Foundational Premises
of Relational Elders Training

Introduction

When developing training designed to move men towards spiritual maturity and to be qualified as elders in local churches, there are a number of possible approaches to take. In addition, there are numerous possible topics to cover in such training. However, due to space and time limitations, we must be intentionally selective of the topics that are covered. Therefore, this "Relational Elders Training" has been developed, and is delivered, on the basis of four foundational premises.

- Established Biblical Doctrine
- Trinitarian Foundation
- Relational Orientation
- Coordinated Learning Models

Established Biblical Doctrine

This Relational Elders Training has been developed, and is delivered, based on established biblical doctrine. These doctrines are a part of recognized orthodox Christian beliefs, and they in turn establish both the source of the training content and the expected application of the training.

Although some men participating in this training may not be familiar with some of these doctrines, it is very important that those participating in the training understand that these doctrines are assumed throughout the training, but will not necessarily be directly developed during the training itself.

It is highly recommended that all participants in this Relational Elders Training become familiar with the "CB Northwest Identity Document." This document is available at the CB Northwest website (www.cbnw.org).

NOTE – Those who may be unfamiliar with biblical doctrine are encouraged to read *Christian Beliefs: twenty basics every Christian should know* by Wayne A. Grudem, Edited by Elliot Grudem. This book is a brief and easy to read introduction to basic doctrine.

The Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture

This training has been developed, and is delivered, on the basis that Scripture has both the authority and the sufficiency to address all the topics covered in this training, as well as their corresponding applications to a local church. Understanding and applying scriptural truths and principles with regard to the local church and to church leadership is the starting point and is crucial in any ongoing developments.

Although organizational and managerial philosophies and techniques may provide some insight and be useful, they must always be first evaluated in light of the clear teaching of Scripture.

The following statement about the Scripture is from the CB Northwest "Identity Document."

We believe the Bible is God's absolute, objective truth for all people for all times.[1] It is without error in concept or detail in the original writings.[2] It is breathed out in its entirety by God, divinely preserved, and, therefore, trustworthy.[3] We believe the Holy Spirit superintended human authors so that, through their individual personalities and literary styles, they composed and recorded God's Word.[4] It is God's written revelation complete in the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments.[5] It is the supreme authority in all matters to which it speaks and is sufficient for life, conduct, and practice – understandable by every believer.[6] We believe Scripture must be understood through the literal, contextual, grammatical, and historical method of interpretation, and applied under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.[7]

[1] 2 Samuel 7:28; Psalm 25:10; 33:4; 119:160; John 17:17; Titus 1:2-3
[2] John 10:35; 2 Timothy 3:16
[3] Matthew 5:18; John 10:35; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21
[4] 1 Corinthians 2:12-13; 2 Peter 1:20-21
[5] Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; 1 Corinthians 14:37; Galatians 1:11-12; Revelation 22:18-19
[6] Isaiah 8:20; Matthew 5:17-19; Acts 17:11; 1 Corinthians 14:17, 37; 2 Timothy 3:15-17
[7] 1 Corinthians 2:10-16; 2 Corinthians 3:14-16; 2 Peter 1:20

The Nature of the Church

This training has been developed, and is delivered, on the basis that the church is a unique organization ordained by God. Therefore the church's purpose, organization, and functioning are determined by God as taught in the Scriptures.

The following statement about the church is from the CB Northwest "Identity Document."

> We believe that the New Testament Church is composed of all persons who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit since the day of Pentecost following Christ's resurrection.[56] We believe that the Church is the spiritual body of Christ, of which He is the Head.[57] We believe that this body expresses itself in local assemblies in which believers are in a covenant relationship.[58] Biblically that relationship is expressed corporately through hearing the Word of God proclaimed, engaging in worship, practicing the two ordinances of believer's baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper, building up each other's faith, holding each other accountable through biblical love and discipline, and engaging in local and world evangelization.[59] Biblically designated officers must meet the biblical qualifications for their office and submit to the headship of Christ, emulating His servant leadership.[60] We believe the function of eldering is reserved for biblically qualified males.[61] Each local church is to choose, support, and submit to those who function as elders.[62]

[56] Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 12:27; 2 Corinthians 6:16
[57] 1 Corinthians 12:27; Colossians 1:18

[58] 1 Corinthians 12:27
[59] Matthew 18:15-17; 28:19-20; Mark 16:16; John 3:22; 4:1-2; Acts 2:38, 41-42, 47; 8:12, 36-39; 16:32-34; 18:8; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25; Ephesians 4:11-13
[60] Matthew 20:25-28; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:7-9
[61] Titus 1:5-6; 1 Peter 5:1-3
[62] Acts 6:3-6; 15:22; Hebrews 13:17

The Polity of the Church

This training has been developed, and is delivered, on the basis that there are clear standards and guidelines for church polity (government and oversight).

The following statements about polity are from the CB Northwest "Identity Document."

