD THE CHURCH

Elders are a gift to the church. But, what kind of gift? Every Christmas it seems another company picks up the old phrase, “the gift that keeps on giving,” and attaches it to their latest product. The intention, of course, is to persuade their audience of the product's abiding value. Though they certainly have abiding value in the church, the phrase can be used in a much more literal sense to describe the gift of elders. Every elder is intended by God to be a gift that keeps on giving. That's because the calling of an elder is a call to generosity. It's a call to a ministry of *servant* leadership that follows in the footsteps of the chief Shepherd who “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). The calling of an elder is a call to be joyfully open-

handed with what he has for the sake of the church.

The qualifications for elders are laid out in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:1–9. Noticeably absent from those lists is the word “generous,” though hospitality (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8) is certainly a form of generosity and financial generosity is implied by the phrases, “not a lover of money” and “not . . . greedy for gain” (1 Tim 3:3; Titus 1:7). The most explicit teaching on the need for elders to be generous is found in two passages that describe the elders' work.

In Acts 20, Paul delivers a lengthy word of exhortation to the elders of the church in Ephesus. He begins by reminding the elders of the nature of his own ministry. His ministry was a model of generosity as he poured himself out for the sake of the gospel. In the second half of his speech, Paul exhorts the elders to pay careful attention to themselves and to the flock, to be alert that they might guard the church against false teaching, and to help the weak. He sums it all up with these words: “remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35). The call of the elder is a call to give of oneself for the sake of the of the flock.

Peter, an elder of the church in Jerusalem, offers a similar exhortation to the elders of the churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. In 1 Peter 5:1–3, he calls them to shepherd and exercise oversight of God's flock willingly and eagerly, not for their own gain, and by doing so to set an example for the flock. His is a call for the elders to be joyfully open-handed as they care for God's sheep and to model generosity to the church.

These two passages make it clear that the calling of an elder is a call to generosity. But, practically, what does that look like? The answer is an important one, not just for the elders, but for the church. It's important for the church because she is tasked with the weighty responsibility of recommending and selecting her elders. The qualifications laid out in 1 Timothy and Titus are essential, but they aren't the only characteristics that matter when it comes to evaluating the fitness of a potential elder or even a current one. As we've seen, generosity is clearly something we should be looking for.

So, what kind of generosity should we expect to see manifested in the lives of current and potential elders? The generosity of an elder should be evident in at least six areas. An elder is called to be generous with:

- *His finances.* Though financial generosity is only one ingredient in the recipe of a generous life, it's a significant one. Like yeast in a loaf of bread, it determines the shape of a man's overall generosity.

If a man is not generous with his finances, it's unlikely that he will be generous in other ways. Our checkbooks reveal the priorities of our hearts (Lk 12:34). If a man has his heart set on storing up treasure on earth, he won't lead the flock of God to store up treasure in heaven. An elder's treasure must be of the kind that moth and rust cannot destroy. He is to be financially generous.

- ✦ *His home.* Repetition is the Bible's bold print. Twice Paul tells us that an elder is to be hospitable (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8). He wants us to understand that an elder is a man who regularly opens his home to the flock. As Alexander Strauch helpfully explains, "An open home is a sign of an open heart and a loving, sacrificial, serving spirit."³ Hospitality reveals the willingness of an elder not only to share his stuff, but, more importantly, to share his life.
- ✦ *His time.* The hands of the clock tick along at the same rate for the elder as they do for everyone else. The elder's time is just as limited and just as valuable. Yet, his calling demands that he willingly and eagerly gives a significant amount of it to the shepherding and overseeing of God's flock. From discipling and hospitality to emails and phone calls, from teaching to counseling, from elders' meetings to membership interviews, the calling of an elder is to be generous with his time. As a staff elder who has been set aside to serve the church full-time, I consistently marvel at, and thank God for the amount of time our lay elders regularly and gladly give to shepherding Mount Vernon. As precious as their time is, they are joyfully open-handed with it for the sake of serving the church.
- ✦ *His mind.* Eldering is an inherently theological task (see Titus 1:9). It regularly requires that the elder devote significant time and mental energy to the study of God's Word in order to ensure the careful application of it to specific pastoral and doctrinal issues. For example, over the last year Mount Vernon's elders have, by necessity, thought deeply and pastorally about the Bible's teaching on divorce and remarriage, men's and women's roles, the nature of genuine repentance, and the doctrine of Hell. But, the elder doesn't merely devote his mental energy to thorny theological and pastoral issues. He also devotes a good bit of time to thinking about the needs of the flock in order to ensure that he and the other elders shepherd well. The church is never far from the mind of an elder. It fills his mind often. And, that's ok, because he is glad to give his mental

energy for the sake of seeing the church built up.

