

11 – The Framework for Eldering: *Living in the Radical Center*

Relational Elders Training

20130925

This training session and all corresponding sessions were developed and written by Mark Hoeffner and Royce Curtis for CB Northwest's "Relational Elders Training".

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Introduction

When we learn about what it means to be an “elder” (leader) within Christ’s church, we will learn there are a number of different components of how elders are to view themselves and how they are to function. It will be important to understand each of these components, how they relate to the others, and how they are to be kept in proper balance with each other.

In this unit we will be looking at “A Framework for Eldering.” It provides a balanced understanding of how eldering is to be approached and implemented.

On Your Own – *Before* Group Instruction

In this part of this training session you will personally interact with new training concepts and prepare to work with others during the group instruction time. You are to complete the following activities before the group instruction time:

Read

Step 1 – Read the article “A Framework for Eldering” and “The Four Quadrants of the Framework for Eldering”. As you read:

- A. Place the letter “N” in the margin near information that is “New” to you.
- B. Underline what strikes you as significant.
- C. Circle terms or ideas you might need to have clarified.
- D. Write down any questions you might have in your Learning Journal for this session.

Think

Step 2 – Take some time to think about the following aspects of the article “A Framework for Eldering”. Write your thoughts in your Learning Journal and be ready to discuss these during the next group instruction time.

1. In what ways do you know that you are a man “called by God”? Describe what this looks like in your life.
2. In what ways (if any) do you doubt or struggle with the knowledge that you are a man “called by God”?
3. In what ways do you know that your church is a community “commissioned by God”? Describe what this looks like for your church.
4. In what ways (if any) do you doubt or struggle with the knowledge that your church is a community “commissioned by God”?

With Others – *During* Group Instruction

In this part of this training session you will work together with others to gain understanding of the key truths of this session. You are to complete the following activities during the group instruction time:

Connect

This section is oriented to “connect” you to:

- God through prayer,
- Each other through sharing, and
- The session content through review and discussion.

Step 3 (In Triads) – Pray together, asking God to graciously provide His direction, protection, and presence during the group instruction time.

Step 4 (In Triads) – Share experiences, outcomes, and “Aha Moments” from the personal application activities from the last session.

Step 5 (In Triads) – Have each person share his observations and answers to the **Read** and **Think** sections of this session.

Step 6 (With the Whole Group) – Have someone from each triad summarize to the whole group:

- A. a few outcomes and experiences from the personal application activities from the last session.
- B. a few **Read** and **Think** observations or answers discussed in his triad.
- C. any questions or concerns that came out of the triad sharing time.

Analyze & Interact

This section will direct you to dig deeper into the Scriptures and truths of this session.

Step 7 (In Triads) – Review the article “The Four Quadrants of the Framework for Eldering” together. After reviewing the article, answer the following questions:

- A. What are some reasons a training program on eldering in the local church would begin with the topics in Quadrant 1 and not with the topics in Quadrant 4?
- B. In what ways could dealing with your “vulnerability of brokenness” (both as individuals and as a group of men) during this training be “risky” for you?
- C. How can you (both as individuals and as a group of men) make it less “risky” for each other?

Step 8 (With the Whole Group) – Using 2 Timothy 3:16 as a framework, analyze and interact with the following Scripture passages:

- Titus 1:5-9 (focusing on what it says for you as a man called by God)
- 1 Peter 5:1-5 (focusing on what it says for you as a group of men commissioned by God).

Use the questions below as guidelines. Record your answers in your Learning Journal.

- A. Teaching (*What is true.*) – What are the key biblical truths of this passage?
- B. Reproof (*What is not true.*) – What is something false or inaccurate that you personally have believed related to the topic of this passage?
- C. Correction (*What not to do.*) – In relation to this passage, what is something in your life that needs to change?
- D. Training in righteousness (*What to do.*) – What are some things you need to learn to do (or not do) in order to live in a way that reflects the truth of this passage?

Step 9 (On Your Own) – Summarize what you have learned from this training session (so far). Record your personal summary in your Learning Journal.

Step 10 (With the Whole Group) – After everyone has had time to write a personal summary, have each person share his summary with the whole group.

Integrate

This section will guide you to incorporate truths from this session into your life in tangible and relevant ways.

Step 11 (In Triads) – Think about what you have read and discussed in this session so far.

Use the following categories to help you think through various aspects of your life.

- Knowledge – your understanding, beliefs, and convictions about what is true and not true
- Values – your priorities and the things of high worth or importance
- Attitudes – your feelings, preferences, or points of view, especially towards others
- Practices – your actions actually done, especially with regularity, including the routines you keep or habits you have
- Relationships – your personal interactions and connections with others, especially the people close to you (spouse and family) and those combined with you (church and work)

Then thoughtfully and honestly answer the following three questions. Record your answers in your Learning Journal.

