

First Among Equals

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 4

Introduction

“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’” (1 Tim. 5:17–18 ESV)

We are going to look at one of the most important passages of Scripture on defining biblical eldership. 1 Timothy 5:17–18 doesn’t fit with the mental concept most people have of elders. When you talk about elders laboring in preaching or teaching, or leading well, they are confused. This is because most people think of elders as temporary board members who make financial decisions or church decisions, but they don’t shepherd people. Biblical eldership is shepherding eldership.

I. **The Church’s Duty to Honor its Elders: 1 Timothy 5:17–18**

In verses 17 and 18, Paul instructs the congregation to care for the welfare of elders who rule well, particularly those who labor at preaching and teaching. In the same way that needy widows had been abandoned by family members, it appears that the church’s spiritual leaders had been neglected.

A. **Honor Those Who Lead Well**

1. Although all elders lead, certain elders deserve special honor because they “rule well.”
2. The verb for rule is *prohistemi*, which means in this context “lead,” “guide,” “care for,” “manage,” or “direct.” The English translation “rule” is far too strong of a translation. The NIV is very good when it says “the elders who direct the affairs of the church.” Or we could say: “those who exercise leadership well.” The idea conveyed here is that these elders exercise effective household leadership.
3. They serve with distinction or proficiency. Such elders exercise their leadership faithfully. They are good planners, organizers, and motivators. They are the kind of men who get things done and can effectively care for people.
4. Moreover, they are willing and able to give a good deal of their time and energy to the spiritual care of the local congregation.
 - a) They may have the gift of leadership: “The one who leads, with zeal” (Rom. 12:8).
 - b) The word for “one who leads” is the same Greek word used in 1 Timothy 3:5, *prohistemi*.

B. **Honor Those Who Labor in Preaching and Teaching**

The elders to whom Paul refers are identified by two qualifying clauses: “who lead well” and “those who labor in preaching and teaching.” There are two ways to understand how these clauses relate to one another.

1. The Greek adverb for “especially” often means “above all,” or “particularly.”
2. The other interpretation contends that, in certain contexts, the adverb *malista* means “that is,” “in other words,” “I mean,” or “to be precise.” The elders who lead well are the same persons who labor in preaching and teaching. I prefer the first alternative, as do most translations.
3. Paul’s foremost concern is that the congregation properly honor those elders who labor at preaching and teaching. On this point there should be little disagreement.

C. The Meaning of “Labor in Preaching and Teaching”

1. These elders labor in preaching and teaching. The word “labor” is a strong one. It has the idea of working to the point of weariness. It is strenuous labor in the activity of teaching or instruction.
2. Good teachers “labor” at long hours of study, preparation, and demanding teaching situations.
 - a) Teaching is absorbing work. It is mentally strenuous, time-consuming work that demands a great deal of strength and self-discipline.
 - b) It demands lots of sacrifice of time and other interests in life. It means being disciplined in the use of time.
3. Preaching and teaching:
 - a) The word “preaching” in the original text is *en logo*: demands the rendering “preaching,” in the general sense of exhorting, admonishing, evangelizing. This term probably includes preaching the gospel to the unbeliever.
 - b) Linked with preaching, yet distinct, is “teaching” (*didaskalia*). Here teaching is the more specialized term, meaning authoritative instruction in doctrine for believers.
 - c) By using “preaching and teaching,” Paul covers all dimensions of public discourse. All this need to be understood in light of the heresy that has created disorder and chaos in the church.

D. Rightly Entitled to Double Honor

1. Certainly, those who lead well and those who labor in preaching and teaching should “be considered worthy of double honor,” which means “rightfully deserving” or “entitled to.”
2. Because of their gifts and strenuous labor, such elders are rightfully entitled to double honor. Also they are desperately needed in the church.
3. The church needs a fresh evaluation of these elders and their importance to the church. It is likely that the confusion in the church caused the elders to be neglected. But their work is essential to the health of the church and its protection (Acts 20:28–31. Titus 1:9ff).
4. It is the responsibility of the congregation to know this and to honor their elders. So often we think of the elders’ responsibility to the congregation. Well, the congregation has responsibilities to the elders also.

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“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’” (1 Tim. 5:17–18 ESV)

I. The Church’s Duty to Honor its Elders: 1 Timothy 5:17–18 (cont.)

A. The Meaning of “Double Honor”

1. All elders should be honored, but elders who lead well and work hard at preaching and teaching are entitled to “double honor.”
2. By using the expression “double honor,” Paul wisely avoids slighting other elders of their due honor and is able to call special attention to those who rule well and those who labor at teaching. So “double honor” refers to both respect and remuneration: honor for an elder of the church and honor for his extra labor.
3. If this is not correct, then Paul uses double honor figuratively for abundant honor, much honor, extra honor.

B. The Meaning of the Word “Honor”

1. The word “honor” (*time*) means “respect,” “consideration,” or “high regard,” and in certain instances includes the idea of monetary aid. Consider the following points:
 - a) Although the word “honor” (*time*) itself doesn’t necessarily mean material assistance, it includes in certain contexts the sense of material aid.
 - b) 1 Timothy 5:3 states, “Honor widows who are widows indeed.” The “widow indeed” is a truly destitute Christian widow. A church honors a destitute Christian widow by providing for her material livelihood.
 - c) The biblical quotations in verse 18 show that material provision is uppermost in Paul’s thought.
2. Using “honor” rather than a more tangible term like “money” is in harmony with Paul’s choice of expression for financial matters.
 - a) Paul favors terms that express grace, liberality, love, and partnership: service.
 - b) The word “honor” expresses financial compensation in a thoroughly Christian manner.
3. Financial provision for elders is really honor due the elders, and such honor conveys the congregation’s esteem, thoughtfulness, and loving concern.

C. The Scriptural Basis for Material Honor

1. Paul wants no misunderstanding as to the meaning or necessity of his instruction, so in verse 18 he adds scriptural support and clarification to his charge. Quoting from both the Old and New Testaments, Paul writes:

“For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while when it treads out the grain,’ and ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’” (1 Tim. 5:18)

2. Paul introduces both quotes by saying, “For the Scripture says.” For the believer, just the mention of the word “Scripture” signals the ultimate voice of authority—God’s Word (John 10:35). By using this qualifying phrase, Paul is saying that complete unity exists between the Old and New Testaments--both Moses and Jesus agree that a laboring man “is worthy of his wages.”
3. Paul’s Old Testament quotation is from Deuteronomy 25:4, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.”
 - a) The context of Deuteronomy concerns equity and justice in daily life—even the right of an animal to enjoy the fruit of its labor while working for its owner.
 - b) The full intent of Deuteronomy 25:4 is explained in 1 Corinthians 9:6-14.
 - c) To refuse to support hard-working teachers of the Word is as unjust, heartless, and selfish as muzzling an animal while it is working, which was a common practice among greedy, ancient farmers. The passage thus implies the provision of adequate living support, not merely token gifts, for the worker.
4. Paul aids more support to his point, a quotation from Jesus himself and applied by the apostle to the church elders: “the laborer deserves his wages” is from Luke 10:7.
 - a) Jesus originally spoke these words to the seventy before he sent them out to preach. Paul applied his words to all who teach and preach the gospel (1 Cor. 9:14).
 - b) Here, in 1 Timothy 5, Paul applies the same words to elders who labor in the Word.
 - c) In a similar way, Paul tells the Galatians: “One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches.” (Gal. 6:6)
5. No matter how poor a local congregation is, it must exercise faith and liberality before the Lord (2 Cor. 8:1-5) in giving to those who labor in the Word. In short, God’s people must honor their elders.
 - a) Since no details are given, how this will be implemented in a local church will depend upon local circumstances.
 - b) There is a great deal of flexibility in how these things are fleshed out in local churches.

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“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’” (1 Tim. 5:17-18 ESV)

II. First Among a Council of Equals: Leaders Among Leaders

A. In light of what we have learned, an extremely important biblical concept to grasp is “first among equals.” Failure to understand the concept of “first among equals” (or 1 Tim. 5:17) has caused some elderships to be tragically ineffective in their pastoral care and leadership.

1. Although elders act jointly as a council and share equal authority and responsibility for the leadership of the church, all are not equal in their giftedness, biblical knowledge, leadership ability, experience, or dedication.
2. Therefore, those among the elders who are particularly gifted leaders and/or teachers will naturally stand out among the other elders as leaders and teachers within the leadership body.
3. This is what the Romans called *primus inter pares*, meaning “first ones among equals.” This is a thoroughly biblical concept—both with the twelve tribes of Israel and Judah and Ephraim, and the twelve apostles.

B. Examples:

1. Jesus and the Twelve Apostles
 - a) Jesus chose twelve apostles, all of whom he empowered to preach and heal, but he singled out three for special attention: Peter, James, and John (“first ones among equals”). On key occasions Jesus chose only Peter, James, and John to accompany him to witness his power, glory, and agony (Luke 8:51, 9:28; Mark 14:33).
 - b) Among the three, as well as the Twelve, Peter is unquestionably first among his equals. In all four lists of the apostles’ names, Peter’s name is first (Matt. 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:14–16; Acts 1:13).
 - c) Matthew actually refers to Peter as “the first” (Matt. 10:2). By calling Peter “the first,” Matthew means “first among his equals,” first in the group. The word first is *protos*, “most prominent of the Twelve” (Greek Lexicon, BDAG).
 - d) In all four gospels, Peter is indisputably the prominent figure among the Twelve. If you doubt this, look up the name Peter in a Bible concordance, then look up the names of the other apostles.

- e) Jesus charged Peter to “strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32). Jesus acknowledged Peter as first among his brothers, the natural leader and motivator. He knew that they would need Peter’s leadership to help them through the dark days immediately following their Lord’s departure.

2. Peter in Acts

The book of Acts richly demonstrates Peter’s leadership. Among the Twelve who jointly shared the leadership of the first church (Acts 2:14,42; 4:33,35; 5:12,18,25,29,42; 6:2-6; 8:14; 9:27; 15:2-29), Peter is the chief spokesman and natural leader throughout the first twelve chapters of Acts (Acts 1:15; 2:14; 3:1ff; 4:8ff; 5:3ff; 5:15,29; 8:14-24; 9:32-11:18; 12:3ff; 15:7-11; Gal. 2:7-14). Some scholars even divide the book of Acts according to its two central figures: the acts of Peter (Acts 1–12) and the acts of Paul (Acts 13-28).

- a) In Paul’s letter to the Galatians, Paul speaks of James, Peter, and John as the acknowledged “pillars” of the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9; see also Gal. 2:7, 8).
- b) They are also referred to as “leading men among the brothers” (Acts 15:22), “leading men of the city” (Acts 25:2; 13:50).
- c) As the natural leader, the chief speaker, the man of action, Peter challenged, energized, strengthened, and ignited the group. Without Peter, the group would have been less effective.
- d) When surrounded by eleven other apostles who were his equals, Peter became stronger and more balanced, and was protected from his impetuous nature and his fears.
- e) In spite of his outstanding leadership and speaking ability, Peter possessed no legal or official rank or title above the other eleven. They were not his subordinates. They were not his staff or team of assistants. He wasn’t the apostles’ “senior pastor.” Peter was simply first among his equals, and that by our Lord’s own approval.