- ✦ *His prayers.* Like a farmer who knows his tilling and planting are futile unless the Lord sends the rain and the sun, an elder knows that all his efforts to shepherd and oversee the flock are futile unless the Lord works powerfully in the hearts of his people. Because of this, an elder gladly and faithfully labors in prayer for and with those entrusted to his care, recognizing that his prayers are the greatest gift he can give to God's people.
- ✦ *God's Word.* Martin Luther famously said of his labors in the Protestant Reformation, "I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. . . I did nothing, the Word did everything." Luther was an elder who rightly understood the power of the Word of God to transform the people of God, so he generously took every opportunity to feed them with the Word. This is what elders do. They labor by God's grace to know the Word well, not to impress others, not to fill their heads with knowledge, but in order that they might faithfully feed God's people with it. And, as they have opportunity, whether from the pulpit or in casual conversation, they generously use it to teach, admonish, exhort, equip, and encourage.

Elders are intended by God to be a gift that keeps on giving to the church. The calling of an elder is a call to a ministry of generosity. Will elders fulfill this ministry perfectly? No. There has only been one perfectly generous Shepherd of God's sheep. But, as they look to their chief Shepherd, and seek to follow his perfect example of generosity, each elder's generosity will be a great blessing to the flock entrusted to their care.

ELDERS ARE BLESSED BY THE GENEROSITY OF THE CHURCH

Generosity often has a ripple effect. The brother who wrote me the kind birthday email was my pastor for about a year and a half. Toward the end of that time, he and his wife went through a particularly difficult time financially. He called one evening and let me know that the power had been cut off at his house because they weren't able to pay the bill. He asked if he could come over and plug in their fish tank. He never asked for financial help, but I was glad to give it anyway. When he got to my apartment with the fish tank, I asked him how much he owed and cut him a check for the amount. It was a joy, and the least I could do to, in some small way, return the generosity he had so consistently shown toward me and the rest of the church week after week as he shepherded

our souls and faithfully fed us from God's Word.

In 1 Timothy 5:17, Paul says, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching." While the primary concern of the passage is to call the church to show financial generosity to her elders when she is able, the use of the word "honor" suggests that Paul has more in mind than merely remuneration.⁴ The church is also to be generous in showing honor to her elders. What might that look like? As an elder, I recognize it might appear self-serving for me to provide an answer to the question. But, though I'm a shepherd, I'm also a sheep—a sheep who is called to be generous in showing honor to the elders who faithfully and generously labor to shepherd and oversee my soul. So, how can we show double honor to elders who rule well? For starters, we can:

- ✦ Pray for them regularly.
- ✦ Labor to think and speak well of them.
- ✦ Go out of our way to encourage them.
- ✦ Give them grace when they let us down.
- ✦ Help them shepherd us by being responsive to their efforts to reach out.
- ✦ Invite them into our homes and, more importantly, into our lives.

I'm so thankful to serve at a church where so many are so generous in showing honor to the elders. You pray for us, you encourage us, and most importantly, you gladly and graciously allow us to shepherd your souls. Your generosity encourages us to be even more generous toward the church.

When elders rule well, generously pouring out themselves for the sake of the flock, the flock is called to respond in kind. A church whose elders are joyfully open-handed with what they have for the sake of the church is one in which we should expect to see an abundance of generosity. In God's wisdom, the generosity of the elders serves to build a culture of generosity in the church.

It's been over fifteen years since I was a member of that tiny church in Texas, but the generosity of my former pastor continues to have a profound impact on my life. It reminds me of the lavish generosity of God. It's equipped me with a better understanding of the calling of an elder. It encourages me to be more generous toward the church and my fellow elders. I pray that our elder body would be marked by the kind of generosity modeled by my former pastor and, more importantly, modeled by our chief Shepherd. As, the Lord answers that prayer, I'm convinced that the ripple effect of generosity in the church will be profound.

– Dustin Butts

¹ Got Questions; "[How Many Israelites Left Egypt in the Exodus?](#)"

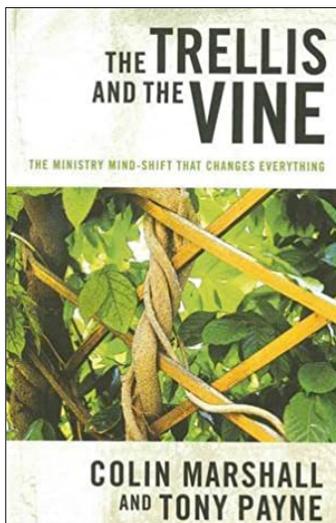
² See Jeramie Rinne, *Church Elders: How to Shepherd God's People Like Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 87-88, for a brief examination of the New Testament pattern of a plurality of elders in each local church.

³ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1995), 194.

⁴ Donald Guthrie, "The Pastoral Letters" in *New Bible Commentary*, 21st Century Edition, eds. D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer & G. J. Wenham (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 1302.