- A. What does the truth of this session look like in my life now?
- B. What could the truth of this session look like in my life:
 - i. one month from now?
 - ii. one year from now?
- C. What is at least one thing you can do that will enable you to integrate (apply) the truth of this session into your life?

Pray

Step 12 (With the whole group) – Spend some time praying with each other and for each other using Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-5 to guide your prayer time.

On Your Own – *After* the Group Instruction

In this part of this training session you will apply what you are learning to your personal life. You are to complete the following activities outside the group instruction time:

Act (Assignment)

Step 13 – Review your notes, assignments, and “Aha Moments” for the Relational Elders Training sessions you have completed so far. Answer the following questions:

- A. What has been the biggest challenge for you personally so far? Why?
- B. What has been the biggest surprise about others in the group so far?
- C. What would your wife say is the biggest change in you so far? (If you are not sure, ask her.)

Interact

Step 14 (With Your Wife) – Discuss with your wife:

- the main ideas of this session.
- your answers to the integration questions (Step 11) and discuss the assignment (Step 13).

Summarize the main points of your discussion in your Learning Journal.

Think (Reflect)

Step 15 – Prayerfully think about what you have learned with regard to the truths of this session, your experience during the assignment (Step 13), and your conversation with your wife (Step 14). Use the questions below to guide your reflection (thinking). You do not necessarily have to write out answers to all of the questions but take the time to prayerfully think about each one and then write down some thoughts pertaining to one or two of them. Be ready to share your thoughts and insights during the next group instruction time.

- A. Do you need to repent of any disobedience? If so, what?
- B. Do you need to acknowledge any unbelief? If so, what?
- C. What biblical truth do you need to trust to be true for you?
- D. What promises of God can you trust in and expect Him to keep?
- E. What signs of growth do you perceive in your life?
- F. What can you give thanks to God for?

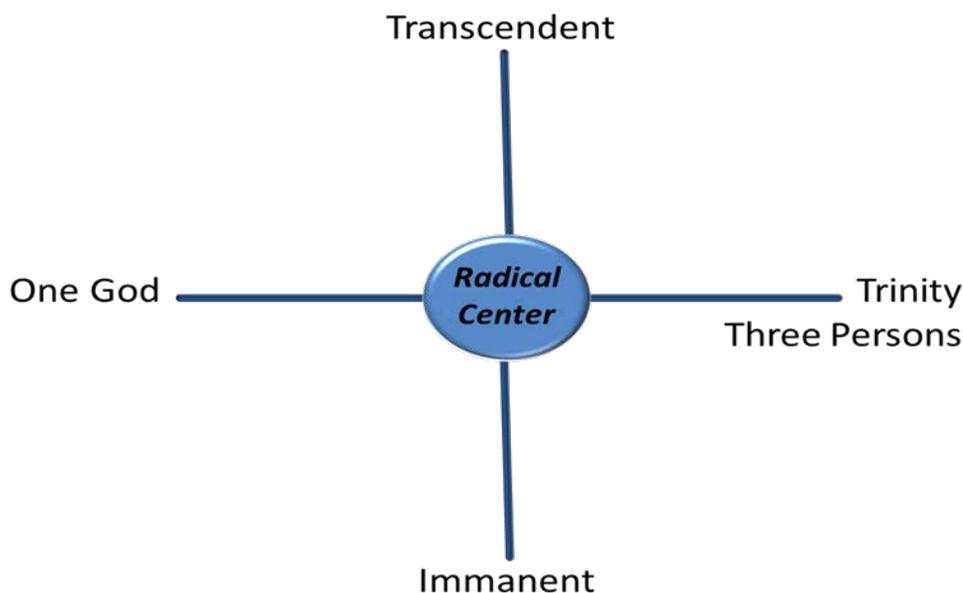
Step 16 – Record any “Aha Moments” from this session (i.e. insights gained that are important for you to remember). Record this in your Learning Journal.

Step 17 – What is something you should research or talk about with someone else? Record this in your Learning Journal.