3. Paul and Barnabas

The concept of “first among equals” is further evidenced by the relationship of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas were both apostles (Acts 13:1–3; 14:4; 15:36–39; 1 Cor. 9:1–6), yet Paul was first between the two because he was “the chief speaker” and dynamic leader (Acts 13:13; 14:12). Although Paul was plainly the more gifted of the two apostles, he held no formal ranking over Barnabas; they labored as partners in the work of the gospel.

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III. First Among a Council of Equals: Leaders Among Leaders

B. Examples (cont.):

7. Ephesians 4:11

- a) All elders must be able to teach the Word, but not all desire to work fully at preaching and teaching or have the spiritual gift.
- b) The kind of spiritual gift envisioned in 1 Timothy 5:17 parallels what we find in Ephesians 4:11, which states that the risen Christ gives to the church gifted shepherds and teachers to equip his people for better service on behalf of the body:
“And He gave the apostles, and the prophets, and the evangelists, and the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11–12).
- c) According to the grammatical structure of the phrase “and the shepherds and teachers,” shepherds and teachers are closely linked together but not identical. Shepherds are included in the category of teachers, but not all teachers are included in the category of shepherds. The shepherd gift, then, uniquely combines teaching and leading. It is this kind of gift that would enable an elder to “rule well” and “work hard” at teaching. A great deal of flexibility exists as to how teachers operate.
- d) Such gifted teachers don’t just prepare a sermon a two a year. They are constantly preparing sermons and messages. They make enormous sacrifices in time and effort to be studying and to be prepared to teach. This is their passion. They always have books with them. They are constantly meditating on doctrine. They love the great doctrines of Scripture. But most importantly, they are gifted of the Holy Spirit and led by the Holy Spirit to do this.
- e) The church needs to acknowledge such giftedness and the benefits it receives from such gifted teachers. They are driven to study Scripture and to work fully at teaching. Nothing else satisfies them like teaching and preaching God’s Word. They are skilled at communicating divine truth, and there is a marked effectiveness to their teaching. They have a wide appeal among people, and the people have confidence that they are knowledgeable in Scripture. Their teaching bears consistent fruit.

IV. Abuses of This Doctrine

- B. This doctrine is easily abused. There are two extremes to the concept of equality and diversity with the eldership:
1. One is to see all elders as equal and allow for no diversity of gift or expression of gift. Gifted people are pushed down or out.
 2. The other extreme is to create a whole new office of superiority. People are naturally lazy spiritually and are willing to hand over their spiritual responsibilities to the paid people in the church.
- C. What “first among equals” does not mean:
1. It doesn’t mean that elders who are first among their equals do all the decision making for the group. The big issue is who makes the final decision for the church?
 2. Or they are the pastors while the others are merely elders. To call one elder “pastor” and the rest “elders” or one elder “the clergyman” and the rest “lay elders” is to act without biblical precedence.
 3. Nor does it create a distinct office separate from the eldership.
 4. Nor does it give to any person exclusive rights to preach, baptize, lead in worship, or administer the Lord’s Supper.
 5. In fact, the New Testament doesn’t assign a special title or name for these elders even though their giftedness and full- or part-time working status for the church distinguishes them from the other elders.
- D. Advantages of first among equals:
1. The advantage of the principle of “first among equals” is that it allows for functional, gift-based diversity within the eldership team without creating an official, superior office over fellow elders.
 - a) Just as the leading apostles, such as Peter and John, bore no special title or formal distinctions from the other apostles, elders who receive double honor form no official class or receive no special title.
 - b) The differences among the elders are functional, not formal.
 2. It also protects gifted leaders and teachers from playing God or controlling everything in the church, or worse, falling into sin. It is a good form of government for the church, which is the holy brotherhood and sisterhood.
 3. It also guards against jealousy over gifts.
 - a) Differences in spiritual giftedness must not be allowed to create jealousy or division within the eldership.

- b) By stating God's approval of such elders and their entitlement to double honor, Paul emphasizes that these elders ought to be viewed by the congregation and their fellow elders as a source of blessing, joy, and profit, rather than as a threat.
- E. All this must be balanced out with Jesus' teaching on servant leadership. All great leaders are, in the end, servants of the people of God. Yet there is the constant danger of exalting one man over all others, making him the "holy man," the Protestant priest.

Love Among Elders

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 4

V. Introduction

A. The fall has adversely affected every human relationship.

1. All of us, from time to time, experience conflict in every human relationship we have. It is part and parcel of living in a fallen world.
 - a) Husbands and wives experience conflict.
 - b) Parents and children experience conflict.
 - c) Siblings experience conflict
 - d) Employers and employees experience conflict.
 - e) Nations experience conflict.
"Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." (Job 5:7)
 - f) Church members experience conflict.
 - 1) Less than 2% of church splits are over doctrinal issues.
 - 2) 98% of church splits are the result of discord among the children of God.
 - 3) At times we simply cannot get along with each other.
 - 4) Even the most godly and mature among us still have areas where the flesh raises its ugly head.
 - 5) Churches experience disunity, conflict, and sinful actions as a result of the fall.

B. The fall has adversely affected every church leadership team.

1. It is not uncommon for the elder board to struggle with conflict and carnal behavior.
 - a) Church leaders can be tempted with worldly politics and pride.
 - b) Church leaders can be tempted with selfishness and immature behavior.
 - c) Church leaders can be tempted with stubbornness and annoying weaknesses.
2. Strong disagreement among leaders in and of itself is not necessarily wrong.

C. The fall can provide opportunities for personal growth and unity.

1. Service together on an elder board can provides a wonderful training ground for men to personally grow into wise, loving servants.
 - a) In an atmosphere of love, elders can express differing theological views
 - b) In an atmosphere of love, elders can have a good Spirit-led debate
 - c) In an atmosphere of love, elders can improve their communication skills
 - d) In an atmosphere of love, elders can learn to submit to one another.
2. Conflict is not always a bad thing; it becomes a bad thing when it leads to ungodly and carnal behavior.
3. Church leaders must learn to deal with conflict and controversies among themselves.

4. The spiritual atmosphere of a leadership group directly affects the health of a church.
 - a) A carnal leadership team can destroy a church.
 - b) There is a direct link between the quality of elder relationships and the quality of the leadership and pastoral care that the group provides.
 - c) Whether we realize it or not, the attitudes and behavior of the leadership body provide a model for all the other relationships within the church.
 - d) Sadly, the opposite can also be true. If not operating under the control of the Spirit, church leaders can also make matters worse.

VI. Building solid relationships among elders

A. God has provided the resources for leaders to function in love and unity.

B. The good news is that God has already given to us all of the resources that we need to live Spirit-led lives as we work and serve together as leaders, in addition to being role models to the flock.

1. Seven qualities available for life and godliness:

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (II Peter 1:3-8)

2. A few observations from this passage:

- a) God has provided all needed resources for life and godliness.
 - 1) In addition to the new birth, God has granted to us all of the resources that we need for life and godliness.
 - 2) More specifically, all that church leaders need to serve and work together in a humble, Spirit-led manner has already been given to us.
 - 3) It's as if God has given to us a wonderful toolbox filled with just the right equipment to build up:
 - (a) *Our private lives*
 - (b) *The body of Christ*
 - (c) *The elder board*
- b) God has given seven supplemental qualities to add to our faith (v. 5-7):
Virtue (v. 5), Knowledge, Self-control, Steadfastness, Godliness, Brotherly affection, Love

- c) It's as if Peter is comparing the building of our lives to a solid building.
 - 1) The foundation: faith
 - 2) The capstone: love
- d) Gifting (service) without love equals nothing.
 - 1) As it relates to leadership, we may:
 - Have a vibrant personality
 - Be very gifted
 - Have profound bible knowledge
 - Have leadership skills
 - 2) But if we lack love, we are nothing, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians.

"There is no use trying to do church work without love. A doctor, a lawyer, may do good work without love, but God's work cannot be done without love." -D. L. Moody
 - 3) And that work would include church leaders serving and working together.
 - 4) Elder relations with each other must be bathed in love!

C. Three foundational passages for building love and unity among elders

And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.
(Col. 3:14)

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-3)

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.
(Eph. 4:31-32)

Our goal as leaders as a result of this study:

1. Glorify God by placing Christ's example of love at the center of the leadership body.
2. Seek to promote love and unity among the elder board, which then sets the tone for the entire congregation.

VII. Soul maintenance is vital to a leadership team

A. A loving leader must be a healthy leader.

And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph. 5:2)

1. One of the key issues to being a loving leader is maintaining a healthy, loving soul.
 - a) When a church leader is spiritually healthy, love for others is less of a challenge.
 - b) An elder board will never reflect the love of Christ with unhealthy leaders.

2. In addition to the world, the flesh, and the devil, the pressures of church leadership can leave one spiritually drained.
 - a) Statistics are showing that 1,500 pastors permanently leave the ministry *each month* in America.
 - b) About 50% of those who continue are so discouraged they would seek another line of work if they could.
3. Spiritual health is a major issue facing Christian leaders.
 - a) When a leader serves on spiritual fumes, his brokenness tends to be accentuated.
 - 1) Insecurity
 - 2) Pride
 - 3) Selfish ambition
4. On the other hand, when a church leader pursues spiritual health as a lifestyle, love for fellow elders tends to be one of the byproducts.
 - a) The key word here is “pursue.” Are we...
 - 1) Pursuing Christ likeness?
 - 2) More loving, patient, kind as we encounter each other’s idiosyncrasies?
 - 3) Seeking to improve in our people skills?”
 - 4) Displaying love and compassion for our fellow leaders?

James Strahan said, *“Men are not to be judged by the presence or absence of faults, but by the direction of their lives.”*
5. A spiritual leader can never stop growing.
6. We can never kick back and think we have arrived.
7. We can never coast and live off of past victories. I like what the American business leader Bruce Barton said: *“When you’re through changing, you’re through.”*

B. When leaders serve and work together in a loving atmosphere, they set the tone for the whole congregation.

1. A leader’s life is like an open book for all to see: the good, the bad, and the ugly.

History has accurately demonstrated the following principle: *“As the soul of the leader goes, so goes the leader. As the leader goes, so goes the ministry.”* Why is this true?

C. The health of a leader sets the tone for those he leads.

1. People tend to emulate their leaders.
 - a) Whether they realize it or not, leaders set the spiritual bar in a ministry or a church.
 - b) If leaders tend to gossip, those that follow tend to gossip.
 - c) People tend to pick up their leader’s traits, whether good or bad.
2. Members of a group tend to be inspired by a godly example.
 - a) A loving leader also sets the tone for the elder board.
 - b) That love comes through intimacy with Christ, which contributes to a healthy soul.
 - 1) Unfortunately, we often minimize the need for a healthy soul when it comes to

- church leadership.
- 2) Spiritual drift on the part of a leader is a constant hazard, for the leader himself, as well as for those he is leading.
 - c) The truth is, all leaders are still imperfect human beings. We are all affected by the fall and still struggle with many character flaws.
3. All leaders must tend to their spiritual health and seek to improve in their people skills.
- a) As leaders we must first have a desire to improve.
 - b) Then, we must intentionally pursue change or it will never occur.
 - 1) Do I communicate poorly?
 - 2) Do I display irritating eccentricities?
 - 3) Do I have a gnawing character flaw?
 - 4) Do I have blind spots and imbalances?
 - c) When leaders become stagnant in their growth, their weaknesses can be exposed.

