

Elder Accountability

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 3

I. Opening:

- A. Elder accountability is an important aspect of a healthy biblical eldership.**
- B. One area in the realm of accountability that tends to cast its shadow over everything else is the area of sexual temptation and how to deal with it.**
- C. It seems like every day we hear of stories of fallen pastors and moral failings.**
- D. It goes without saying that we don't want to bring a reproach on the name of Christ.**
 - 1. One of the qualifications for an elder is that he is to be self-controlled—and self-controlled in the area of his sexual appetite.
 - 2. He is to be a one-woman kind of man.
 - 3. We need a proper understanding of the biblical doctrine of sin.
 - 4. We are fallen people, and *prone to wander*, as the hymn says.
- E. So what are some practical things that elders can do as a team, to protect against sin and Satan and the world wreaking havoc on the name of Christ and His church and His under-shepherds? (In the words of John Owen, “Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.”)**

II. Acknowledge it, and pray about it.

- A. Every single week in our elders' meeting we pray. We pray for our missionaries, our sick people, and our young people. We pray for leadership development and local missions.**
- B. And then we pray for each other in the area of sexual temptation.**
 - 1. It's listed on our prayer sheet every week because we know it doesn't take much for us to make a complete mess out of lives and bring a reproach on the name of Christ.
 - 2. It was the famous British preacher Alan Redpath who said, “There is no sin I am not capable of committing, five minutes after this sermon is over.”
 - 3. It's true: It doesn't take much for us to make a mockery of everything we have believed and taught.
- C. We need to have a high view of the nature and power of sin. We need to take heed, lest we fall.**
- D. The self-control an elder is called to encompasses every area of his life, including his thought life and any kind of pornography, which is so readily available electronically.**
- E. Elders shouldn't be naïve, or have their heads buried in the sand when it comes to this.**
- F. They need to proactively pray about it, and acknowledge the tension and struggle for personal holiness.**

III. Have regular meetings of accountability and openness.

A. There are two extremes to avoid:

1. One extreme is life-control, the kind of accountability that looks more like a police officer than a brother.
2. The other extreme is no accountability at all.
 - a) This is a kind of darkness that leaves room for sin to flourish.
 - b) Regular meetings bring a measure of light; they are one tool, among many, of exposing the deeds of darkness.

B. Elders need to have some level of openness.

1. This may be a fellow elder, it may be a former elder, or maybe someone else, like a mentor.
2. But it's critical that someone has permission to ask you the hard questions and to speak into your life.

C. Regular meetings are a means of fostering humility:

1. We also need to fear God more than we fear being exposed.
2. Erik Raymond said, "Accountability is often quite helpful. However, many times folks end up fearing their 'accountability partner' while remaining numbly void of a healthy fear of God. This does not kill the root of sin, but unwittingly increases a fear of man."
3. We need to kill sin, and regular meetings with another brother help with that.
4. We need bring ourselves before our fellow elders and submit to them.
5. Another tool in the arsenal is software.

IV. Software and practical steps:

- A. Programs like Covenant Eyes are helpful in mitigating sexual sin online.
- B. Content blockers like Open DNS also help mitigate the opportunity for sexual sin.
- C. Jesus said, "If your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out!" In other words, "Be radical with your sin." Go to extreme levels to stop habitual sin.
- D. This might mean you shouldn't have a smart phone or a Tablet. If it's too much temptation, get rid of it. Gouge it out.
- E. Another tool is to regularly rehearse the consequences of sin.

V. Rehearse the consequences of sin.

"I met with a man who had been a leader in a Christian organization until he committed immorality. I asked him, 'What could have been done to prevent this?' He paused only for a moment, and then said with haunting pain and precision, 'If only I had really known, really thought through and weighed what it would cost me and my family and my Lord, I honestly believe I would never have done it.'" -Randy Alcorn

