Elder / Preacher
relationships that last

by
Gene Newton, Glenn Newton & Mark Newton

Published by 21st Century Christian
Dedication:

This book is dedicated to
Ann (Mom), Jennifer, and Regina.
Without the support of these three godly women,
our service and ministry would not exist.
FOREWORD

Perspective is everything. It is easy to judge another’s performance from afar, but quite a different matter to “walk a mile in his shoes.” Perspective certainly matters in the elder/preacher relationship. All too often, elders can’t understand why their minister is doing what he’s doing. Preachers struggle to comprehend what is motivating some of the eldership’s “crazy” decisions. Often, it’s simply a matter of perspective.

There is a necessary tension between the three branches of our federal government; there is also a necessary tension between elders and preachers. Both parties have needs, expectations, and responsibilities. Both parties need each other. The more each side understands and appreciates the other, the more successful the Lord’s work will be in that congregation.

Just as Willard Harley’s classic 2001 book, His Needs, Her Needs, laid the groundwork for healthier marriages; Gene, Glenn, and Mark Newton present a practical, workable plan for improving the elder/preacher relationships in churches across the land. Those who take the time to read this work will gain a better perspective on how this God-prescribed team is intended to work.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 9

Section 1 - Defining Roles ....................................................................................... 15
  The Role Of An Elder .............................................................................................. 17
  The Elder And His Flock ....................................................................................... 23
  The Elder And The Elders ..................................................................................... 33
  The Role Of An Evangelist .................................................................................... 41

Section 2 - Defining The Problem ......................................................................... 57
  Startling Statistics ................................................................................................. 59
  The Personality/Style Problem ............................................................................. 65
  Lack Of Support .................................................................................................... 67
  Reactionary Leadership ......................................................................................... 73
  “Busting” The Biggest Myth In The Church ....................................................... 75

Section 3 - Discovering Bridges ............................................................................ 81
  The Preacher Needs Security .............................................................................. 83
  The Elders Need Respect ..................................................................................... 89
  The Preacher Needs To Be Himself ...................................................................... 93
  The Elders Need Cooperation ............................................................................. 99
  The Preacher Needs Protection .......................................................................... 101
  The Elders Need Support .................................................................................... 105
  The Preacher Needs Encouragement .................................................................. 109
  The Elders Need Accountability ......................................................................... 113

Section 4 - Developing Trust ................................................................................. 119
  When Trust Is Lost ............................................................................................... 121
  A Blueprint For Trust ......................................................................................... 127
  Laying The Foundation ....................................................................................... 133
  Building A Working Relationship ...................................................................... 137

Conclusion ................................................................................................................. 145
This book is different. Different in that it was written by three different authors. At times you may wonder “who is speaking?” Most of the time, you can determine who is writing by the subject matter. If it is about elder needs or responsibilities, Gene most likely wrote it. If it is about the minister’s role or needs, Mark or Glenn probably wrote it. The rest (specifically sections 2 and 4) was a collaborative effort. Yet even in the collaboration, there are some personal stories. We have attempted to put the “storyteller” in parenthesis in those instances.

We pray that the way it is written will allow the reader to know that these words and feeling are intensely personal and come from the experiences that go with serving as an elder or a minister. We also hope you recognize that it is written on the premise of God’s people, elders and ministers included, being one (John 17:20-26).
INTRODUCTION

More than fifty years ago when my wife and I started our journey together, neither one of us realized what the Lord had in store for us. I suppose most people could say that, but I am glad we did not know what the future held for us. At that time we were not prepared to know that the trials we were to face were there to make us stronger and to bring us great blessings.

A part of our journey, and at times our trial, was to raise four sons. As our children grew older, we wanted them to grow up to be workers in the Lord’s Kingdom, but the Lord has blessed us in ways that we could not have imagined. Three of our sons have been or are currently serving as deacons. Two of our sons are preachers of the gospel. One of the preachers has also served as a deacon and as an elder and a Police Chaplain. One of them is an author for 21st Century Christian. We are very pleased to have talented sons who are willing to use their talent to serve the Lord, but because of the path we have chosen, there have been some bumps in the road, some trials to face.
Since this book is about “elder-preacher relationships,” we will try to stay with those trials. The elder-preacher relationship, friendships, or even partnerships seem to be a tenuous one at best. Many congregations of the Lord’s church seem to have a problem with this relationship. Why? I believe it simply boils down to the fact that most elders see this relationship as an employer-employee relationship rather than a brother-to-brother relationship.

Nothing will wake up an elder to the problems with the elder-preacher relationship more than seeing your preacher son going through difficulties that could have been avoided by a more understanding eldership. It makes me wonder if some of my problems in the past could have been avoided if I had been a little more patient and understanding of the ministers with whom I have served.

To begin to understand the difficulties in the elder-preacher relationship, I think we need to look at this from the beginning. Why do we become elders and why do we become preachers? If we are honest with ourselves, the answer may not be that easy. We should say that we became an elder or a preacher because of our love for the Lord and our desire to serve Him: You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind (Matthew 22:37, NASB). But let’s be honest, sometimes a man becomes a preacher because he does not like the line of work he is in, or because he cannot find another way of making a living. I would hope this is a small amount, but we know that it does happen. A preacher has to have a strong desire to do as is recorded in Mark 16:15. Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

There is a saying that if you can be happy doing anything other than preaching, then you should not be a preacher. The same statement is true for an elder. As long as we are being honest about preachers, we need to be honest about elders. It saddens me to say that some men become elders for other reasons than to serve the Lord in shepherding the flock. When that happens, there will not be good elder-preacher relationships, and there will probably not be good elder-congregation relationships. We will talk about elder-congregation relationships later in the book.