Pride, bad tempers, controlling spirit, cutting words, attempts to intimidate or manipulate fellow elders

 - 1) As a result, our love for one another can be adversely affected and very difficult.
 - 2) Many church leaders continue to serve, but:
 - Carry grudges.
 - Have unresolved conflict with other leaders.
 - Are bitter, jaded, and suspicious of one another.
 - d) Yet, under the same circumstances, a leader also has the opportunity to:
 1. Grow spiritually.
 2. Improve in people skills.
 3. Be a model and a blessing to fellow leaders.
 4. Demonstrate love under pressure.
 5. Demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit.
4. I believe every sincere church leader desires to be a catalyst for change, not only in his congregation but also among the leadership team. The good news is that God has given us all of the resources required to do that.

Love Among Elders

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VIII. Love: The Key Ingredient for Elder Relations

B. The Biblical Emphasis on Love

Bible scholar William Kelly said, *“Love is the life-breath of the church.”* We might add that love is also *“the life-breath of the elder board.”*

1. Setting the bar on love: Leviticus 19:18 instructs us to *“Love [our] neighbor as ourselves.”*
2. Comparing the bar on love
 - a) Our Lord repeated this when asked by an expert in the law which command in the law is the greatest?

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. (Matt. 22:37–38)

“The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matt. 22:39)
 3. Raising the bar on love
 - a) But before the Lord went to the cross to die, he raised the bar even higher.
 - b) In John 13:34-35 he gave a new command regarding love:

“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
 - c) While this new command was given to all of Christ’s followers, it is also the standard for behavior among elders as they serve together. Without the crucial ingredient of love, elder relationships can spiral down to simply enduring each other or worse, undermining each other.
 4. When biblical love permeates elder relationships, it enhances the group dynamic and frees the members from: jealousy, fear of opposing ideas, defensive posturing, infighting and a host of other carnal tactics and responses.
 5. When love prevails, it is much easier for elders to: communicate ideas, disagree, understand each other, be open to opposing views and forgive one another.
 6. Elders must let love set the tone and be the standard for all leadership interaction.

(continued)

C. The Church Leader's Wardrobe

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Colossians 3:12-14)

1. I recommend that church leaders adopt the following items as their "dress code."
 - a) Paul encourages us to put these items on: Compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness and love.
 - b) As a matter of fact, love should be at the heart of everything an elder does, including interacting with fellow leaders.
 - 1) Love is simply the most important piece of spiritual clothing.
 - 2) Let's apply this directly to elder relationships!
 - (a) *Elders should express heartfelt compassion for one another.*
 - (b) *Elders should treat each other with kindness and humility.*
 - (c) *Elders should be gentle and patient with one another.*
 - 3) Could you imagine an elder board that operated like this?
 - 4) Offenses and complaints are inevitable as leaders work together in many stressful situations.
 - b) As a matter of fact, love should be at the heart of everything an elder does, including interacting with fellow leaders.
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 - 3) Could you imagine an elder board that operated like this?
 - 4) Offenses and complaints are inevitable as leaders work together in many stressful situations.
2. Elders are to accept and forgive one another as offenses and complaints arise.
 - a) Notice the qualifier that Paul adds to the end of verse 13:
"Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive."
 - b) How has the Lord forgiven us?
 - c) Is his forgiveness limited?
 - d) Does he hold a few sins back to drag out against us to keep us in line?
 - 1) No! All is forgiven! "As far as the east is from the west."
 - 2) I put it this way: God through Christ has forgiven **the mother load** of our sins.
 - 3) And having experienced that level of forgiveness, how can we then hold back and not forgive a fellow elder for a much lesser level of offense?
3. And then Paul crowns this passage with "above all" exhortation.
"Above all, put on love—the perfect bond of unity." (14)

D. The Church Leader's Model for Love

1. There is an incident in the Life of the Lord Jesus that has inspired me to intentionally pursue becoming a more loving elder. It was at the tomb of Lazarus in John 11.
 - a) It was a very stressful, hectic moment for Mary and Martha, as well as the Lord Jesus.
 - b) Tension was high at the loss of a brother and dear friend. Tears were being shed.
 - c) This scene was being observed by onlookers. Many opposed the Lord's ministry.
 - d) What impressed me in this passage was what the Jews said as they observed the Lord in this stressful situation.

- e) And what they said inspires me as an elder to remember that the world is watching us as spiritual leaders. *“So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’”* (John 11:36)
2. As we serve the Lord and his people as elders, we may hear encouraging remarks about our service: “He is a hard worker,” “He is a good shepherd,” “He is a good preacher or teacher.”
 - a) But the one I aspire to most of all is to be known as a humble, loving servant.
 - b) Wouldn’t it be wonderful if the saints in our local churches would observe their leaders and say, “See how they love us”?
 - c) This will not happen by accident. By nature we love ourselves.
 3. As leaders we must intentionally seek to improve in our love and people skills as we serve God’s people. If we leave it to chance we will never lead with love.

E. The Church Leader’s Mandate for Love

1. The command to love one another is the most oft-repeated command in the NT.
 - a) Of course, it is a command for all believers.
 - b) But how much more important it should be for those who lead the flock of God.
2. I would like to go over just a small sampling of some of the NT commands regarding love. As we do, I think you will be impressed at least about two important things:
 - a) How crucial these commands are in developing a leader’s love for others.
 - b) If practiced regularly, how they could radically transform a leadership body.

Romans 12:10 gives us the first two commands: *“Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.”*

3. Be an example of love. In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul instructs Timothy to: *“Set the believers an example in . . . love.”*
4. *“Pursue . . . love”* (1 Timothy 6:11)
5. *“Love the brotherhood.”* (1 Peter 2:17)
6. *“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly.”* (1 Peter 4:8)
7. Maintain a perpetual debt of love for one another. *“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”* (Romans 13:8)
8. As you can see, the topic of love was not an incidental issue for the apostles.
9. Christian leaders should be out in front modeling love in their congregation.
 - a) But it must begin to be demonstrated first among the leaders themselves.
 - b) If there is a fake love among the elders who simply tolerate each other—well, this would be hypocrisy.
 - c) And Paul is very clear about hypocrisy when it comes to love. He tells us in Romans 12:9 to “Let love be genuine.”

So, as you can see, love among believers, particularly among elders, is not an incidental issue. It is at the heart of Christianity.

V. A self-test to measure an elder's "love factor"

A. Let me suggest to you a kind of self-test that you can administer to get a sense of any area you may need to shore up in your relationship with your fellow elders.

1. In 1 Corinthians 13, sometimes called the "love chapter," Paul describes the manner in which believers are to use their spiritual gifts as they serve one another. He presents this chapter because many of the Corinthian believers were misusing their spiritual gifts like children playing with toys.
2. Church leaders are the ones to set the tone in the local church. They are the "role models" of how believers should get along as they serve in the local church. So let's read verses 4-7 in this passage. But let's do it as an "elder self-test" to measure our "love factor" as leaders and role models among God's people. We will simply add the word "elder" from time to time to make it personal to those who lead the flock.

**[An elder] is patient . . . is kind.
[An elder] does not envy,
is not boastful, is not conceited,
5 does not act improperly,
is not selfish, is not provoked,
and does not keep a record of wrongs.
6 [An elder] finds no joy in unrighteousness
but rejoices in the truth.
7 [An elder] bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.
(1 Cor. 13:4-7)**

I can't stress enough how important this passage is in maintaining love and unity among believers, but particularly among elders as we serve together.

3. Paul starts the passage with two positive aspects of love: patience and kindness
 - a) Am I a patient leader?
 - b) Am I a kind leader?
4. After mentioning these two positive aspects, he then goes on to lists eight negative things that sabotage love.
 - a) These eight negative qualities are like termites. If left unchecked, they could eat away at the fabric of an elder board, reducing it to a group of suspicious board members who simply tolerate each other.
 - b) They are eight negative aspects that should never characterize a Christian leader:
 - c) Eight negative aspects of love
 - 1) As a leader, do I struggle with envy?

- 2) Do I promote myself? (Boasting, pride)
- 3) Do I come across as conceited? (Conceit)
- 4) Do I demonstrate improper behavior?
- 5) Am I selfish?
- 6) Am I easily provoked?
- 7) Do I keep records of wrongs committed against me?
- 8) Do I secretly find joy in unrighteousness?

B. So as we work together as church leaders, let's make it our goal to:

1. Wear the right wardrobe (put on love)
2. Model love
3. Pursue love

As leaders of God's people, let's bathe everything we do in love.

Love Among Elders (continued)

Detailed outline

Part 3 of 4

VI. Check Your Attitude

A. You have heard the saying that “attitude is everything.” This is especially true as church leaders serve together in the crucible of life.

1. Working closely under stress in a leadership body can quickly reveal our depravity.
2. The potential for disunity among elders is just one bad attitude away. Such things as pride, threatening talk, selfish independence, temper tantrums, emotional withdrawal, angry outbursts of emotion, jealousy, and sour attitudes can sabotage love and harmony.
3. The antidote is an attitude check.
 - a) We must make sure our attitude in ministry aligns with the attitude of our Savior.
 - b) This is so important that God has given us an entire chapter in the NT regarding the correct attitude, which we will look at in just a moment.
 - c) And that attitude should permeate every aspect of elder relationships: how we talk to one another, how we talk *about* one another, how we treat one another, how we conduct ourselves at board meetings.

B. Right and wrong attitudes

1. We must constantly fight against “Diotrephes Syndrome.”
 - a) In 3 John 9, the apostle wrote about Diotrephes. He described this man as one “*who likes to put himself first.*” In our fallenness, our instinct is to put ourselves first.
 - b) Thus, we need to constantly check our attitude as we serve with others. In Christ’s kingdom, especially for those who lead, things are different.
2. The world says:
 - a) Be bold, be brash, be assertive
 - b) Demand your rights, use others
 - c) Do whatever it takes to get to the top, to get your way
3. In Christ’s kingdom, things are different—things are reversed.
 - a) Mark 9:35: “*If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.*”
 - b) As under-shepherds of God’s people, elders lead the flock in a manner totally different than what we find in the world.

4. In the business world, where one fits on the social ladder is of great concern. This kind of leadership is often obsessed with self-promotion, honorific titles, and public acclaim.
5. In Christ's kingdom we want to connect leadership with servant hood. It was the way of our master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. The best attitude: In Philippians 2:5–8, the apostle Paul gives us a wonderful description of Christ's servant attitude.

1. Before reading it, note the context as Paul leads up to this passage. Philippians 2:1–4:
2. Paul addresses some problems at Philippi by giving good counsel to combat them:
 - a) Be of the same mind [like-minded] (v. 2)
 - b) Have the same love (v. 2)
 - c) Being one in spirit and of one mind (v. 2)
 - d) Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit (v. 3)
 - e) Value others above yourselves (v. 4)
 - f) Not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others (v. 4)
3. Notice the phrase in verse 3, "*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.*" That would include relationships among the leadership team.