A Framework for Eldering

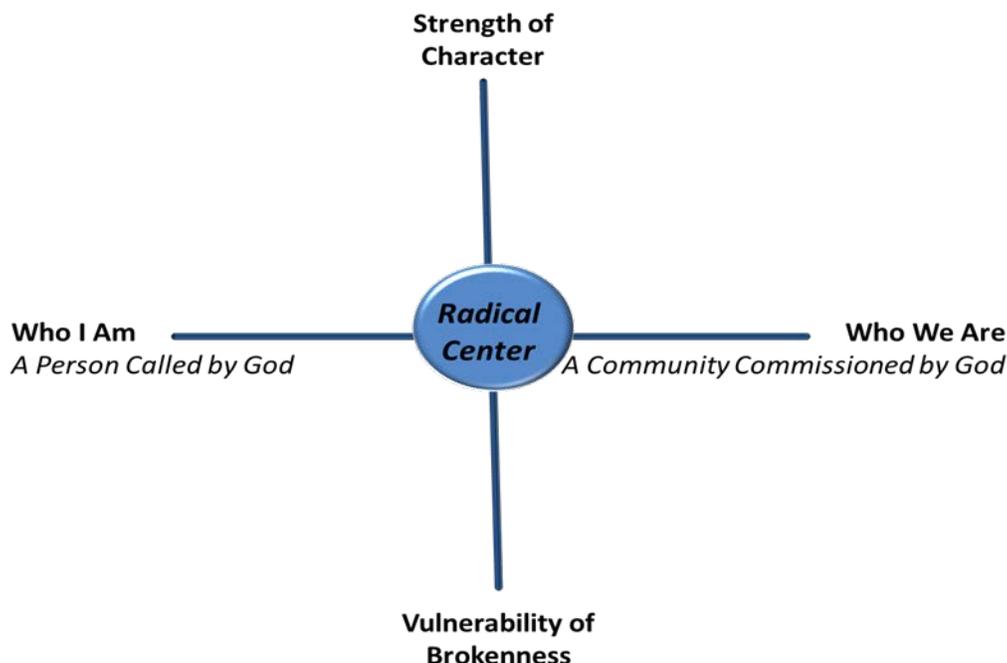
The Godhead as a Model of Eldering

In an earlier session (4 – The Community of the Godhead: Trinity), we discussed how the Trinitarian Godhead exists in apparent tension between multiple truths. The diagram below depicts the “tension” that exists between various aspects of what is true about God. God exists as “One God” and as “Trinity – Three Persons,” as well as being “Transcendent” and “Immanent.” (Reminder – the terms transcendent and immanent were explained back in session “4 – The Community of the Godhead: Trinity”.)



A Framework for Eldering

This same understanding of existing in tension between what is true also provides a framework for eldering. Similar to the Godhead, the elder exists with two planes of tension as well.

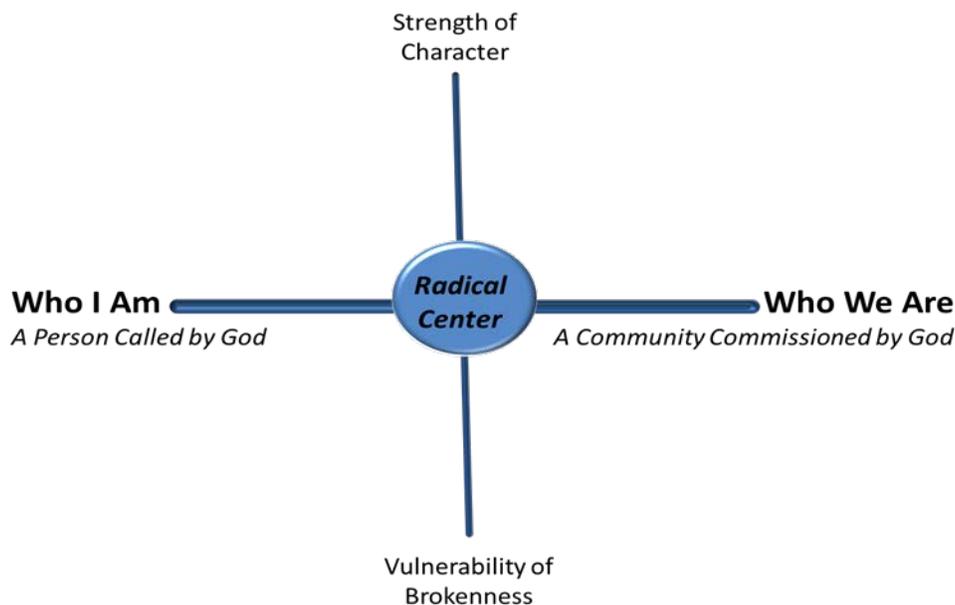


The diagram above is a summary of “A Framework for Eldering.” The objective of understanding this framework is to be living in the “radical center.” The radical center is a position of balance and yet “tension.” By tension we mean that these truths may appear to be exclusive of the other or maybe even contradictory at times. However, the Bible clearly teaches them both to be true. The tendency by many people is to stress one or the other, or even one against the other. This training recognizes that understanding and applying these truths is not an issue of “either/or” but of “both/and.” For example, it is neither “Who I Am” nor “Who We Are,” but it is both “I” AND “We.”

