

Armor Call

If I were to ask you to list a few of the offices, or roles, in the church, you'd probably say pastor, elder, and deacon.

You might call the pastor, "pastor-teacher," because that is what you read in Ephesians four.

While you're in Ephesians four, you would remember that "evangelist" is listed there, too.

One office, or role, you probably would *not* list is "armor bearer."

However, this is a role some churches have adopted.

What, exactly, is an armor bearer in the modern church setting?

You can trace it's origins to a 1990 book by Terry Nance, titled, *God's Armor Bearer*.

The tagline reads:

Leaders in the Bible often chose loyal "armor bearers" to assist and protect them. Christian leaders today also need dedicated assistants to turn visions into reality. In this challenging 2-books-in-1 resource, Nance uses biblical examples of servant-hearted believers to help you discover and develop the essential qualities of an integral team player.

I haven't read it, so I can't really comment on the author's intent. It seems he was drawing an analogy in order to encourage servanthood.

Some people, it seems, have taken the role of an armor bearer too far. Or, at least, there is a debate over it.

Perhaps this will help. I ran across a 2013 article, titled, *Armor Bearer Is Not a Biblical Church Office,' Says Florida Pastor in Viral Post.*

Excerpts:

A Florida pastor has sparked an online debate about a church role - armor bearer - often tied to the Bible but yet is not described in the New Testament as an actual church position or office. His post... challenges the concept of such a position that is usually tailored to assist pastors and that can involve tasks like serving as a personal bodyguard or carrying a preacher's Bible.

"I read Terry Nance's book, *God's Armor Bearers*, when it was first published some years ago [1990]. I found it interesting. Then I forgot it. I never expected it would get so much traction. Yet there is a now a movement of 'armor bearers.' And I am not sure it's a good thing," writes H.B. Charles Jr., pastor of Shiloh Metropolitan Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla.

"Let me [be] clear. It is good for men to have hearts and hands to serve in the church. And it is good when men are willing to serve their pastor. But I wonder if all this 'armor bearer' stuff is taking things too far," Charles continues in his post.

With regard to taking things too far, I found this anecdotal story:

My friend Charles wanted a mentor. He was eager to learn the ropes of ministry, so he asked an older pastor for training. The pastor agreed - but Charles soon realized the man wanted a valet, not an apprentice. Charles became the man's "armor bearer."

The man never took Charles on hospital visits, involved him in ministry assignments or prayed with him. Instead, Charles was expected to carry the pastor's briefcase, fetch coffee and take suits to the cleaners - all with no salary offered. In this case, "armor bearer" was a spiritualized term for "slave."

This bizarre trend became popular in churches 20 years ago, but it still thrives. It appeals to insecure leaders who need an entourage to make them feel important.

These young men are instructed to keep people away from the pastor so he doesn't have to talk to anyone after a church service (because, after all, the poor preacher might be "drained of his anointing" if he fraternizes with common folks).

Excuse me while I barf!

Once again, I missed-out on a great trend.

Here, really, is what we think:

- The armor bearer, as a church office, is just wrong.
- The armor bearer, as a devotional, is alright.

Obviously, all the armor bearers described in the Bible are in the Old Testament.

We tend to think of these guys as we do golf caddies. Or as a ceremonial office.

That's far from their actual duties and responsibilities.

Let's take a look at the Old Testament armor bearer, starting with the five places we read about one.

#1 Jdg 9:50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he encamped against Thebez and took it.

Jdg 9:51 But there was a strong tower in the city, and all the men and women - all the people of the city - fled there and shut themselves in; then they went up to the top of the tower.

Jdg 9:52 So Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it; and he drew near the door of the tower to burn it with fire.

Jdg 9:53 But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull.

Jdg 9:54 Then he called quickly to the young man, his armorbearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, 'A woman killed him.' " So his young man thrust him through, and he died.

#2 1Sa 14:6 Then Jonathan said to the young man who bore his armor, "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the LORD will work for us. For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few."

1Sa 14:7 So his armorbearer said to him, "Do all that is in your heart. Go then; here I am with you, according to your heart."

#3 1Sa 16:21 So David came to Saul and stood before him. And he loved him greatly, and he became his armorbearer.

#4 1Sa 17:4 And a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.

1Sa 17:5 He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze.