D. Christ's attitude

1. Philippians 2:5-8: "*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*"
2. Can you imagine how the atmosphere of many elder boards would instantly change if all leaders emulated the attitude of Christ as described in this passage?
3. Jesus' life was characterized by self-surrender, self-renunciation, and self-sacrifice.
4. These words of Paul would have been shocking to members of the Roman colony where status and the pecking order were everything.
5. Three points would have been particularly troubling:
 - a) He used his exalted status for the benefit of others.
Humility in the Roman world was not seen as a virtue, but rather as a weakness. The idea of someone to **purposefully** descend from a position of honor and status would have been counter cultural. But that is exactly what Christ did:
"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing" (vv. 6–7).
 - b) He took the lowest status in Roman society for the benefit of others.
Slaves were at the very bottom of the pecking order in their culture. To descend from being the Sovereign Creator of the universe, and then WILLINGLY descend to be a slave,

would be madness in the mind of any Roman citizen. But that is exactly what Christ did: *“He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant [slave], being made in human likeness.”* (v. 7)

- c) He died a criminal’s death for the benefit of others.
Death by Roman crucifixion was reserved only for non-Roman citizens. It was the ultimate shame for a human being. Yet Christ descended to even this, for the benefit of others: *“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!*
6. Christ’s example redefined for believers at Philippi how one uses status to benefit others.
7. Imagine what the tone and atmosphere would be like on an elder board if church leaders applied these teachings on a regular basis.
8. Joseph Hellerman, in his book *Embracing Shared Ministry*, summarized Paul’s teaching for the believers at Philippi: *“To pattern their lives not after the values of Rome, but after a Jewish Messiah who willingly exchanged his immeasurably exalted status for the shame of a crucified slave – all for the benefit of rebellious human beings whom he had created.”*
9. Paul’s teaching in this passage should still be the normal operating procedure in the modern church, but especially for church leaders as they serve and work together.
10. The Lord taught the same thing in Matthew 20:26, didn’t he?
Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. (Matt. 20:26)
“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life—a ransom for many.”
(Matt. 20:28)
11. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Lutheran pastor, referred to the Lord Jesus as “the Man for others.” And indeed he was.
12. The right attitude among the church leadership is crucial. One’s attitude can affect the entire elder board—for good or for bad.
13. Christ’s attitude should affect elders in the way they communicate with each other, disagree with each other, persuade and press each other for change, use body language, and care for each other.
14. It’s so easy to revert back to the old carnal ways. But our Savior has left us a better way:
 - a) He was humble and selfless
 - b) He focused on the interest of others
 - c) He refused to use his personal status for his own benefit
 - d) He was the ultimate servant: he gave up the ivory palaces for a stable, set aside his royal robes to become human, put on an apron to wash dirty feet, went forward to receive the betrayer’s kiss, and made the ultimate sacrifice for the benefit of others.

E. We who lead the people of God are now called to have this same attitude as we serve.

1. But how important to demonstrate this attitude *toward those we serve with!*
2. Ironically, the Father responds to Christ's amazing descent by bestowing on this crucified slave the highest honor ever bestowed on a human being.
3. Aligning our attitudes to God's kingdom principles pays large dividends in the end.
4. Church leaders who use their status for the blessing and benefit of others will likewise receive honor from the Father.
5. Peter, in 1 Peter 5:4, says to his fellow elders: "*And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*"
6. Let me encourage you as a spiritual leader: As you serve the Lord and serve his people, make it a regular habit to always be aligning your attitude to that of Christ in this passage, and to use your status for the benefit of others.

Love Among Elders (continued)

Detailed Outline

Part 4 of 4

VII. Practical Suggestions for Building Love and Unity Among Elders

A. Paul tells the Corinthians: *“Let all that you do be done in love.”* (1 Cor. 16:14)

1. As is obvious, this would include relationships among elders.
2. I want to share my personal learning experience of love and unity among church leaders.
 - a) I have had the privilege to serve as a church elder for the last 18 years. Currently I serve at my local church with four other elders.
 - b) I can honestly say that my experiences have transformed me into a better person.
 - c) Dealing with stressful situations over the years with men who are equally flawed has been somewhat like a workshop for developing Christ-like character.
 - d) Serving as an elder is a life-changing experience where God develops us into mature, Christ-like men.
3. Working together forces us to:
 - a) Exercise patience, self-control, and gentleness
 - b) Improve in people skills
 - c) Stretch our minds to others' ideas
 - d) Become better Bible students
 - e) Practice humility and forgiveness

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” - King Solomon (Prov. 27:17)
4. Of course, for this to occur, an elder must be teachable, open to constructive criticism, willing to have his opinions challenged, willing to grow and improve.
5. One of the other elders in our local church is also one of my dearest friends. We enjoy hobbies together and communicate almost daily. We share our personal lives and hold each other spiritually accountable.
6. While I love and respect the other elders, we usually do not interact outside the church leadership context.
7. I noticed that in critical and stressful moments (say, at an elders' meeting), my interaction with my friend was more loving and patient, while my interaction with the others was more formal and “business like.”
8. Why the difference? My friend and I had developed a “friendship-relationship.” We had a history. It was not simply a “task-oriented,” “business at hand” relationship.
9. I learned from this observation that my relationship with the other elders was imbalanced. We had a cordial business relationship but we lacked a deeper level loving relationship. And I believe this is critical issue for any leadership team.

10. Now, while it is unrealistic to expect all the elders to be best friends as well, a leadership team can take steps to foster deeper relationships.

B. Let me give you a few practical suggestions toward building a more loving and caring environment among the leadership team:

1. Plan and implement a yearly retreat for the leaders and their wives.
 - a) The purpose of this time away would be to encourage and enjoy fellowship among the leadership team and their wives.
 - b) Today we live in a hyper-busy society. Rarely do we have time to enjoy deep fellowship with our fellow elders.
 - c) A weekend away together could help the leadership team move beyond simply having a business relationship to building a deeper, more intimate connection.
2. Intentionally plan social interactions during the year for the leaders.
 - a) While a yearly time away together would be a move in the right direction, more fellowship is needed to build a healthy, loving atmosphere among the leadership.
 - b) Church leaders are constantly in the midst of spiritual warfare; Dealing with church conflicts, grappling with difficult people problems, handling complaints and criticisms, doctrinal disputes
 - c) Such issues can weary an elder board.
 - d) Therefore, elders should be intentional in pursuing regular social settings together for fellowship, mutual encouragement, and accountability.
 - e) These could include such things as:
 - 1) Regularly scheduled meals together (hospitality)
 - 2) Occasionally scheduling lunches during the week
 - 3) Having breakfast before a workday (monthly)
 - 4) Recreation: golf, hunting, fishing, etc.
 - f) All of these suggestions would help to build a healthy, loving atmosphere among the leadership team.
3. It must be intentional, or in time the atmosphere can become cold and corporate, where programs become more important than people.
4. This is a worthy goal—to deepen our relationships and build a sense of family where we:
 - a) Share laughter and have fun together
 - b) Cry together and carry each other's burdens
 - c) Resolve conflicts together
 - d) Seek to build a good team culture and a sense of community

Get this on the agenda. Plan for it or it will never happen.

C. Purposely set aside a regular time for praying and sharing personal needs.

1. At the start of each board meeting, set a specific time apart before proceeding with the business at hand. Use this time to share personal struggles and temptations, family matters (pray for specific family members), thank God for each other, ask for counsel, and practice

mutual accountability.

2. Elders must remember that in addition to shepherding the flock, we are also responsible for caring for the wellbeing of each leader and their family.
3. Elders and their families are particular targets of our enemy.
4. Setting aside a time to pray for and focus on the specific pastoral needs of fellow leaders and their families is crucial to building a loving atmosphere among the leadership team.
5. I find that an attitude of prayer for my fellow elders also diminishes the potential for conflict with them and any temptation to judge them or be unkind to them.
6. It's difficult to hold them up to the throne of grace and pray God's best for them, and then turn around and mistreat them. Prayer fosters kindness and forbearance among church leaders.

D. Design and implement a pledge of protection for the leadership body.

1. It is naïve to believe that relationships among church leaders will always be smooth sailing. The potential for conflict and damaged relationships is very high.
2. Hurt feelings, mistrust, infighting, and power struggles can sabotage the unity of the elder board. Wise elders will anticipate conflict and get out ahead of the problem.
3. One way to do it is draw up a document that outlines biblical principles of how conflict will be handled when it arises. Included in the document will be pledges:
 - a) To pray for and support each elder and his family
 - b) Never to gossip or slander a fellow elder
 - c) To always represent each other accurately without exaggeration
 - d) To respect all confidences
 - e) To foster a safe environment within the team to be able to express contrary opinions
 - f) To demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit when conflict arises
4. In the "heat of the moment" when conflict arises among leaders, there is a tendency to revert back to what the apostle Paul called "the works of the flesh."
5. With a pledge there are clear boundaries. When the boundaries are crossed, it's much easier to resolve issues because all had agreed to abide by the contents of the pledge.
6. If nothing is written down, the situation can be rather murky. There is little to no expectation on how elders are to behave in stressful situation.
7. Galatians 5:19–21 mentions fifteen examples of the works of the flesh. Eight of them seem to be particularly common if an elder board is not led by the Spirit when conflict arises. They are enmity (hostility, animosity), strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, and envy. A few verses later, in Galatians 5:26, Paul adds these words: "*Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*"
8. Because the male ego is so fragile, it can quickly become volatile. This seems to be the case in theological discussions, especially if one's theological point of view is ridiculed or dismissed or if one's self-respect has been attacked.
9. Paul prepared the Galatians for dealing with the works of the flesh. He said: "*Through love serve one another.*" (Galatians 5:13)
10. But Paul knew, and we must understand, that by ourselves we do not have the power to either resist the works of the flesh, or to produce the fruit of the Spirit.

11. Any attempt at unity among the elders will be short-lived if they are not spiritual men.
12. Elders must be Spirit-filled and Spirit-led men.
 - a) They must be men who constantly seek to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit.
 - b) And while all nine aspects of the fruit of the Spirit mentioned by Paul in Galatians 5 are essential for maintaining love and unity among elders, the last one mentioned is especially needed: self-control.
 - c) It's easy to love in theory when all is going well. But in the "heat of the moment," self-control serves like a gatekeeper, holding back the works of the flesh from gushing forth. Listen again to Paul in Galatians 5:16:

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

So a wise elder board will take proactive steps to be prepared when conflict arises.

And one of those steps will be to draft a document explaining the way in which elders will function when facing conflict.