In this session, we will first summarize two sets of truths that exist in “tension.” These truths are represented by the horizontal plane (line) and the vertical plane (line). We will then briefly summarize the perspective of each quadrant created by the intersection of the two planes. These quadrants provide the framework for the rest of this Relational Elders Training.

I and We – Living on the “Horizontal Plane”

The horizontal plane (line) of the diagram depicts the tension between two important truths; “Who I Am” and “Who We Are.” Notice that the first statement is about “you” as an individual, but the second statement is about “we” (plural), which are the elders as a leadership community.



“Who I am” is “a person called by God.” “Who we are” is “a community commissioned by God.”

We are going to look at the truths and tension between who I am as a person called by God and who we are as elders of a church, as those commissioned by God.

Who I Am

I am a person called by God. What does it mean that “I am a person called by God”?

Scripture tells us that God’s sovereign call includes the all-encompassing work of God through predestination, justification, and glorification. This call is for us to be conformed to the image of his Son (Romans 8:29-30). The surety of our calling is based on God and his purpose of our being identified with Christ. Paul tells us that, “*God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord*” (1 Corinthians 1:9).

This calling is recognition of our identity in Christ. We each come to Christ through repentance and faith. We participate in baptism as a sign of what it means to identify with Christ. For example, water baptism is an ordinance that is an acted-out declaration of a belief system. When we step into the water for baptism, it is a declaration of our submission to the gospel and the God of the gospel. Going under the water (immersion) is identifying in Christ’s death. Coming up out of the water is

identifying in Christ's resurrection from the dead (see Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27; Matthew 28:19; Colossians 2:12-15).

This calling is recognition of the gospel, its impact on my life, and the call on my life to live in step with the truth of the gospel (Galatians 2:14; Philippians 1:27). This calling also includes the understanding that we should actively progress in our walk with Christ: *"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving"* (Colossians 2:6-7).

This calling includes both a new identity and corresponding purpose of being used by God to spread the gospel message. In Christ, each of us is a "new creation" entrusted with the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16-21).

Who We Are

We are a community commissioned by God. What does this mean?

The calling we have as individuals is personal, but it is not private. We are called *"out of darkness into his marvelous light"* to be *"a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession,"* that we may proclaim his excellencies (1 Peter 2:9).

When we as individuals are saved, we automatically become part of the body of Christ, his church. The baptism we participate in as individuals unites us to the whole church. Every person brings something unique to contribute to the family of God. We are the body of Christ with many parts. We need one another. Everyone is important and no one is expendable (1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15-16).

Walking in step with the gospel is not simply an individual undertaking but one that is done as a church.

This is recognition that the gospel has impacted our lives and that we are now a gospel community on mission. Belonging to the church automatically includes the personal and corporate mandate to participate in the mission of that church. As God's workmanship, we are created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10). Jesus' authority and presence with us provide the foundation for the ongoing commission to make disciples of all people (Matthew 28:18-20).

Living in the Tension of I and We

There is an "I/We" reality in our calling and commission as Christians. We need to learn to navigate between functioning as an individual and within the context of a group (family or church).

For example, Paul instructs us in Ephesians 4:1-7, *"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. There is one*

body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” Notice that there are both personal and group responsibilities to walk in a manner worthy of the calling. Each one is to bear with others in love (v. 2) and use grace and gifts given to them (v. 7). But these are clearly done within the context of one body and one Spirit (v. 4), while maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (v. 3).

Living in the Radical Center

In order to live a healthy and effective life as a Christian and to function effectively as a leader, it is to be your goal to live in the “radical center” of the horizontal plane. It is not a matter of focusing on the “I” or the “We” but focusing on the “I” and the “We.” You are not to stay on the left side, focusing on yourself and being isolated from others. You are also not to stay on the right side, completely dependent on others and taking no personal responsibility.

The Repercussions of Imbalance

It is important to know that if we get it wrong with “Who I Am” it has repercussions in understanding “Who We Are.” For example, if we believe and function as if we each personally earn God’s acceptance through performing the right works, we will either move into a legalism that is hard for ourselves and others to live up to or we will become discouraged by the tentativeness of God’s acceptance. Either way, we can be crushed under the load of works and create barriers to healthy relationships with others.

In the same way, if we get it wrong with “Who We Are” it has repercussions on “Who I Am.” For example, if we disengage from the mission of the church we will most likely become very self-centered and self-serving.