1Sa 17:6 And he had bronze armor on his legs and a bronze javelin between his shoulders.

1Sa 17:7 Now the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his iron spearhead weighed six hundred shekels; and a shield-bearer went before him.

#5 1Sa 31:3 The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was severely wounded by the archers.

1Sa 31:4 Then Saul said to his armorbearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me." But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it.

1Sa 31:5 And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him.

1Sa 31:6 So Saul, his three sons, his armorbearer, and all his men died together that same day.

Armor bearers were not just weapons-caddies. They were usually chosen for their own bravery in battle. They were highly skilled. They served as bodyguards. They participated in any fighting.

They had the solemn responsibility of killing their leader if he was mortally wounded in battle. Although probably not required, in some cases, they would then kill themselves.

(It was a pretty good bet that if your leader was killed, you would be, too, either by the enemy or, if you escaped, by your own people for cowardice).

I want to focus on Saul for just a moment, the first king of Israel. He's involved in two of the places armor bearing comes into play.

He was chosen king for all the wrong reasons. The Israelites wanted to be like the other nations, and Saul seemed the best specimen to represent them.

1Sa 9:1 There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power.

1Sa 9:2 And he had a choice and handsome son whose name was Saul. There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.

Never a good idea to choose by outward appearance.

God was willing to put his Spirit upon Saul and he could have prospered by depending upon the Lord. First Samuel 11:6 says the Spirit came upon Saul; God was willing to work through him, if he'd let God.

His role as king made it his responsibility to be Israel's champion; and, after all, that's why they chose him.

If you have a role, then you are empowered by God to live up to its responsibilities. The things you read about in the Bible, regarding your role, is God's way of empowering you to be able to do them.

As Israel's king, and a man promised the Spirit of God, Saul ought to have faced-off against Goliath, with David as his armor bearer.

Instead, Saul heard the taunts of the giant every day and did nothing.

Well, that's not true, exactly. He did do something. This is what the soldiers explained to David when he came on the scene:

1Sa 17:25 So the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel; and it shall be that the man who kills him the king will enrich with great riches, will give him his daughter, and give his father's house exemption from taxes in Israel."

Saul abdicated his role and responsibility. It should have been him fighting Goliath. Instead he offered a bribe for someone to take his place.

If the chronology of First Samuel is correct, Saul had made David his armor bearer in chapter sixteen - *before* the Goliath episode.

If that's the case, Saul went to battle with no one to bear his armor - indicating he never intended to fight.

When David arrived, we read the following account:

1Sa 17:34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock,

1Sa 17:35 I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it.

1Sa 17:36 Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God."

1Sa 17:37 Moreover David said, "The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!"

1Sa 17:38 So Saul clothed David with his armor, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail.

1Sa 17:39 David fastened his sword to his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. And David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested them." So David took them off.

Instead of his armor bearer outfitting him and standing by him in the heat of battle, he tried to give his armor to David and planned on staying behind as a spectator.

The two-fold exhortation for us, with regard to ministry, is this:

1. If you are called to serve in some capacity, fulfill your role. We don't want to be sitting in the midst of our armor, or looking for someone else to wear it, when the name of God is at stake and the people of God are suffering.

2. Always be ready to take-up the slack if someone else won't. The job needs to get done.

In either case you have everything that you require. You see, we have **our** own armor bearer.

There is a famous passage in the New Testament book of Ephesians where every one of us who is a believer is commanded to,

Ephesians 6:11 **Put on the whole armor of God**, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

This armor we are told to put on in the subsequent verses is provided for us. It is made possible by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It's not going too far to say that **Jesus, by the agency of God the Holy Spirit, is our armor bearer!**

For example we know that prayer is in our armor arsenal. We are encouraged to pray, empowered to pray, by God the Holy Spirit.

We are also told there are times we cannot pray; only groan. What happens then?

Rom 8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

The Holy Spirit steps-in, and **He does the job of an armor bearer for us**, taking up our prayers.

David wouldn't go into battle with untested armor. Sadly, many people would say the same about the armor of God: "I cannot walk with these, because I have not tested them."

Are you more used to the weapons and armor of the flesh, or the weapons and armor of the Spirit?

Go forward, in God's armor, with your armor bearer, and defeat the enemy you are currently facing.