E. Determine to have the hard conversations when needed.

1. If you are like me, you seek to avoid conflict if at all possible. Yet is there a time when smiling and being nice can be counterproductive? I believe the answer is yes.
2. One defense mechanism we often employ when conflict or hard issues arise among leaders is to simply avoid dealing with them. We are really good at dancing around issues and ignoring "elephants in the room."
3. We often prefer to maintain peace by being nice. For example, we would rather tolerate:
 - a) A bully
 - b) A controlling elder
 - c) Intimidation tactics
 - d) Inappropriate behavior
 - e) Harsh communication, etc. . . . rather than having the hard conversation!
4. Frankly, we are just not that good at speaking up. We know it is the right and loving thing to do, but we drop the ball when it comes to the difficult, courageous conversation.
5. We often prefer to project an image of peace and unity on the elder board that does not match reality. We interact with kindness and respect and prefer to gloss over any conflict so as not to make any waves.
6. The problem, however, is that avoiding conflict really sabotages genuine community and deep relationships. *"Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse [deceitful] are the kisses of an enemy."* (Proverbs 27:6)
7. Leaders must be intentional when it comes to having the hard conversations.
8. When people know you love them, you can say hard things to them.
9. Shying away from speaking truth to a beloved colleague leads to superficial relationships. In Ephesians 4:15, Paul admonishes us to *"speak the truth in love."* This principle was also important to the apostle John. In 1 John 3:18 he said, *"Let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."*
10. At times I have remained silent when I should have spoken up. I've gone along with decisions against my will for fear of what others might think of me. I have tolerated behavior

unbecoming of an elder because I didn't want to have the difficult conversation.

11. I believe all of us want a leadership environment that is authentic, loving, and where we feel safe to have honest communication. Therefore, pulling back and remaining silent in conflict is not an option. True biblical love values a colleague to the point where we tell them what we think. We communicate our concerns clearly and honestly.
12. Sadly, problems are perpetuated when we remain silent in times when we should be speaking up. We mistakenly *think* we are maintaining peace, but really we are prolonging an unhealthy environment.

F. Regularly set goals and evaluate progress as a team.

1. Example: My backyard
 - a) The backyard of our house goes right into the woods at about sixty feet. Every year, weeds try very hard to take over both the garden areas and the grassy areas of our yard. If I let it go for just one year, it would look like an abandoned lot.
 - b) Every year is a battle: fertilizer, weed control, water, removal fallen branches, dealing with moles and chipmunks—and on and on.
2. A leadership team is in some ways similar to my backyard. It is not going to function and thrive by chance.
 - a) Leaders are not going to wake up in a few years and say, “Hey, how did we achieve such peace and unity? How is it that we love each other in spite of our disagreements? How did we become a healthy, mature group of men?”
 - b) No. It is going to require constant maintenance and hard work. It needs to be an intentional part of the elder agenda over time. Leaders need to be aware of the three “killer B’s”: Building, Bodies, Bucks.
 - c) If things are going well in these three areas, there is a temptation to lie back and coast or go into maintenance mode.

VIII. Conclusion

A. We can have a crowded church with countless programs, but it does not guarantee that the leadership team will be healthy and on track spiritually. I want to encourage you to be intentional when it comes to the health of the elder board.

1. Let me finish by reminding you of how very important your work is as an under-shepherd. You are caring for “blood-bought” sheep. In other words, God paid an unbelievably high price for his sheep. It cost him the very life of his Son. So it's a big deal to him how they are cared for. That care can only come from a leadership team that is growing and healthy.
2. And our growth and health as leaders is not going to occur by chance. We must be intentional about it! But it's worth the effort, both for us as well as for the flock of God.

Remember the words of Peter in 1 Peter 5:4, “*And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*”

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 smartphone 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 discipled.
 - 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.
 - 1. The entertaining of the thought of adultery and the act of adultery are two very different things, even though they are both wicked and sinful.
 - 2. But the elder needs to be quick to confess, and quick to repent.
 - 3. He needs to be open to those who are holding him accountable.
 - 4. He needs to walk in the light, not live with secret sin in the darkness.
 - 5. The Lord is serious about the holiness of his church and the holiness of his under-shepherds. They are to be above reproach.
- B. The fact of the matter is that *no elder* is worthy of the work. If the Lord marked our iniquities, who could stand?
- C. 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.
- D. 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.

Accountability

Detailed Outline

Part 2 of 3

Introduction

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 ministry.**
- 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 toward 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 selfishness.
 - 4. Pastors who are lone rangers can get away with a lot because they aren't really accountable to anyone.
 - 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. But accountability among elders doesn't just *happen*.
 - 2. Unless certain things are done, accountability amid elders will just be a theory, not reality.
- E. Practical ways to cultivate and foster accountability among an 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) Regular meetings are a great way to protect against lazy, derelict eldership.

- 3) God forbid elders merely *claim* the office of the elder, but never actually do the hard work of shepherding.
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 there was 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. They have no idea what they are supposed to be doing. They have no area of oversight.
 - 2) 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, so that an elder takes the lead in overseeing various ministries, like youth ministry, women's ministry, Sunday School, etc.
 - 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," and provides a level of accountability.
 - 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."

Accountability

Detailed Outline

Part 3 of 3

IX. Shared Leadership (continued)

F. Practical ways to cultivate and foster accountability among an eldership team (cont.)

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!
 - 3) I promise you, you will have an immediate increase of effectiveness.
 - c) Make reporting back a regular expectation, even if it needs to be explicit every time.
 - d) 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.
 - e) If everyone is in charge, no one is in charge.
4. Have intentional fellowship.
 - a) An eldership can be a miserable place of suspicion and distrust. It's possible to have a toxic eldership.
 - b) Such a place is not conducive to accountability.
 - c) If elders don't trust one another, they naturally pull away from one another.
 - d) One way to counter this is to schedule intentional fellowship.
 - 1) Get meals together.
 - 2) Go golfing, hunting, fishing together.
 - 3) Go to conferences together.
 - 4) Go camping together.
 - 5) Spend time with one another's families.
 - 6) When you are one-on-one, ask about their marriage and their work.
 - 7) Share prayer requests with each other.
 - e) You are a team, and Satan would love to destroy the unity and peace that you have as an eldership. Be intentional about counteracting that.
 - f) Fellowship sometimes just happens, and that's wonderful. But other times it needs to be scheduled.
 - g) 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.
 - h) We cannot afford to forfeit intentional fellowship.

5. Elder retreats should be mandatory for elders.
 - a) Have focused time away, together as elders, praying and planning and reevaluating.
 - b) 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!
 - c) We have had specially planned elders' retreats when we have especially needed the Lord's direction and guidance—major decisions that merited two or three days away together for us to strategize and plan and pray.
6. Have intentional protection of one another.
 - a) A healthy eldership cares for and looks out for one another, each other's marriage and family.
 - b) We need the courage to *care-front* one another, not just *confront*.
 - c) Part of caring for one another is praying systematically for each elder.
 - 1) Have a system: pray for an elder every day.
 - 2) Pray for their jobs, their businesses, their families, their health, and their spiritual lives.

G. "The Lord sent them out two by two." We need each other. We cannot be Lone Ranger elders.

105: *Shepherding by Plurality*

Communication

Detailed Outline
Part 1 of 4

Effective shepherding requires good communication with the people we lead and between leaders. Since we are in the people business, we are also in the communication business. We're also in the education business. We are to be communicating the very Good News: the gospel, and the teachings of Christ and the apostles.

We communicate not only by teaching and preaching but by personal conversation. Much of our work is done through conversing privately with people, as well as speaking to the whole congregation. In fact, some of the most important work in helping a church through conflict or making changes is done on the personal level of private conversations.

For this reason, we need to be very aware of our communication skills and to be seeking all the time to improve our ability to communicate.

The Bible tells us that our God is a God who communicates. He speaks, and he made us to speak. That is part of the divine image in man. In fact, Old Testament prophets would often make fun of idols because the idols cannot communicate. The true and living God can, and he made us to communicate with him and with people. We are able to communicate complex ideas and great thoughts to other people.

When we look at the book of Genesis, we see that sin ruined communication.

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." ¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Gen. 3:8-11 ESV)

Notice at the very beginning when he created man and woman, the Lord communicated with them. When sin came into the garden, they hid from God. They were not comfortable with communicating with him. The same is true of us when we run from God. We become like the dumb idols.

I. General Principles of Good Communication

First, we want to look at good or general principles for good communication. If we don't communicate well, we will cause many problems and unnecessary frustrations in the church. Problems that shouldn't occur happen because we communicate poorly and we don't direct people properly, and we leave people in the dark. Let us look at eight principles of good communication.

A. Be aware that skillful communication is hard work.

It is hard work and takes work! Most people, especially men, are lazy communicators. They often don't care to expend the energy or put in the effort it takes to communicate well.

One reason we make the effort to communicate better is because we care for and love others.

“Better is open rebuke than hidden love.” (Prov. 27:5)

People desperately need to hear that they are loved, appreciated, and understood. As a leader and a shepherd, you are important to people in your congregation. They want to talk with you and hear from you. They want to know your vision and your values in the church. If you are a leader you need to be able to speak effectively.

1. I think of the Apostle Paul. Much of his ministry was done through speaking and in front of people, but he also did much through writing. In all of Paul’s letters, we see his exemplary ability to communicate with others:
 - a) In a cross-cultural setting,
 - b) On a meaningful level,
 - c) About serious problems, and
 - d) To encourage and challenge people.
2. Our Lord Jesus Christ was also a very effective communicator.
3. If we want to be good communicators, we have to want to improve!
 - (1) Illustration: A man told me this story. He said he realized he was a very quiet person and had a hard time speaking up. One day, he had a confrontation with the Lord, and he told the Lord that he was not a good communicator naturally. But God had placed him in a position to lead and care for people. So he asked, “Lord, help me to be a better communicator.” And from that point on, he worked on speaking up and listening to people carefully and improving his communication skills. Today he is an excellent communicator.
 - (2) You can change, too! But you have to desire to do this and love people.

B. Learn to speak gently, calmly, graciously, and tactfully.

Where did I get this? Proverbs is the great book about communication. The most frequent proverb is about speech and how to speak properly. This book was written for the king’s sons and daughters, who were preparing themselves for the king’s court. One of the things that makes a wise leader is good communication and knowing how *not* to speak.

Let’s look at some principles that have saved my life. If you don’t know these, you may want to memorize them!

1. *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (Prov. 15:1 NIV)*

This has saved me from so many problems! This is a very important communication skill.

- (1) Illustration: One time, a man called me and started yelling at me. His daughter had been put out of the youth group because of her bad behavior. He said everything bad he could think of about the youth leader. I could tell that if I responded in anger, I would stir him up more. So, when he stopped, I lowered my voice and spoke very gently and softly. I said, “I know this hurt you. But you have to trust that this is the best thing for your

daughter. You need to let the Lord handle this. You are getting your daughter's side of the story. This is a very tragic situation. Can we let the Lord work?" I could hear him calm down, and he started to weep.

(2) If you give a harsh answer, it makes things worse. It only stirs up people's anger more and they get more violent!

2. *"Sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness." (Prov. 16:21b ESV)*

(1) Much of life as leaders is to persuade people and get them to change their thinking. If you learn to speak tactfully and skillfully, you'll be able to convince and persuade people.

(2) Leaders often present new ideas, too. We have to do this with tact and skill, not by bashing them on the head.

3. *"By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue breaks the bone." (Prov. 25:15 NASB)*

(1) In the ancient world, if you broke a bone, you were in big trouble. To break a bone, it takes a very hard hit.

(2) A soft, gentle response or presentation has a way of breaking some of the hardest arguments or changing hard-hearted people.

(3) You will find much of your work is persuading people. You need to get people to accept new ideas, to make changes and to accept certain teachings.