What prompted me to start this book were the trials my preacher sons were facing that could have been avoided or made easier by better elder-preacher relationships. As I thought about it, I realized that my sons were only a small
part of a bigger picture. There are preachers going from one congregation to another, or leaving the ministry all together because of elder-preacher conflicts.

The elder-preacher relationship, of course, is a two way street. Both the elder and the preacher must realize that we are Christians first, then elders and preachers. Although we are not doing the same work, we are still brothers in Christ. I also readily recognize that preacher/elder relationships are impacted by our flawed humanity. We, like most elders and preachers, have contributed to some of our own problems. Our main concern, whether an elder or a preacher, should be the kingdom of the Lord. We pray this book will help us all remember to focus on what really matters, because the church is bigger than any one of us.

Gene
Defining Roles
THE ROLE OF AN ELDER

What is the role of an elder? Defining the role of an elder might not be as easy as we think. I (Gene) wonder how I would have answered that question 36 plus years ago when I first became an elder. Oh, I knew the qualifications; they are spelled out for us in God’s Word (although some of them are not looked at the same way by everyone). However, I am not sure I knew what my role would be. As far as I know, there is nowhere in the Word of God that gives a list of the duties of an elder, or what the role of an elder is.

We can quickly give a very broad answer to the question: “The elder is to shepherd the flock.” Is that answer sufficient? How do we shepherd our congregations? We feed them when they are hungry, comfort them when they are
hurting, find them when they are lost, love them always, and lead them to Heaven.

I was a deacon for eight years and have been an elder for 27 years and counting. In those 27 years I have made a lot of mistakes, but nothing has brought them to the surface more than seeing my two preacher sons deal with the problems they have faced in the ministry. It is very difficult to see your son and his family put everything in storage for an undetermined time because of a misunderstanding that could have been solved. It is also difficult to see your son leave full time preaching because of an eldership that was not as understanding as they could be.

Some of these problems could have been lightened or even avoided by the elderships with which they were working. Working with is the key here. Elders need to realize that preachers are not working for them, and they are not working for the congregation. We are working together for the Lord.

Because the preacher receives financial support, I suppose it would be easy to think of him as an employee, and therefore he must have an employer. But that is not the case. An elder has a work to do, a preacher has a work to do, a
deacon has a work to do, and each member of a congrega-
tion has a work to do,

The Body of Christ will not grow the way God intends for it to grow if one member thinks he or she is more impor-
tant than the other.

For even as the body is one and yet has many mem-
ers, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many...But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body (1 Corinthians 12:12-14,18-20).

I believe that some of us today, especially elders, be-
lieve that preachers are a part of the body of Christ, but not a part of our congregation. I am not quite sure how that works. I also believe that congregations today would be growing a lot faster if we paid more attention to evangelism and were less critical of the evangelist.

Let’s look at two reasons why preachers usually are
asked to leave a congregation, and then look at the alternatives. Of course, if we are honest with ourselves, the main reason is personality conflicts, but the two we will look at are: (1) they are not working up to our standards – not doing the work of the Lord the way we think they should; and (2) moral issues.

To answer the first one, we need to ask ourselves this question: If preachers are members of the congregation, shouldn’t they be treated like any other member? The answer is yes, but the problem is that when one of the members is not using his or her talent the way they should, we usually look the other way instead of admonishing, exhorting, or encouraging them. We do not ask members to leave because they are not working for the Lord the way we think they should. What we are supposed to do is admonish them (reprove gently, instructing and directing them), exhort them (incite them with words of advice, strongly advising them), and encourage them (inspire them with hope).

The word “exhort” for our purposes means “to present the warnings and the promises of God to excite men to the discharge of their duty.” If a preacher is not doing the work of the Lord the way he should, we need to admonish,
exhort, and encourage. Instead, however, we tend to take the quick and easy way by asking him to leave. Is that really what God wants us to do?

The second one is a little more difficult to handle: That of morality, or maybe immorality. We have to remember though, that preachers are a part of the flock that we are shepherding. We should attend to them in the same way we would any other member. Our preachers have the same temptations that the rest of us have. Adultery and pornography seem to be a big problem with some preachers today, just like it is with other members. But what are we doing about it? Are we trying to help them, or do we just dismiss them and try to find a preacher that is perfect like we are.

If one of our members has a marital problem, we normally try to help them by talking to them ourselves or by encouraging them to get professional counseling. But when our preachers have the same problem, we often encourage them to take care of the problem on their own, not telling anyone and not getting counseling because we do not want the congregation to know about it. In addition we do not want other congregations to know that we are having “preacher problems.”
There are many good, understanding elders in the church today, and there are many good, hard-working preachers who have evangelism first and foremost on their minds and in their hearts. We need to pray that when Satan brings a temptation our way, and we know that he will, that we are ready to meet it the way the Lord would have us to do. We need to realize that Matthew 18:15-18 is for elders and preachers as well as the rest of the congregation. “...[G]o and show him his fault in private.”