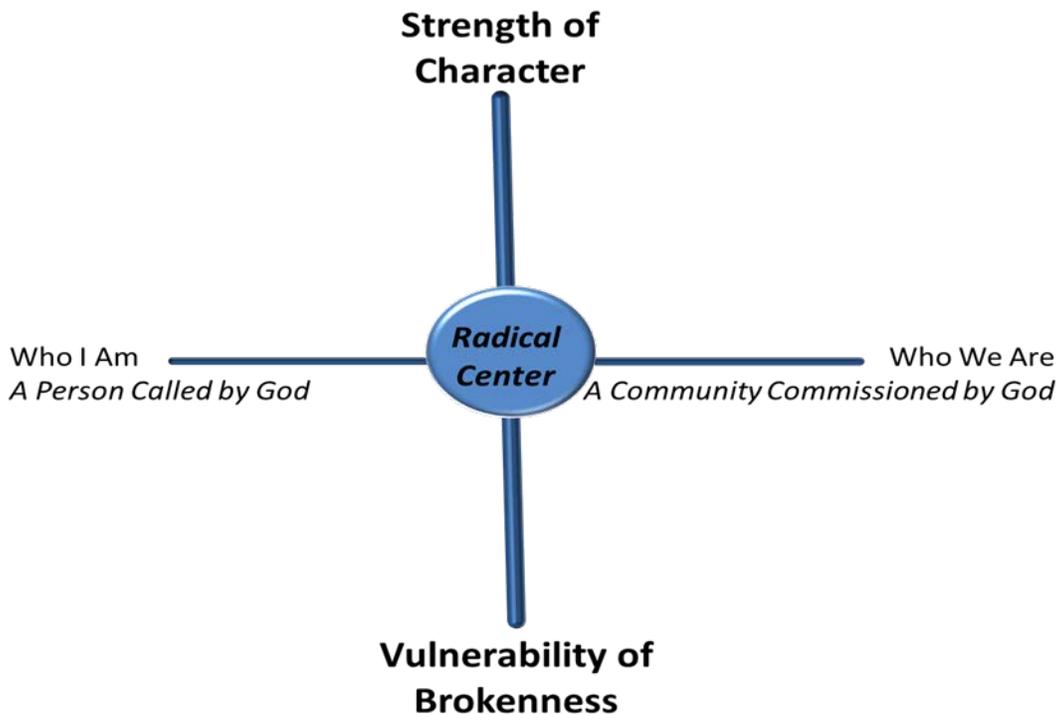
It is our goal to live in the radical center, where we live most dependent on God as we know “Who I Am” and “Who We Are.”

The Trap of a Consumer Mentality

Many people come to church with an “I” framework in mind. They come to church to get what they want or what they think they need. This is part of our culture’s consumer mentality. If they don’t get what they want, they will go someplace else. We need to be aware of this way of thinking and make sure we do not function (lead) from it.

Strength and Brokenness – Living on the “Vertical Plane”

The vertical plane (line) of the diagram depicts the tension between your “Strength of Character” and your “Vulnerability of Brokenness.” It may seem like a contradiction to talk about your strength and your brokenness at the same time. But to be healthy, there needs to be an acknowledgement of each in your life.



Strength of Character

We all have “strength of character” because we are created in the image of God, recreated in Christ, and the Spirit of God lives in us and is at work in us.

Being created in the image of God means we have intelligence, skills, gifting, personality traits, and divine characteristics (such as an innate sense of justice) that we can leverage in God’s service. As Christians, we have been “born again” to be new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) and God’s “*workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*” (Ephesians 2:10).

Because we are now redeemed through the work of Christ on our behalf, the Holy Spirit is continually at work in the various aspects of our lives, even when we might not be aware of him. As we learn to “walk in the Spirit,” we learn not to gratify our sinful desires. The Holy Spirit is actively developing the fruit of the spirit (love, joy,

peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) in our lives (Galatians 5:16-26).

In this way, he is sanctifying us and conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:26-30). We know that God's *"divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness"* and that we are to grow in character as we *"make every effort to supplement our faith with virtue"* so that we will be kept *"from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Peter 1:3-11). We also are transformed by the grace and truth of God, which is *"training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age" and to be "zealous for good works"* (Titus 2:11-14).

The strength of our character is not that we don't sin; it is that we are open and honest about our sin. And when we do sin, we move quickly to God in repentance and faith in order to deal with our sin. Someone who is of strong character is vulnerable about his sin. He not only acknowledges it, but allows others to speak into his life with regard to his sin.

Vulnerability of Brokenness

We also know we have a certain "vulnerability of brokenness." When we understand our sin and are vulnerable about our sin, there is a brokenness that takes place. We can walk with God a long time, but we still sin. Christians who are not honest with God, themselves, and others about the sin in their lives are deceiving themselves and denying God's Word (see 1 John 1:8-10). Persistent unrepented sin may be an indication that a person really does not know God (see 1 John 3:4-10). Someone who is mature recognizes his own vulnerability of brokenness but is quick to confess his sin and appropriate the forgiveness and righteousness of God in Christ (see 1 John 1:9).