4. *"I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ..." (2 Cor. 10:1a ESV)*

Our Lord Jesus was meek and gentle. Paul takes on that disposition as he talked to the Corinthian church about some very difficult things. They were a very troubled church and a difficult group to deal with, but Paul dealt with them with the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

5. *"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." (Eph. 4:29 NASB)*

(1) We are to be the kind of speaker who edifies and builds people up.

(2) How we speak must be appropriate for the moment.

(3) And then, Paul says something very interesting. He says we speak grace to those who hear us.

(4) How important it is to speak wholesome words and to be careful of exaggerated and inflammatory speech, or crass and crude speech. These types of speech should not come out of the mouth of a man or woman of God.

6. *“Let your speech always be with grace [graciousness, attractiveness], as though seasoned with salt.” (Col. 4:6a NASB)*

In the ancient world, meat was very hard. It had to be beaten and softened. You seasoned it with salt in order to eat it. When you speak, you should speak with graciousness and attractiveness. Season it with salt so it will be received by your listeners.

We must learn to speak gently, calmly, graciously, and tactfully. How important it is, as Proverbs teaches us, to be a tactful, calm, persuasive speaker—a speaker who has his words under control, whose words are always wholesome and build people up and are appropriate for the moment. If you are that kind of leader, people will come to you. You will be able to move people’s hearts and unite people and move them forward.

Communication

Detailed Outline

Part 2 of 4

II. General Principles of Good Communication (cont.)

A. Be aware of the ways you block good communication.

There are many different ways we can hinder communication. As a result of sin entering the world, we are not the communicators God made us to be. There are all kinds of ways we can ruin communication with other people and with God.

1. Lecturing and preaching
 - a) People come to you and ask you a question. If you just lecture them and preach at them, they will never get a chance to say a word or ask questions.
 - b) Illustration: One night, I went out with a young person and some other people. The young person asked a question, and for the next half hour, one of the men hammered him! By the time the man was done, I could see that the poor kid was worn out. Don't lecture and preach at people. Talk with them and draw them out.
2. Withdrawing or giving "the silent treatment"

If we don't like what people say or they offend us or they make us uncomfortable, we can withdraw or give them the silent treatment.
3. Being easily angered or hurt
 - a) Some people don't want to go to their leaders because the leaders easily get angered or upset if you ask them a question or challenge them.
 - b) Illustration: A friend who attended our church went to talk to his pastor (at another church). He simply said he thought the church should have some more Bible studies and that he wanted to open his home for having a Bible study. The pastor angrily snapped back at him, "If you can't support me, then get out!" My poor friend just wanted to bring a suggestion! You wouldn't approach that kind of person again, because you don't know what they will do!
4. Monopolizing conversations
 - a) A person asks you a question or wants to talk to you about a concern, and then you do all the talking.
 - b) We need to be careful of this, because people in church leadership often have this problem. They tend to be big talkers and have difficulty controlling their tongue. This wears the listener down!
5. Learn to direct the conversation to the other person and draw them out.

6. Being argumentative

If you turn everything into a debate or argument, you will hinder people from coming to you.

All these things destroy good communication. They frustrate people, and they will stop coming to you. Seek to be aware of how you personally hinder good communication. If you don't know, have the courage to ask your spouse or a good friend. Ask them how you block good communication. If they have the courage, they will tell you. Often we don't notice that we are doing this. Take it to the Lord and seek to improve your weaknesses and to be a communicator more like our Lord Jesus.

B. Make a conscious effort to be a patient listener.

I cannot give you better advice than what James tells us in chapter 1. James has a lot to say about conflict. Here is one of the first things he says:

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness [that God requires]. (James 1:19 ESV)

Here is a scriptural command: you are to be a good listener. Someone wrote this: effective leadership has more to do with listening than with talking. It is tragic that so often, people will come to us and we never really hear them. We make misjudgments or misunderstandings because we don't take the time to listen and understand.

1. People want to be heard and understood. They want you to listen to them.
2. When people come to you, train yourself to listen. Be slow to speak, be quick to hear, and of course, be slow to anger. Your anger is not going to produce the kind of righteousness that God wants to produce in your life or the lives of others.
3. When you are in a conversation with someone, ask lots of questions.
 - a) Show real interest in the other person.
 - b) Draw them out, and make sure you really understand what they are saying.
 - c) Make it your business to get their perspective and understand their reasoning. Don't give them all of your advice as soon as they mention an issue you think you have the answers for. You haven't even heard what the problem is!
 - d) A good leader or conversationalist does not do all the talking. He or she asks a lot of questions, seeking, listening, and evaluating. This is the secret to good leadership. Let people know that you are interested in who they are and what they have to say.
4. Illustration: One time, a certain person came up to me at church. This person is known for being very emotional and getting heated and causing conflict. As they approached me, I could tell they were upset. So I placed my hand on that person's back and guided them to another room. We sat down on the couch, and I asked them what the problem was. As they told me, I simply listened and asked a few key questions, asking them how they thought the problem could be fixed. They calmed right down and the problem was solved. If I had accused them of being emotionally out of control and always causing problems, this would have gone on and on. But by simply listening and asking questions, even asking what they

thought the solution should be, they were satisfied. Most people, if you will just listen to them, will calm down.

“God gave us two eyes, two ears, and only one mouth. A lot of people never learn a lesson from that—which is that you ought always to use your eyes and ears twice as much as you use your mouth. Another way of putting it in electronic terms...is that the purpose of the eyes and ears is to program the mouth. The problem with a lot of human relationships is that there is too much unprogrammed talk.” – Reuel Howe, The Responsibility of the Preaching Task, p. 10

C. Be proactive in your communication.

1. Because elders work under shared leadership, we need to be proactive and deliberate in how we communicate to one another. We must be able to talk to one another honestly and openly because we need to correct, challenge, and direct one another.
2. This is especially true at elders’ meetings.
 - a) So often people don’t speak up, because they are afraid it will cause disunity, or they fear older or more powerful members. They become silent members in the meeting.
 - b) But God needs every perspective of every elder. Each one has something to contribute. God wants you to speak up! Your advice and counsel is needed in the eldership. You need to have courage and not be intimidated.
3. A healthy eldership team promotes an atmosphere that encourages everyone to speak up honestly without fear of rejection or attack.
4. Make sure this atmosphere of encouraging communication is maintained in the elders’ meetings and in the whole church.
5. You must be able to speak to one another without intimidation and fear. If you see someone angry at another person or causing intimidation or fear, you need to speak up and address the problem. That is not how Christians should relate to one another. Deal with it right away.
6. We need to be able to speak to one another clearly, honestly, openly, and sincerely; otherwise, we as elders will not be able to make good decisions.

105: *Shepherding by Plurality*

Communication

Detailed Outline
Part 3 of 4

III. General Principles of Good Communication (cont.)

As an elder, you are in the ministry of communication and of education. Everything you do is through speech. As people of the Word of God, we must be able to *speak* the Word of God. The gospel is good news, but what is news if you don't speak and share it with people? Isn't it interesting that, in the gospels, our Lord is always teaching? He's always communicating, especially in the book of Matthew.

A. Be sure to clarify responsibilities and work assignments.

1. Shared leadership requires continual communication among group members about their areas of responsibility and specific assignments.
2. As the saying goes, "What is everyone's business is no one's business."
3. If, for example, someone in the church is facing a life-or-death operation, what will happen if each elder thinks another is responsible to visit before the operation? It could be that not a single elder will visit because each one thinks someone else will be there.
4. To avoid situations such as this, or to eliminate wasteful duplication of efforts, it is essential that elders clearly communicate:
 - a) Specific responsibilities—each elder should have an area of teaching or specific pastoral care for which they are responsible, and all the elders should know who is responsible for what areas.
 - b) Special assignments—written down in meeting minutes.
5. Provide adequate instruction when you give a person a job to do.
 - a) When giving someone a job to do, let that person know exactly what is expected.
 - b) Let's say you have a new song leader, and you only tell them that you need them to lead the music. But that's not enough!
 - c) You need to make clear your expectations and your burden for the ministry. It is your job to provide clarity for that person.
 - d) Don't assume that a person can read your mind or that he or she knows what the elder council wants.

B. Don't spring important decisions on people.

1. I have seen many disagreements and fights in churches because we as leaders spring decisions on people and they have not participated in the decision.
2. Illustration: A church had an old, beautiful organ that had been purchased many years ago by a few families in the church. But the organ was no longer being used, and there was

hardly anyone who could play it. One Sunday, the organ was gone. The elders had not discussed getting rid of the organ with the one person who could play it or the families whose grandparents had purchased the organ so long ago. There was a lot of anger in the congregation. The organ was part of the people's tradition, and some thought it might be needed one day for a wedding or funeral. They were angry that the elders had gotten rid of the organ without discussing it with them.

3. When anything you decide on affects another group, you need to have people from those groups participate. Don't just pop decisions on people.
 - a) Learn to bring people into the elders' meetings.
 - b) Learn to communicate with anyone whom your decision will affect.
 - c) Our people have wisdom and information that you may not have. It is important that you get them to participate and that you let them know their opinion matters to you.
 - d) In the case of the organ, the elders should have brought the involved parties into the elders' meeting or sent out a letter to the families who purchased the organ. The elders should have told them they were thinking of getting rid of the organ and the reasons why.
 - e) Ultimately, it may be necessary to get rid of the organ. Even if you make that decision, you have still allowed the interested parties to be involved in the discussion.

C. Stop the rumor mill before it stops you.

1. Frequent, open communication with the congregation stops church rumors. Rumors can pass through the church so quickly.
2. Illustration: A church was torn apart by a rumor that money had been embezzled by one of the deacons, and the elders had met with him and worked out a deal where he would gradually pay them back.
 - a) That was not true! Yet the rumor circulated the church, and people were very angry and stopped giving. They felt there was mistrust, and they were suspicious because it had not been brought to the congregation's attention.
 - b) As soon as the elders heard about the rumor, they should have come directly to the congregation and dealt with it right away.
3. An area where this is extremely important is church discipline.
 - a) If there is some type of conflict among key people in the church, do not wait!
 - b) Step out in front of the problem and talk to the congregation!
4. When there are major controversies or misunderstandings, it is crucial for the elders to *over-communicate*.
 - a) So many churches completely mishandle a church discipline situation because the leaders wait too long or don't communicate with the congregation.

- b) When that happens, the situation gets completely out of control, and people leave!
- 5. You as elders must communicate clearly and let the people know that you are handling the situation.
 - a) Tell them to come to you if you have questions, not to ask other people.
 - b) In some very severe situations where the church's survival is at stake, you may need to release some private information about the situation.
 - 1) Most of the time, you do not release the private, ugly facts of the situation.
 - 2) But in cases of major sin issues, such as embezzling, you may need to release more information.
 - c) Isolate the groups or the families who are immediately involved in the ugly situation. Meet with them on a more intimate basis to discuss the situation and give them instructions on how to handle it.
 - d) As the elders, we remind them of proper Christian conduct. They must not start rumors. They don't have all the facts.
 - e) You must stop the gossip and tale-bearing before it starts. Tell the congregation that those are sins!