The Trellis and the Vine

Written by Colin Marshall and Tony Payne



What does ministry success in a church look like? Numerical growth? A large building? In *The Trellis and the Vine*, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne argue that a successful ministry develops disciple-making disciples. The vine represents Christians' spiritual growth and the trellis represents all the organizational and physical structures to support that growth (8). What gardener would ever measure success by the trellis itself? Unfortunately, many Christians have done just that. This book addresses two ministry shifts needed among Christians today:

Every pastor should be a trainer. It's not the pastor's job to play CEO and "sell" an attractive church experience. It's not the pastor's job to simply preach a good sermon and go home. He is to "provide the conditions under which the rest of the congregation can get on with vine work (155)." Meaning, a pastor has a life worth imitating (72), he is able to teach (140), he leads souls to the Savior, and trains them up to faithfully make disciples. A pastor's ministry falls short if he doesn't train up faithful co-laborers to minister alongside him. These "faithful men" are those who embrace Marshall and Payne's second ministry shift.

Every Christian should be a disciple-maker. When spiritual growth multiplies in the congregation, the pastor isn't the only one discipling. Rather, each member ministers to one another. Members ministering to one another powerfully spills out into the world. The attractional church model encourages Christians to take a backseat and let the "professionals" do the work. But, Marshall and Payne want readers to know that the world does not need to be drawn in; rather the church should be sent out (19). This powerful and expansive picture of church is only possible when Christians resolve to be disciple-makers.

A trellis doesn't cause vine growth, it simply supports it. And just like a trellis, what Marshall and Payne propose lacks novelty and glamor, but it works! Unfortunately, much of evangelicalism has departed far from biblical Christianity that this book is needed today. Perhaps, reading it will humbly exhort you, as it did me, to labor to make disciples.

– RECOMMENDED BY DANNY SANDERSON

Excerpts From the Book

1

"The Christian without a missionary heart is an anomaly."
– *Is Every Christian A Vine Worker?*, p.53

2

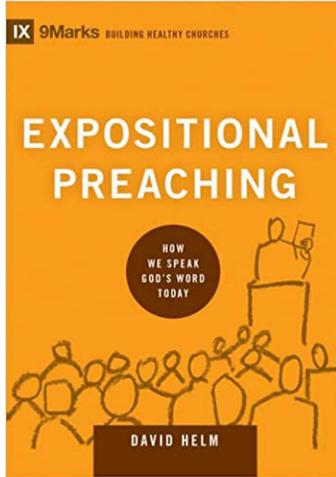
"Regardless of the structures, titles or recognition, the principle is simple: by far the best way to build a congregation full of disciple-making disciples is to assemble and train a band of co-workers to labor alongside you."
– *Multiplying Gospel Growth Through Training Co-workers*, p.116

3

"Structured activities in group events have taken over, and those on the pastoral team spend their time organizing and managing rather than chasing and discipling and training people."
– *Making a Start*, p.153

Expositional Preaching

Written by David Helm



What is expositional preaching? Expositional preaching rightfully submits the shape and emphasis of the sermon to the shape and emphasis of the biblical text. But there is a dilemma. Is the preacher's responsibility to get the message across or get it right (36)? Which does he choose? Both! If he wants to get the message across, he must first get it right. This is why exegesis is important. It looks to draw out the main point of the text. When the biblical authors wrote, they had an original audience in mind. We tend to

think he was writing to us! Yes, the Bible is timeless, but the biblical author wrote to a specific audience. This audience is the preacher's first concern. But that is not enough. Exegesis must lead to theological reflection. This is when the preacher takes into account how a passage relates to the whole Bible, specifically to Christ. But that is not all. We also want preachers to get the message right while getting it across. There are implications of sermons for today that must be applied to specific audiences. With all that, a preacher is ready to preach expositionally.

It is always a fresh reminder that the Word is the 'relevant word.' A preacher is an ambassador who has received a message (2 Cor 5:20). Whatever intent and application is in the text, that is the application God is speaking to his people. This is what 'revives us.' It is easy to think we know what we need to hear. But does not God know our words even before it's on our tongue? Does he not diagnose our problems best? Are not his solutions the most timely? This is what should thrill us every Sunday. God has set aside a man to declare the words of life, so our hearts should be filled with thankfulness and our mouths should be eager to encourage him as he faithfully does this work. What is more encouraging than having notepads out eager to hear the Word! We want God to speak and he has spoken to us through his Word. As it is faithfully unpacked we can be confident this is expositional preaching.

Even if you know you will never preach, this book will help you understand why we preach the way we do at Mount Vernon. It will give you tools to deepen your personal time in the Word.

– RECOMMENDED BY DARIUS TUCKER

Excerpts From the Book

1

"Some preachers spend more time reading and meditating on our contextual setting than we do on God's Word. We get caught up in sermonizing about our world or city in an effort to be relevant. As a result, we settle for giving shallow impressions of the text. We forget that the biblical text is the relevant word. It deserves our greatest powers of meditation and explanation."

– Contextualization, p.17

2

"If we preach in a way that treats the historical situation of our passage in the Old Testament as irrelevant and merely a springboard to the gospel, then we teach that the Bible is not really interested in history."

– Theological Reflection, p.65

3

"The best biblical expositors, while immensely concerned with today, nevertheless do all their sermon work (whether it be exegesis, theological reflection, or contextualization) in light of the day—that day when Jesus returns, when all things will be made known, including the motivations of the preacher's heart."

– Today, p.110



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