A. Randy Alcorn's personalized list of anticipated consequences of immorality

1. "Periodically, especially when traveling or when in a time of temptation or weakness, I read through this list. In a personal and tangible way it brings home God's inviolate law of choice and consequence. It cuts through the fog of rationalization and fills our hearts with the healthy, motivating fear of God. We find that when we begin to think unclearly, reviewing this list yanks us back to the reality of the law of the harvest and the need both to fear God and the consequences of sin."
 - Grieving my Lord; displeasing the One whose opinion most matters
 - Dragging into the mud Christ's sacred reputation
 - Loss of reward and commendation from God
 - Having to look Jesus in the face at the judgment seat and give an account for my sin
 - Forcing God to discipline me in various ways
 - Following in the footsteps of men I know of whose immorality forfeited their ministry and caused me to shudder. List of these names:
 - Suffering of innocent people around me who would get hit by my shrapnel.
 - Untold hurt to Nanci, my best friend and loyal wife, and loss of her respect and trust
 - Hurt to and loss of credibility with my beloved daughters, Karina and Angela. ("Why listen to a man who betrayed Mom and us?")
 - If my blindness should continue or my family unable to forgive, I could lose my wife and my children forever.
 - Shame to my family ("Why isn't Daddy a pastor anymore?"; the cruel comments of others who would invariably find out)
 - Shame to my church family and hurt to my fellow pastors and elders. List of names:
 - Shame and hurt to my friends, and especially those I've led to Christ and disciplined.
 - Guilt hard to shake; even though God would forgive me, would I forgive myself?
 - Plaguing memories and flashbacks that could taint future intimacy with my wife
 - Disqualifying myself after having preached to others
 - Surrender of the things I am called to and love to do: teach, preach, write, and minister to others. Forfeiting certain opportunities to serve God. Years of training and experience in ministry wasted for a long period of time, maybe permanently.
 - Being haunted by my sin as I look in the eyes of others, and having it all dredged up again wherever I go and whatever I do
 - Undermining the hard work and prayers of others by telling our community, "This is a hypocrite—who can take seriously anything he and his church have said and done?"
 - Laughter, rejoicing, and blasphemous smugness by those who disrespect God and the church (2 Samuel 12:14)
 - Bringing great pleasure to Satan, the enemy of God
 - Heaping judgment and endless problems on the person I would have committed adultery with
 - Possible diseases: gonorrhea, syphilis, chlamydia, herpes, and AIDS (pain, constant reminder to me and my wife, possible infection of Nanci, or in the case of AIDS, even causing her death, as well as mine)
 - Possible pregnancy, with its personal and financial implications, including a lifelong reminder of sin to my family and me
 - Loss of self-respect, discrediting my own name, and invoking shame and lifelong embarrassment upon myself

VI. Confession

- A. Not all sin is disqualifying sin.
- B. The entraining of the thought of adultery and the act of adultery are two very different things, even though they are both wicked and sinful.
- C. But the elder needs to be quick to confess and quick to repent.
- D. He needs to be open to those who are holding him accountable.
- E. He needs to walk in the light, not live with secret sin in the darkness.
- F. The Lord is serious about the holiness of His church and the holiness of his under-shepherds. They are to be above reproach.
- G. The fact of the matter is that *no elder* is worthy of the work. If the Lord marked our iniquities, who could stand?
- H. It's a battle in which we will never put the stake in the ground and claim victory: we won't reach sinless perfection in this life, yet it's a battle we must acknowledge and fight.
- I. Confession is part of that fight.

VII. Resources:

- A. Heath Lambert's *Finally Free* is the best resource I have ever read in the topic of accountability and sexual temptation.
- B. Every elder should have this—if not for himself, then for the people he is shepherding.
- C. In that book, Lambert offers a great explanation of what accountability is and is not.

VIII. Effective Accountability:

- A. Effective accountability does not rely exclusively on accountability.**
 - 1. Accountability is one weapon among many.
 - 2. Accountability is not the only weapon in the fight against sin.
- B. Effective accountability is involved early rather than late.**
 - 1. Accountability is calling out for help in the moment of temptation and before you sin.
 - 2. Accountability is not delayed confession—or the regular reporting of sins already committed.
- C. Effective accountability involves someone with maturity.**
 - 1. Accountability is able to function best when it occurs under the leadership of someone who has a track record of victory over the sin in question.
 - 2. Accountability is not going to work well if you are seeking accountability with someone who is struggling and sinning in the same area as you.

D. Effective accountability involves someone with authority (Heb. 13:17).

1. Accountability is involving those who can speak with authority. It may also involve those who “. . . watch over you as those who must give an account.”
2. Accountability is not fighting on your own: by definition, accountability is not a solo effort.