Communication

Detailed Outline

Part 4 of 4

IV. Elders are to Model Good Communication within the Church Body

A. Elders Communicating within the Eldership

1. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of elders practicing good communication with one another. This can be done very practically and easily by going out to lunch together or going on retreats together.
2. Get to know one another!
 - a) If you know and trust one another, you will be better communicators because you understand one another.
 - b) If there is suspicion or distrust, every little thing will be misunderstood or taken in the wrong way.
 - c) You should get to know how the others speak and their strengths and weaknesses.
 - d) You must learn how to communicate within the elders' meetings and on individual bases. Every meeting, you should be practicing good communication with your fellow elders.
 - e) If there are communication snags, you need to try to resolve those and openly talk about them among yourselves.
 - f) Learn to laugh and enjoy one another.
3. Do not be a passive eldership; be active in your communication.
4. If you have a problem with another elder in communication or understanding, get together over a meal and discuss the problem. Try to get to know the elder better and ask him to help you understand him better.
5. As elders, we:
 - a) Help one another
 - b) Pastor one another
 - c) Counsel one another
 - d) Support one another
 - e) Study and seek to understand one another
6. One of the best elderships I've ever seen went on a retreat together twice a year. On that retreat, they tried to build relationships with each other and increase their understanding of one another. That way, in the tough times together, they could be good communicators.

B. Elders Communicating to the Congregation

1. Illustration: There was a man who had been an elder for many years. He retired from the eldership but stayed in the same church. He thought he was a good communicator and that the elders were good at communicating to the congregation. After one year of being out of the eldership, however, he realized that the elders were not communicating to the congregation. He and the other elders had thought they were, but they were doing poorly at communicating to the congregation. He approached the elders and said, "When I was an elder, I thought we were doing a good job of communicating with the congregation. But now that I'm not an elder, I have no idea what you are doing. Things happen in the church, and there is no communication to the people. This needs to be improved!"
2. Most of us are not communicating as a leadership body to the people. We think we are, but we are not. Step away from yourselves. No one else probably knows what you're doing.
3. Let me give you some ideas for improving your communication with the congregation.
 - a) Prayer line: If your church has one, you should get on that prayer line. Ask for prayer for yourself. Make sure you are communicating to the congregation what you need prayer for. Don't just be praying for others all the time. Maybe the elders have a big decision ahead. Ask the congregation to pray about it! Ask them to pray for your marriage, or a problem you might have. Do not assume they can read your minds!
 - b) Church bulletin: Put in a section where you can have prayer requests from the elders. Tell people some of things you are planning.
 - c) Newsletter: In our newsletter, there is an elders' section. Sometimes we tell the history of one of the elders or give his biography. There, the elders can voice their thoughts about things that are happening in the church or plans that are ahead.
 - d) Sunday morning: If you have some time for prayer, mention issues or burdens that the elders are dealing with, or a new vision you have.
4. However you choose to do it, it is crucial to communicate with the congregation.
 - a) You don't want them to see you as a back-room oligarchy that just makes big decisions and no one knows anything about it.
 - b) Let people know who you are.
 - c) Be as transparent as you possibly can be.
5. Bring in groups to your elders' meetings.

If you are dealing with the youth, have the leaders come in to your meeting. Ask them lots of questions and communicate to them your burden and your vision for their group. You must communicate well with the major groups in the church, such as the deacons.
6. Don't be afraid to repeat your values over and over to the church. For example, when there is a major operation or crisis among our people, we will always say, "We want to be a caring

and praying church.”

7. Every five years, we hand out a big survey to our congregation.
 - a) We ask our church:
 - 1) *How are we doing as leaders?*
 - 2) *What areas are our strengths?*
 - 3) *What areas are our weaknesses?*
 - 4) *What do you think about our programs?*
 - 5) *What do you think we need to do differently?*
 - 6) *What suggestions do you have for us?*
 - b) The results can hurt! But people know these things anyway, so you as their leaders might as well know the truth.
8. We want them to evaluate us and evaluate the church.
 - a) Don't be defensive. Poor leadership is defensive leadership.
 - b) Do the best you can and be as effective as you can! You know you can't do everything and you can't be perfect.
 - c) Sometimes, you may need to tell people that you can't be all things to all people.
 - 1) *You want to focus on certain things, such as good Bible teaching, being people of prayer, being a gospel-oriented church, and "one-anothering."*
 - 2) *You don't have the man-power to do everything!*
9. As individuals, you need to be communicating among the congregation and listening to what people can say. As a group of elders, agree on what can be shared with other people. Talk to people about things that are going on. Let them know you're interested.
10. Don't be deceived by what you are doing—you can do a better job of communicating!

C. Groups within the Church Communicating with One Another

1. The elders and deacons need to communicate. They need to share minutes and sometimes have meetings together. We have an elder at the deacons' meeting and a deacon at the elders' meeting.
2. Maybe the women's ministry needs to get together with the youth ministry to discuss areas that they are overlapping or doing the same thing.

As an elder, you are a communicator. You must speak, and you must speak properly. The book of Proverbs is so important in this endeavor. I recommend you read through Proverbs and put them into categories: verses on speech, on proper speech, on improper speech, and so on. That book is filled with good principles for improving your communication.

So much of who we are comes out from our heart through our lips. Ask God to give you the power through his Spirit to be a better communicator. Ask others to help you. Your people will be blessed, you will be a better shepherd, and you will avoid many problems in your church.

Self-Discipline

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 4

V. Self-Control

“For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. . . . He must [be] hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled [sensible], upright, holy, and disciplined [self-controlled].” (Titus 1:7–8; ESV)

A. Disciplined or self-controlled refers to self-restraint over one’s emotions and passions, especially over one’s bodily desires (1 Cor. 7:5, 9, 25).

1. The noun form of the Greek word for self-control is *enkrateia*. It communicates the idea of self-restraint, self-mastery, or power over oneself.
2. *“To have power over one’s self and thus to be able to hold oneself in.”* – Lawrence Richards, *The Expositor’s Dictionary of Bible Words*, 546
3. *“Having one’s emotions, impulses, or desires under control, self-control, disciplined.”* – BDAG, 274

B. A Fruit of the Spirit

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, . . . self-control.” (Gal. 5:22-23)

1. The Spirit of God wants to produce in you this important quality of character.
2. This quality is crucial to your battle against the works of the flesh, sin, bodily temptations, laziness, and an undisciplined, disorderly, self-indulgent lifestyle.

C. The Wisdom of Proverbs

“Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.” (Prov. 16:32)

“A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.” (Prov. 25:28)

1. In the ancient world, walls were placed around a city to defend it from outside forces. A city without walls is defenseless. It has no wall to protect it from the many enemies without!
2. A person without self-control has no protection, no way to block the enemies of lust, laziness, overeating, or whatever other temptation one would face.
3. Self-control is like a wall that protects us and keeps us safe.

D. The Spiritual Athlete

Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” (1 Cor. 9:25–27)

1. Paul was a spiritual athlete who strove to discipline himself and keep his bodily appetites and freedoms in Christ under control.
2. In the Christian race (Heb. 12:1-4), we have to discipline our bodies from laziness, lust, greed, out-of-control sexual appetites, and self-indulgence in sleeping and eating.
3. The virtue of self-control is essential to living the victorious Christian life and shepherding God's people in an overindulgent society.
4. Many of our personal problems and failures are due to a lack of personal self-control. *"Perverted values, wasted time, dulled thinking, flabby bodies, and distorted emotions provide ample evidence of our undisciplined lives."* – D. G. Kehl, *Christianity Today* (Oct. 7, 1983), 33
5. You cannot develop strength of character or a godly life without self-control.

E. The Self-Control Promise

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness . . . For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5–6, 8)

1. Note the close connection between knowledge and self-control.
 - a) Knowledge without self-restraint can be dangerous.
 - b) Self-control also helps one gain knowledge, because gaining true knowledge takes disciplined study and protection from spiritual laziness and procrastination.
2. Self-control, along with the seven other virtues, protect one from a barren spiritual life and deplorable ignorance of our Lord Jesus Christ.

VI. Self-Discipline

- A. Self-control and self-discipline are closely related. I have heard it said that self-discipline is doing what you ought to do even when you don't feel like doing it.**
- B. Church shepherds are busy people with many responsibilities involving family, employment, church work, and personal life. All of these responsibilities demand a life of self-discipline and personal organization.**

I defy you to read the life of any saint that has ever adorned the life of the Church without seeing at once that the greatest characteristic in the life of that saint was discipline and order. Invariably, it is the universal characteristic of all the outstanding men and women of God . . . Obviously it is something that is thoroughly scriptural and absolutely essential. – D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, 210
- C. *Time Magazine* did an article on "Why Intelligent People Fail." They found the secret to a person's success was two things: a) They were skilled in interpersonal relationships, and b) they were all self-disciplined.**
- D. William Barclay illustrates the tragic results of the undisciplined life through the story of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834).**

1. Paul exhorts Timothy to train himself to be a godly man: *“Train [or exercise/discipline] yourself for godliness.”* (1 Tim. 4:7)
2. Training for a sport always involves self-discipline, effort, personal commitment, concentration, hard work, pain, sacrifice, any training regimen or program.
3. The simple fact is, **there can be no deep, significant, long-lasting spiritual growth without a disciplined life of prayer, reading and studying of the Bible, and responsible Christian service.**
4. The same is also true for our leadership ministry. To be effective as a shepherd leader, one needs to exercise self-discipline for one’s personal growth in Christ and ministry responsibilities.

Self-Discipline

Detailed Outline

Part 2 of 4

III. Steps to Cultivate a Self-Disciplined Life

A. Make a conscious decision to be a self-disciplined person.

“Each person chooses to be controlled or uncontrolled in thinking and living. But the first step is a personal decision to be disciplined.” – Rhonda Kelley, Divine Discipline, 68

1. You must recognize the problem and then be willing to do something about it.
2. You can learn to be more self-disciplined, but it takes time and effort. You have to stay at it all your life. Remember, you have the Holy Spirit of God within you to teach you and to help you (Gal. 5:23).
3. Decide that you are not going to live a chaotic, disorganized, undisciplined life any longer.
4. By God’s grace, you can bring greater order and discipline to every aspect of your life: your time, your money, your body, and your talents.

B. Pray consistently and persistently about developing greater self-control.

1. It is God’s will that you be self-disciplined, self-controlled, and not undisciplined.
2. Pray about this matter daily. Don’t give up. Seek God’s grace and help to be a self-controlled, self-disciplined person.

C. Start small and achieve small victories first.

1. As you work to cultivate self-discipline, start small. Start with small victories, then move on to bigger ones.
 - a) Start with your room, your car, or your desk—any area of life where you need more personal organization.
 - b) Start there and be consistent. Do it daily.
2. When you fall down, pick yourself up and get started again.
3. This is a life-long process. So don’t get discouraged; keep praying and trying. The Holy Spirit will help you. People around you can help you also.

D. Stop procrastination before it stops you.

1. Procrastination means regularly pushing off responsibilities and duties, postponing things that should be done now until later. It is a very bad habit and can be hard to conquer.
 - a) Procrastination is evidence of a lack of self-control and an undisciplined life.

b) When you procrastinate, you produce poor-quality work at the last minute. Or you don't accomplish the task at all.