> There is a biblical prescription for local church polity. Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. Under His headship each local church is elder-led. This elder leadership is congregationally affirmed.[78] Those who have been affirmed as leaders have biblically-granted authority, responsibility, and accountability.[79]

> **Elder-led:** Those who function as elders are biblically-qualified males who are affirmed by the congregation.[80] The vocational and lay elders function together as the elders of the church. The elders have the responsibility and the authority to lead the congregation in discerning the mind of Christ for all the decisions of the church and shepherding the church in those decisions.[81]

> **Congregationally Affirmed:** The congregation, as the temple of the Holy Spirit, affirms the leadership of the elders.[82] There are decisions in which the congregants contribute in helping the elders find/discern the mind of Christ.[83]

> [78] Acts 15:1-23; 16:4; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 27; Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18
> [79] Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Timothy 5:17; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1-4
> [80] Titus 1:5-6
> [81] Acts 6:3; 15:1-23; 16:4; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4
> [82] 1 Corinthians 3:9-17
> [83] Acts 6:3

The Elders of the Church

This training has been developed, and is delivered, on the basis that the role and function of the "elders" is the primary leadership within the local church.

The following statements about elders are from the CB Northwest "Identity Document."

> **Elder:** The spiritual leadership function is borne corporately by mature men who hold various offices. These are men who manifest the biblical qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 who are full of the Holy Spirit and

wisdom. They shepherd God's church through feeding, leading, guiding, nurturing, and administrating the church. Their express purpose is to discern the mind of Christ and lead the church in following Christ's will.

Vocational and Lay Elders: Vocational elders are paid by the church so that they may not be encumbered by seeking other employment; accordingly, they are able to serve the church in a vocational capacity. Lay elders are fully qualified, according to the criteria stated in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, to be recognized elders in a local church, but these carry out specific divine callings and employment outside of the church, as witnesses to Christ's gospel in the world, while also serving as elders within a local church.

Trinitarian Foundation

This Relational Elders Training begins where most other training on elders do not. Instead of jumping right into the qualifications, roles, or responsibilities of elders, this training begins with understanding the Trinitarian Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is because of the conviction that we cannot adequately understand:

- created order without first understanding the Creator

- relationships among people without first understanding the perfect relationships within the Trinity

- roles and responsibilities without first understanding the eternal working of roles and responsibilities among the three persons of the Trinity

How we are to relate to God and to each other is a reflection of how the persons of the Godhead relate with each other. For example, in John 17 Jesus prays his prayer to the Father in a way that reveals that the relational aspects of the Trinity are manifested in those who believe in Christ. Below are some verses from John 17 that speak to this relationship.

- *For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me* (v. 8).

- *And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one* (v. 11).

- *As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world* (v. 18).

- *I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me* (v. 20-21).

- *I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me* (v. 23).

- *I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them* (v. 26).

Therefore, before this training deals with anything pertaining directly to elders themselves, it spends a couple of sessions focusing on the Trinitarian Godhead. The truths and principles learned from this brief study on the Trinity will be carried throughout the rest of the training.

Relational Orientation

This training is called *Relational* Elders Training for a reason. The design of this training is orientated to an elder's relationships: His relationship with God, himself, other elders, and the people he is to shepherd and oversee.

This relational orientation is rooted in an understanding of the Trinity (see "Trinitarian Foundation" above). It is also in recognition of the relational dynamic that is a primary aspect of our salvation, walk with Christ, and our ministry for Christ.

Our salvation is primarily relational. For example, if you asked people to define "eternal life," most people would say something like "to live forever." However, that is not the way Jesus defined it. In John 17 Jesus says; *"And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"* (John 17:3). Eternal life has an important relational aspect of knowing Jesus and being known by Jesus (see also Matthew 7:21-23).

Our walk with Christ is primarily relational. *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you"* (John 14:15-17). Notice that this relationship involves the Trinity.

Our call to serve Christ is primarily relational. The relational reconciliation we have with God through Jesus Christ is also now a responsibility for us to share with others who do not know Christ. Paul tells the Corinthians*: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

Throughout this training there will be an orientation on restoring and building biblical relationships. For example, this training covers a framework for eldering that looks at how an individual elder grows in strength of character and, at the same time, can serve in a vulnerability of brokenness. This framework also looks at how a group of elders can perform their work from their combined strength yet, at the same time, have a position of humility among those they care for.

Coordinated Learning Models

This Relational Elders Training has been developed, and is delivered, based on some very important training method premises. These premises guide how this training has been developed and how it is expected to be implemented.

It is very important that those participating in the training understand these premises. They are assumed throughout the training but will not necessarily be referred to.

The Components of the Training Model

The model used for this training has four components that are interrelated and coordinated.