A paradox of the Christian faith is that in our honesty about our brokenness and weakness we actually gain God's strength. Paul shared with the Corinthians his struggles and how God gave him the strength to endure (see 2 Corinthians 12:1-10). Although he does not identify his struggles as specific sin, Paul formulates a principle of Christ, who told Paul, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I [Paul] will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me"* (2 Corinthians 12:9). Our brokenness is a conduit for the grace and strength of God in us and through us to others.

(NOTE – The relationship between weakness and power/strength is a theme in 1 and 2 Corinthians and would be worth further study. See 1 Corinthians 1:15; 1:27; 2:3,5; 15:43; 2 Corinthians 12:9; 13:3-4; 13:9.)

Understanding the depth of our own sin against God and the immense value of his forgiveness of our sins significantly impacts our willingness to forgive others (see Matthew 18:21-35) and enables us to have the conversations necessary to bring reconciliation with others (see Matthew 18:15-20).

Living in the Tension of Strength and Brokenness

There is a tension in living in both strength of character and vulnerability of brokenness. As we have seen, open and honest recognition of our sin is the means by which God strengthens us with his grace.

Living in the Radical Center

We need to learn to function in the reality of our strength and our brokenness. We are getting stronger with God's help, yet, at the same time, we will gain a greater understanding of the weakness we have from the extent and depth of our sin. Both are true. Both impact our lives.

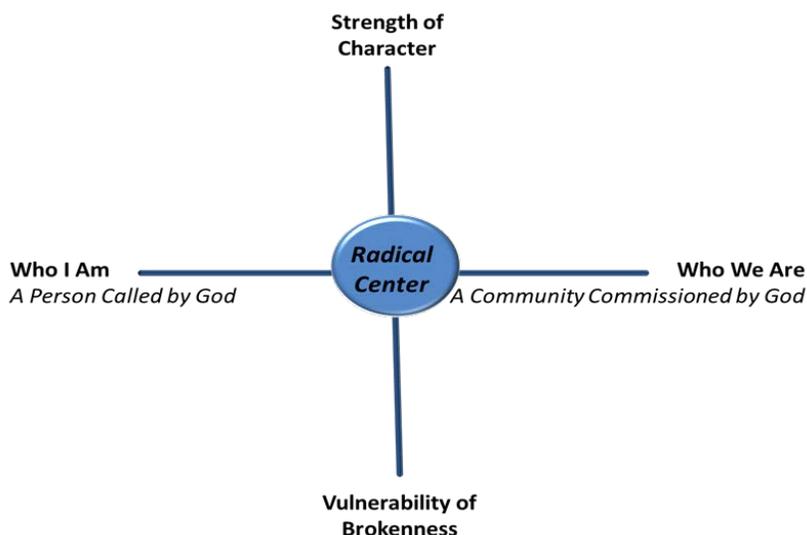
The Repercussions of Imbalance

It is important to know that if you get it wrong with strength of character, it has repercussions in understanding your vulnerability of brokenness. For example, if you focus on personal strength as if it is a personal achievement, it often leads to pride and increasing selfishness. Also, strength that produces arrogance can make a person blind to his sin and weaknesses.

It is also important to know that if you get it wrong with vulnerability of brokenness, it has repercussions in understanding your strength of character. For example, if you are consumed with your sin and weaknesses, you might focus your energy on trying harder, which is a form of legalism. You can get so obsessed by sinful habits that you are in bondage to them. Also, by focusing on your vulnerability you might make excuses for avoiding personal responsibility for growth in character.

The Four Quadrants of the Framework for Eldering

In this training, you are going to look at what it means to live in the “Radical Center.” The radical center is depicted by the circle in the center of the diagram.



You will be learning how you get to the balance of living in the radical center. When you live in the radical center, you each know who you are as individuals (who am I?), while, at the same time, you know what you are supposed to be about doing together (what do we do?). You also know what you contribute by way of personal character and what you participate in by way of your combined character as a plurality of men. You each know your own brokenness because of your own sinfulness, but you also know your brokenness because of your combine sinfulness as a plurality of men.

When you hear phrases such as “find the mind of Christ” for yourself and your church, it is another way of expressing the concept of living in the Radical Center.

How do you get into that health of the radical center? This is what you are going to be working on. To do this, you will be working through each of the four quadrants focusing on the specific aspect of what it means to be an elder/leader. The four quadrants are listed below.