1. This is a serious problem, and you will frustrate the people around you. Procrastination hurts relationships.
2. According to the biblical qualifications for an elder, you need to manage your home well. You cannot manage your home or manage the church if you have a procrastination problem.
3. Procrastination can be a sin. Confess it to the Lord when you procrastinate on the divine duties you have been given (Acts 20:28). You are hurting people who are relying on you. You are a poor example to others.
4. Get help from others who have conquered the vice of procrastination. Start now. Don't tolerate this vice any longer. Your character and public reputation are at stake.

E. Have someone hold you accountable.

Ask a fellow elder, your spouse, or someone who will help you manage your life, get better organized, and learn the skills of good stewardship so you don't damage your character and reputation, and so you have time for the important things like Bible reading, prayer, your family, other believers, and proper rest.

Self-Discipline (continued)

Detailed Outline

Part 3 of 4

IV. Practical Steps for Organizing a Busy Life

We are all stewards of God's good and gracious gifts to us: our bodies, our time, our money, our spiritual gifts, our relationship with Christ, our families, and the ministries God gives us to serve him and his people.

The problem today is overbusyness and multiple distractions, unlike any other time in history.

Elders are busy people. As "God's steward[s]" over God's household (Titus 1:7), elders are responsible for organizing and managing the household of God. God is not pleased if his household is disorganized and mismanaged.

Busy, responsible people need to be organized, and keep their personal lives in order. This is God's will. Furthermore, if you do not manage life well you will have no time for prayer, Bible study, and personal growth in Christ. Let's look at some practical ideas for organizing your busy life, and for becoming a better shepherd of God's flock and a better leader of your home.

B. Organize your life and stay with it.

1. Organizing your life is not a once-in-a-lifetime event. It's something you do consistently—daily, weekly, monthly, yearly.
2. Personal organization and time management are crucial if we are to survive this busy world and be good stewards of the many tasks God has given us.
3. We must manage the time God has given us and the work he has given us to do. We have to get things done!
4. We need to adjust our schedules continually in order to meet life's many demands.
5. Throughout life, you will struggle with managing a busy life. Develop good habits for keeping your life in order.

C. Use a daily planner, calendar, or digital program.

1. In order to manage the many tasks you are given, you need a tool that will help you keep track of your daily schedule and appointments, and responsibilities.
2. Use whatever works for you—phone, tablet, computer, or paper planner.
3. When people give me assignments or jobs, or I have appointments or phone calls I need to make, I write them down right away. If I don't write it down right away, I will forget.
4. This is important when it comes to prayer too. If someone gives you a prayer request, don't just say, "Oh, yeah, I'll pray." Write it down so you can remember to pray and to follow up with that person later.

D. Plan your day and your week.

1. Every day take five minutes and plan your day. Look at the tasks you have to complete that day. This way, you can see what you have planned for the day and what you are able to do or not do in a specific day.
 - a) This will protect you from being over-busy.
 - b) It will help you to know when to say no.
2. The better you organize your life, the easier it is to handle life's many interruptions.
3. Plan the week and the month, maybe even the year.
 - a) You must have some idea of what's happening in your life, or you will be overbooked and frustrated.
 - b) But if you plan ahead, you will be able to take control of your schedule and workload.
4. It's also necessary to do this planning with your spouse.

E. Create a checklist.

1. A to-do list is actually a memory device to protect you from advancing age.
 - a) It helps you maintain an orderly mind and an orderly life.
 - b) It's beneficial to see the things you must do and to check them off as you finish them.
 - c) It will also help you relax because you so you won't anxious all the time, feeling like you forgot something.
2. Developing a checklist of responsibilities and duties is a good habit to get into.
 - a) It makes you feel good when you can check off a lot of jobs accomplished.
 - b) If you don't get something done, you know what you need to do next.

F. Organize your work space.

1. Having an organized workspace will give you mental clarity. And it will bring discipline and order to your work.
2. Know where you are going to put things. Have a filing system.
 - a) Devise a simple, easy-to-use process so that you can store information, sermon notes, illustrations, articles, bills, letters, emails, or books.
 - b) If you have no method of storing information or items, you will become frustrated because you will be unable to find what you need.
 - c) The important thing is for you to be able to find the information when you need it.

G. Be on time.

1. This may not sound very spiritual, but your character is closely tied to your punctuality. If you frequently show up late, people will not trust you in the future. Your character and your word will be discredited.
2. Showing up on time or early is one way you can practice self-discipline.
3. I realize that in some cultures, being on time may not be considered important. But regardless of your culture, if you are not there to open the church building on time, or you don't have the sermon ready on time, people will stop respecting you.
 - a) If you regularly show up late to your elders' meetings, you will frustrate your fellow elders and hurt the effectiveness of your meetings.
 - b) If you are late, it is disrespectful of the other person's time. A tardy person frustrates others and is a sign of an undisciplined life.

H. When you work, work.

1. *"In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty."* (Prov. 14:23)
2. Many people in the workplace say they're working, but they're actually not working; they're doing things other than their work. They fritter away a lot of time doing things other than work.
3. Work when you work. Push other things aside. Get rid of distractions. When you are not working, you can do other things.
4. This applies also to your eldership and your family.
5. We have so many things calling for our attention, especially through technology. But when you work, focus on your work. Don't let these other things distract you.
 - a) It's not right to waste your employer's time or the Lord's time. Be diligent (Rom. 12:8).
 - b) The Bible says we ultimately work with God's eye on us, not man's eyes (Eph. 6:5-8).

I. Do not be a slave to your phone.

1. It's easy to become a slave to the phone, feeling like you must be connected 24 hours a day seven days a week. But this is not natural or healthy.
2. You must control the phone.
 - a) Use your answering machine or voice mail.
 - b) It is not wrong if you don't always have your phone with you, or if you turn your phone off at times. You can return phone calls, emails, or texts later.
3. If you do not learn to take control of the phone, it will control you like a taskmaster. You will have no peace or quietness in your life. That is not good for your brain, your spiritual life, your marriage, or your children.

Self-Discipline (continued)

Detailed Outline

Part 4 of 4

V. Practical Steps for Organizing a Busy Life

A. Learn to seize small units of time.

1. Seize little units of time scattered throughout the day to do something productive.
 - a) You can make a phone call that you need to make or reply to a few emails.
 - b) You could also do some reading in the Bible or another book, or work on your sermon or Bible study material.
2. If you use those small periods of times throughout the day wisely, you can get many small tasks done. This will free you later to do things that are more urgent or more important, like spending time with your family.
3. *“Most time is wasted, not in hours, but in minutes. A bucket with a small hole in the bottom gets as empty as a bucket that is deliberately kicked over.” –Paul J. Meyer*
4. Those small units of time add up. So don’t just putter them away. By seizing those small units of time profitably, you will have more free time later in the day or week.

B. Understand the principle of focus.

1. We live in the age of distractions.
2. You can’t do everything, so you have to choose what you can do and choose deliberately.
 - a) This means saying no to many areas of interest and commitment.
 - b) This means carefully setting out your priorities and focusing on them.
3. If you are a busy elder, you have a job, a family, and responsibilities to fulfill at the church. Maintaining your focus is the only way you can survive and be effective.

C. Follow through with your responsibilities.

1. When an assignment is given to you, follow through and get it done!
2. There is nothing that frustrates a body of elders more than an elder who does not follow through with his responsibilities.
 - a) If you do not follow through, you will frustrate and hurt people.
 - b) It will hurt your leadership.
 - c) It will discredit and hurt the whole eldership.
3. Be the kind of person that has reputation for following through with your responsibilities. Your fellow elders and the people in your church are counting on you!

D. Do the hardest and most important job first.

1. One way to learn to be self-disciplined is to train yourself to do the hardest or most important jobs first.
 - a) Usually these are the jobs we don't want to do.
 - b) We push them off, and then we worry about getting them done. This makes life miserable.
2. A disciplined person tackles the hardest job and most important job first. This is a good habit to learn and practice.

E. Plan for rest, exercise, and family.

1. The Lord wants you to have a balanced life. He doesn't want you to have a cluttered life that frustrates you and steals your joy.
2. The Lord Jesus sent the twelve disciples out to preach. When they came back, here is what he said: *"Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while."* (Mark 6:31)
3. Christ said, rest awhile in a desolate place—a place of peace, a place away from the people, away from the work.
 - a) Do something to get away from all those responsibilities.
 - b) Take time to refresh yourself. Take time off. Take time for exercise. Take time to rest. It is the Lord's will.
 - c) Refill your tank so you can have a long-term ministry. We don't want you to be a three-year elder; we want you to be a thirty- or forty-year elder! And to do that, you have to pace yourself. You have to have time for yourself. You have to rest.
4. If you don't plan for rest and relaxation, it will not happen. There are too many interruptions.
5. If you are disorganized and you procrastinate, you will feel guilty if you go away and rest because your work is not done.
6. Go to a deserted place, a lonely place. Go out to a forest. Take a long walk where no one is around. Such activity is good for both your body and your brain.
7. Create time you can spend leisurely studying the Word of God with nothing else to do but read, talk to the Lord, and meditate. These are important, healthy things for your soul and for your ministry.

F. Take care of your body.

1. We need to discipline our physical bodies, the tent in which we now live (2 Cor. 5:1-4).
2. You only get one body. You need to take care of it! Your body needs proper sleep, physical exercise, food, and rest. You are the steward over your body. You need strength and energy to do the tasks you need to do as an elder.

3. If you are disciplined in your body, it will help to discipline your spirit and your spiritual life.
4. The great missionary to China in the 19th century, Hudson Taylor said, “It takes strength to pray.” If you are weak in body, it will affect your leadership capacity. It takes strength to be a good leader.
5. There are plenty of resources today to help us to care for the body. Be familiar with those resources. Use what science teaches us in order to live longer and be more effectively, so that you can serve God for many years.

G. Learn to say no.

1. You cannot say yes to everything; your time and energy are limited. You have to focus and limit yourself to the task that God has called you to do.
2. Your ability to say “no” gives you the capacity to say “yes” to life’s most important matters.
“Our life is frittered away by detail . . . simplify, simplify.” –Henry David Thoreau

H. Get counsel from someone who has a well-managed life.

1. If you find people who are well organized, who know how to accomplish a lot in life, and are self-disciplined, ask them for advice.
2. Ask them to teach you some of their skills or tell you how they learned to be self-controlled and more organized.

I. Seek to be disciplined in every area of your life.

“Self-discipline is essential to success in all areas of life.” –Rhonda Kelley, Divine Discipline: How to Develop and Maintain Self-Control, p. 67

“We should be examining ourselves and disciplining ourselves always.”—D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, p. 536

1. We need to be disciplined in our study of God’s Word, our exercise, our eating, our sleep, and our relationships with other people.
2. Our goal should be to lead a balanced life.

Conclusion

If you are a pastor elder, you are a busy person—probably over-busy. Failure to manage all of this busyness will put your marriage, family, and ministry at risk. You do this not for your ego’s sake, but for God’s glory. You want to be a good servant of Christ, a good shepherd of his people, and a role model for those in your care. People need such examples because they too lead busy lives.

The Holy Spirit wants to produce the fruit of self-control in your life. Self-control is a requirement for an elder in his personal life, work, and ministry. Make self-discipline your goal in every area of life. Never let up on this pursuit. Work at being a Christlike, Spirit-filled, disciplined Christian leader.