- Common Theology
- Cognitive Learning
- Participatory Learning
- Interactive Learning
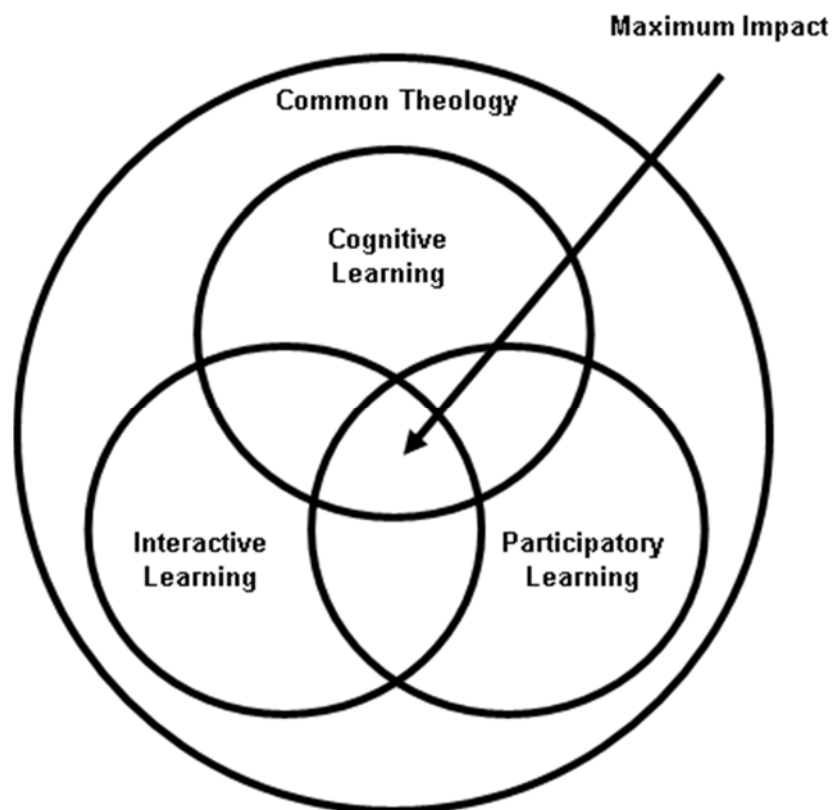
Common Theology

This training assumes that there is a large degree of common theology among those participating in it. For example, there is an understanding and agreement with regard to the Theological Premises stated above. The common theology will influence the other three components of this training.

If there is little or no common theology, then any theological misalignment will undermine the impact of this training and will most likely cause distracting friction among the participants.

In the early church there was a recognized body of doctrine that was for all believers. *"Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints"* (Jude 3).

We know that even in the early church, there was common teaching that was shared among the churches. For example, Paul instructed the Colossians: *"And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea"* (Colossians 4:16).

Cognitive Learning

Christianity is not a philosophical system but is rooted in historical accounts and intentional proclamation of truth. There are facts, stories, truths, and principles that are to be understood and applied to our lives today.

Therefore, in this training, there is specific biblical "information" that is to be learned. It is expected that participants will do follow up studies as necessary to become better acquainted with biblical truth.

The qualification of an elder includes: *"He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it"* (Titus 1:9).

There is an expectation that it takes intentional effort and discipline to become a man knowledgeable in and skilled with the Word of God. *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15).

Participatory Learning

Knowing information "about" something is not enough. It is at best incomplete knowledge. For example, a person can know a lot "about" pianos, but not be able to play even the simplest song. It is a recognized principle of education that personal experience gained by participation in something is a fundamental means of learning, whether it is sports, music, science, or theology.

Therefore, in this training, there are various assignments which require the participants "do" something with the knowledge they have gained via the cognitive learning. These assignments are not intended to be "busy work," but are intended to provide a means for the participant to gain experiential knowledge to add to the cognitive learning.

Jesus said the difference between hearing his words and doing them or not doing them is like the difference between a house with a foundation on rock or on sand (see Matthew 7:24-27).

James tells us that to hear God's Word but not "be doers" is self-deceptive. However, those who intently do what they hear will be blessed (see James 1:22-25). James later goes on to elaborate that faith without corresponding action is really no faith at all (see James 2:14-26).

Interactive Learning

Learning new information and gaining personal experience are both essential. But by themselves they may only provide a limited insight or lack a broader perspective. Including other people in the learning experience provides the opportunity to gain deeper insight and greater perspective.

Therefore, in this training, there are various assignments which require participants to interact with other people. This may be through group discussion or may include performing tasks with others, such as prayer.

Paul exhorted Timothy to recognize the importance of the people who had instructed him: *"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom [plural] you learned it"* (2 Timothy 3:14).

Paul also exhorted the church in Colossae to mutually share the lessons they have learned from God's Word: *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God"* (Colossians 3:16).

Learning Expectations

For this training to have maximum impact in the lives of participants and the elders of a local church, it requires participants to be actively engaged in each part of the training. This includes attentively attending each training session, as well as thoughtfully completing each assignment. Excluding one of the components of this training model will significantly reduce its transforming impact on their lives.

Constant participation is important because the training builds and themes develop as the training progresses. To miss parts of the training will hinder a participant's understanding of future concepts. Therefore, it is important that a participant make up any missed sessions as soon as possible.