E. Effective accountability should avoid explicit details (Eph. 5:11–12).

1. Accountability is describing sin and temptation in general terms with the goal of enabling your accountability person to help you best.
2. Accountability is not a place where explicit details are shared.

F. Effective accountability places the responsibility for confession on the person with the problem.

1. Accountability is full and free confession without prompting, pushing or demands for honesty.
2. Accountability is not going repeatedly through a list of questions without making honest and up-front confession of a particular sin.

G. Effective accountability must actually hold people accountable.

1. Accountability is being actively involved in the life of another Christian with regular and caring communication.
2. Accountability is not simply the commitment to meet regularly and work through a list of questions.

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Part 2 of 3

Introduction

- Welcome to part two of elder accountability: A strategy to be steadfast.
- We have already looked at the behemoth issue of elder accountability in the area of sexual temptation; now I want to broaden the scope to elder accountability in general.
- I want to look more broadly at elder accountability as it relates to the role and function of the elder.
- What are some practical ways to help one another as a team to be faithful to the calling and office of pastoral elder?

IX. Shared Leadership

- A. It's hard to get around the fact that ministry in the New Testament is shared leadership.**
- B. Jesus sent out his disciples two by two.**
1. There is built-in accountability, stimulation, and protection that comes with plurality.
 2. Exercise experts say that people who work out with a partner tend to be more faithful than those who go solo. The same is true in ministry.
- C. We all have a profound propensity towards minimalism.**
1. Left to ourselves, we can be pretty pathetic.
 2. But part of the genius of plural leadership, part of the genius of God's design, is that there is a built-in mechanism for accountability.
 3. Shared leadership helps mitigate our own weaknesses and our own selfishness.
 4. Pastors who are lone rangers can get away with a lot.
 5. But pastoral ministry was never meant to be a lone-ranger type of ministry.
- D. Biblical pastoral ministry is hard work. It's a burden in some ways. But it should be a *shared* burden, where we help one another and support one another. We also keep each other on task.**
1. All that being said, it's not as though accountability among elders just *happens*.
 2. Unless certain things are done, accountability amid elders will just be a theory, not reality.
- E. So what are some practical things that elders can do to cultivate and foster an ethos of accountability among the eldership team?**
1. Regular elders' meetings.
 - a) There is a great deal of accountability that comes from simply meeting every week.
 - 1) It keeps everyone on task: Tasks are assigned.
 - 2) It forces us to make the call, make the visit, and get to work.
 - 3) It forces us to do the work of an elder. Elders' meetings are like having a work-out partner. Our duties may not get done otherwise.

- b) Regular elders' meetings are crucial for maintaining a regular level of pastoral care.
 - 1) When elders don't meet frequently, things slow down, duties get dropped, and ultimately the people suffer.
 - 2) God forbid elders merely *claim* the office of the elder, but never actually do the hard work of shepherding.
 - c) Another way to cultivate elder accountability is to have job descriptions and reviews.
2. Job descriptions and reviews
- a) This is another practical tool that we *highly* recommend.
 - 1) We don't want elders who have no idea what responsibilities they have.
 - 2) It can become too easy for elders to just be elders by name, and not ever really do the work of an elder.
 - b) When I just started off in ministry I was at a church that was senior pastor-led, and then had a team of deacons.
 - 1) The deacons had been there for years, and I was the new senior pastor (even though I rejected that title).
 - 2) I showed them from Scripture that a plurality of eldership is a more biblical model of church leadership, and one of the deacons misunderstood and said, "Phew, that sounds great, I've been working too hard as a deacon all these years, and being an elder sounds like a good break. Let's give the work to others."
 - 3) I had to gently correct his misguided understanding of what elders do.
 - c) Many elders have no specific oversight.
 - 1) They have no specific responsibilities.
 - 2) They have no idea what they are supposed to be doing.
 - 3) They have no area of oversight.
 - 4) That's a recipe for a *lackluster* church and a great way to get ***nothing*** done.
 - d) Instead, write up a job description for each elder.
 - 1) Divide up the oversight of the church. Have an elder who takes the lead in overseeing:
 - (a) *The youth ministry*
 - (b) *The women's ministry*
 - (c) *The men's ministry*
 - (d) *The Sunday school*
 - (e) *The teaching ministry*
 - 2) You can also split up the missionaries. So each elder is responsible to take the lead on communicating and being a liaison between the missionary and the elders and the church.
 - 3) This doesn't mean that the other elders have no say in these areas, but it does put the pressure on that elder to bring leadership and oversight to that area.
 - 4) Of course all major decisions would be brought to the elders meeting.
 - 5) But this helps guard against the reality that if "everyone is in charge, no one is in charge."
 - 6) But this also provides a level of accountability.