1. The Character of the Elder (Quadrant 1)
2. The Service of the Elder (Quadrant 2)
3. The Posture of the Elders (Quadrant 3)
4. The Work of the Elders (Quadrant 4)

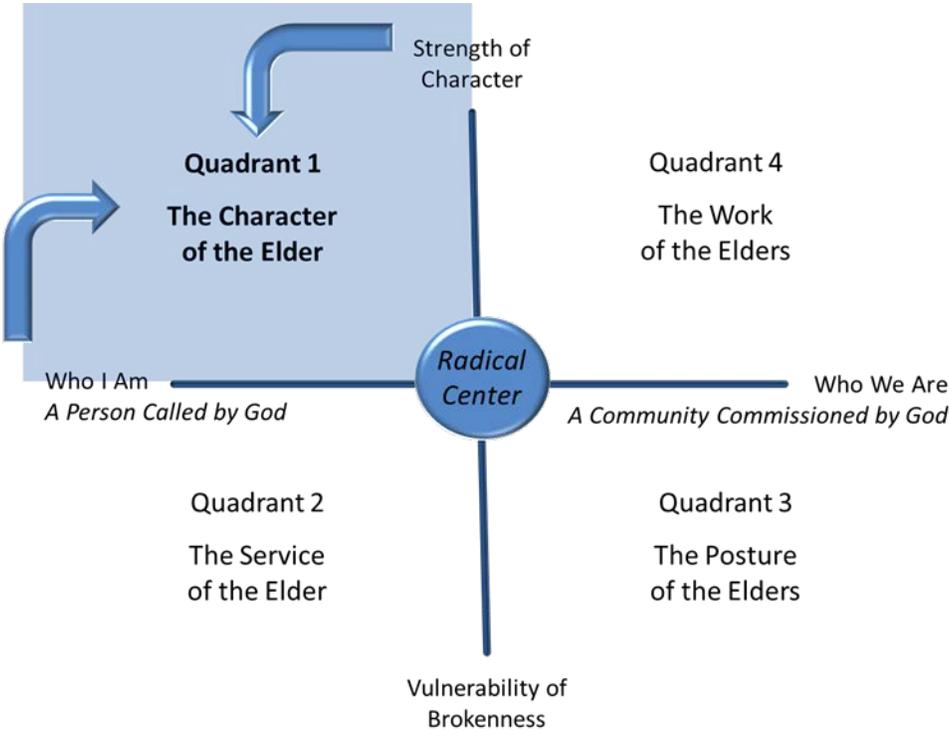
The Character of the Elder (Q1)

The Character of the Elder is the outworking of who you are as a person called by God and your strength of character.

This clarification of calling and strength of character will be developed for three training sessions. First, this training will look at the Old Testament and the New Testament concepts for the role of elders. During this time we will also briefly look at the qualifications of the elder and the parallel between “eldering” and “fathering.” Second, the RET will look at the cultivation of an elder. How the elder responds to the desire to be an elder and the guidelines of raising up next generation elders. Third, the foundation of eldery will be addressed. This foundation is based on the combination of grace and truth in the life and ministry of an elder.

The six sessions that focus on Quadrant 1 are:

- The Concept of Eldering (two sessions)
- The Cultivation of an Elder (two sessions)
- The Foundation for Eldering (two sessions)



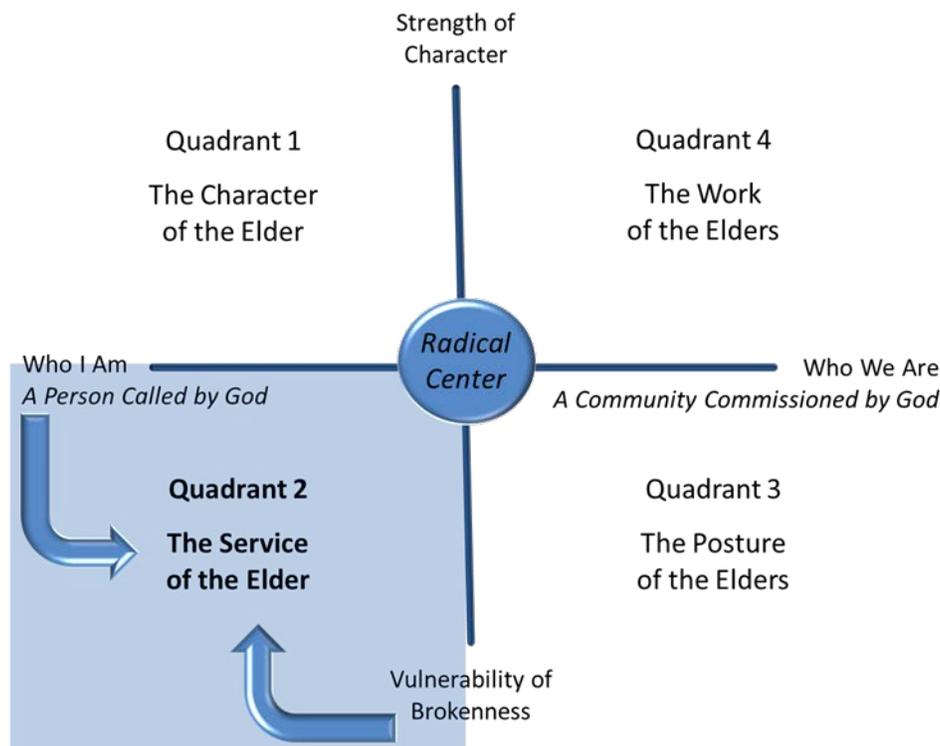
The Service of the Elder (Q2)

The Service of the Elder is the outworking of who you are as a person called by God while recognizing your vulnerability of brokenness.