- 7) Are you doing your job?
- e) At least once a year, go over each elder's job description with all the elders.
 - 1) In some cases, the other elders may look at all you are doing, and say, "You are doing too much! You will burn out! Let's take some stuff off your plate."
 - 2) In other cases, we might say, gently, "What are you actually doing?" "Do you need to take a break from the eldership, because you are not functioning as an elder at all."

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X. Shared Leadership (cont.)

F. So what are some practical things that elders can do to cultivate and foster an ethos of accountability among the eldership team?

2. Job descriptions and reviews

- f) I should add that this is also helpful for any paid pastoral elder too.
- g) It may be difficult to discern, but we have found it helpful to delineate between an elder job description and a paid job description.

3. Report back

- a) It's possible to have job descriptions and duties doled out, but unless there are clear expectations to report back it's possible that nothing will get done.
- b) In your regular meetings, assign responsibilities.
 - 1) If someone in the church needs a phone call or visit, delegate it then and there.
 - 2) THEN have the person REPORT BACK!
- c) I promise you, you will have an immediate increase of effectiveness.
- d) Make reporting back a regular expectation, even if it needs to be explicit every time.
- e) Agree ahead of time that as an eldership, we want to be effective; we want to be good pastoral shepherds. And part of that is following through on things.
- f) Again, if "everyone is in charge, no one is on charge."
 - 1) Alex Strauch has a number of good suggestions on elder accountability in his little book called *Meetings That Work*.

XI. Intentional Fellowship

A. An eldership can be a miserable place of suspicion and distrust. It's possible to have a toxic eldership. Such a place is not conducive to accountability.

B. If elders don't trust each other, then they naturally pull away from one another.

C. One way to counter this is to schedule intentional fellowship.

- 1. Get meals together. Go golfing, hunting, fishing together.
- 2. Spend time with each other's families.
- 3. Go camping together.
- 4. When you are one on one, ask about their marriage and their work.
- 5. Share prayer requests with each other.

D. We have heard of some elders who have a meal together every week together before their meeting. That's a great idea. By the way, if you have good or creative ideas for elder accountability, please write us and let us know. We'd love to learn and share.

- E. Fellowship sometimes just happens, and that's wonderful. But other times it needs to be scheduled.
- F. A certain kind of fellowship brings a certain kind of relationship. A certain kind of relationship brings a certain kind of trust. A certain kind of trust brings a certain kind of accountability. That's a healthy eldership.
- G. We cannot afford to forfeit intentional fellowship.

XII. Elder Retreats

- A. This should be mandatory for elders.
- B. Focused time away, together as elders, praying and planning and reevaluating.
- C. For us, we usually spend a Friday night camping together.
 - 1. This is meant to primarily be a time of fellowship for us.
 - 2. We have steaks. We laugh. We target shoot. We ride four wheelers. We have a fire. We share our struggles and difficulties. We pray.
 - 3. It's a blessed time, and a needed time!
- D. We have had specially planned elders' retreats where we have had tremendous times of prayer and planning and strategy—usually at key times in our church when major decisions are being made, or need to be made.
- E. The more you know and trust each other the better.
- F. You simply cannot get this kind of quality interaction during a weekly meeting.
- G. Elder retreats are important for a variety of reasons.

XIII. Intentional protection of one another

- A. A healthy eldership cares for and looks out for one another.
- B. It's possible you might recommend to another elder that he take a sabbatical. Maybe for six months or one year.
- C. We need the courage to "*care-front*," not just *confront*. (We need to care for one other.)
- D. Part of caring for one another is praying systematically for each elder.
- E. Have a system.
 - 1. Pray for an elder every day.
 - 2. Pray for their jobs, their businesses, their families, their health, and their spiritual lives.
- F. The Lord sent them out two by two. We need each other. We cannot be Lone Rangers.