This clarification of calling and the vulnerability of brokenness will be developed for three training sessions. First, this RET will look at the mission of redeeming relationships through modeling truth, extending grace, and living values. It will also deal with the often misunderstood concept of vulnerability. Second, this RET will spend two sessions on how to properly build right relationships by choosing to resolve conflicts and address the consequences of sin.

The six sessions that focus on Quadrant 2 are:

- The Mission of Redeeming Relationships (two sessions)
- The Building of Right Relationships (four sessions)



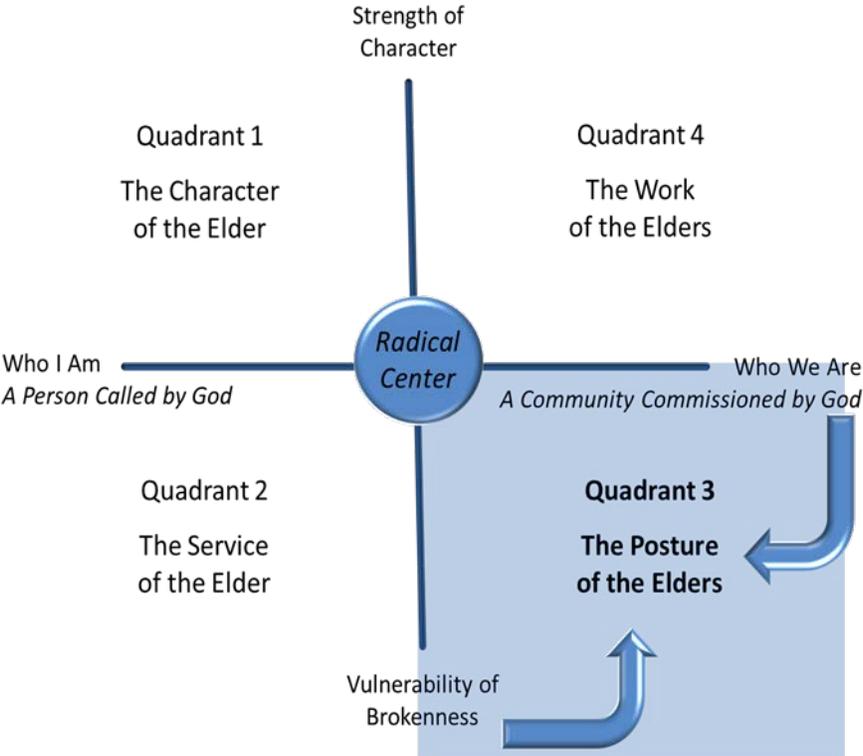
The Posture of the Elders (Q3)

The Posture of the Elders is the outworking of who you are as a plurality (group) of elders functioning as a community commissioned by God while recognizing your vulnerability of brokenness as the group of elders.

This clarification of a community commissioned by God in the recognition of their vulnerability of brokenness will be developed for three training sessions. First, this RET will look at the relational community of the elders, which parallels the relational community of the Trinity. Second, this RET will look at the role of the Holy Spirit to indwell and empower the elders and the church. Third, the paradoxical concept of descending into the role of servant leadership will be addressed.

The eight sessions that focus on Quadrant 3 are:

- The Elders in Relational Community (three sessions)
- The Holy Spirit’s Empowering Presence (two sessions)
- The Descent into Servant Leadership (three sessions)



The Work of the Elders (Q4)

The Work of the Elders is the outworking of who you are as a plurality (group) of elders functioning as a community commissioned by God and the strength of character of the group of elders.

This clarification of working as a community commissioned by God and the combined strength of character will be developed for three training sessions. First, this RET will look at the principle of the plurality of elders. Second, this RET will focus on the work of an elder, which includes the doctrinal work, the intercessory work, and the pastoral work. Third, the seven doctrinal fruits of a church with good eldering will be addressed.

The nine sessions that focus on Quadrant 4 are:

- The Plurality of Elders (two sessions)
- The Work of the Elders (five sessions)
- The Seven Doctrinal Fruits of Good Eldering (two sessions)

