

# The Skills of Leadership

*Greg Cook*

**Introduction** The strategy that we are using for this Family Enrichment Conference involves focusing on exposition of selected texts with clear but principled application in the morning services.

The evening services are the times when the speakers are going to be plain, practical, and personal with clear steps of action. It is my desire to be plain, practical and personal tonight. Let's ask God to help us all in this time together tonight. <PRAY>

You have to understand. Just because I am up here presenting this material does not mean that I have done it, am a skilled practitioner of it, or am an expert at it. In fact, as I was working on this message, I told Becky that it was hard to prepare this message because it was so convicting. So don't think that because I'm up here and you're down there that I am talking as one who has it all together in these areas. That is not true. I am a beggar telling other beggars where the food is. I am not the chef who has prepared the food and is presenting it in all of its glory to you lowly beggars. I stand in just as much need as you do.

I am indebted to many authors for their insights and instructions in what I am presenting tonight. I will give credit to them as I use their ideas throughout our time tonight.

## Being a God-honoring Student

As Russ said this morning, we must begin with our walk with the Lord. Without the two-way communication between God and us, we will not know how to be the leaders that God has designed for us to be.

Let's begin with our intake of God's Word.

### Bible Intake

You notice that I used the word *intake*. I got this insight from Dr. Don Whitney at the annual NANC conference this year. His sessions were very challenging to me. So much so that I bought all of these books. In his book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, he makes these two comments:

*No Spiritual Discipline is more important than the intake of God's Word. Nothing can substitute for it. There simply is no healthy Christian life apart from a diet of the milk and meat of Scripture. (page 24)*

*Regardless of how busy we become with all things Christian, we must remember that the most transforming practice available to us is the disciplined intake of Scripture. (page 25)*

I don't know about you, but there are many times that I read my Bible, close it, and say, "What did I read? I don't remember a thing." Has that ever happened to you, or am I the only one? What Dr. Whitney helped me to see is that the problem is not my age, my IQ, or my seriousness about God's Word – it is more of a problem with my method of engaging God's Word. We not only have to read the Word, we also must meditate on it.

## Reading the Bible

I am a believer in reading the entire Bible through. I don't want to meet Nahum in Glory and have to confess to him that I didn't read his book. There are many Bible reading plans available. In fact, if you look in the back of your Bible, chances are you are going to find a schedule there for reading through the entire Bible in one year.

There are at least two challenges in trying to read through the Bible in one year:

#1 – How many times have you started with good intentions on January 1<sup>st</sup>, but somewhere along the way you get behind or bogged down in Numbers. Maybe you made that commitment this year. Where are you? Are you behind already? What happens when you get behind? You begin reading just to get caught up because your conscience is killing you. In fact, you skip over all of the names and the begots so that you can get caught up; and

#2 – You are so intent on getting all of the reading done for the day so that you don't get behind, you don't remember what you read, much less get anything out of it.

Is it so wrong to take two or three or five years to read through your Bible? I don't think so. I don't think that God is going to be disappointed in you when you take the time to have intake of His Word instead of just getting it done. The important thing is that you have intake, not just reading, everyday. For most of you, just reading each day is going to be a major change in your life, much less getting to the place of intake. But it must be done.

## Meditation and study

But reading is only the first part of Bible intake. You must also have a method for making the Scriptures a part of you. If you will take a concordance and look up the word "meditate" and its derivations, you will find that meditation is the second key to Bible intake right behind reading.

May I make these suggestions to help you get started in your Bible intake:

#1 – If you are going to make reading the Bible through a goal – in whatever period of time you decide, then look at several plans and choose which one appeals to you.

#2 – Decide how long you are going to devote to Bible intake each day – 10 minutes, 20 minutes, a half hour. Then divide the time in half between reading and meditating. It is far better to read less and remember more, than to read more and remember nothing.

#3 – Decide when during the day you are going to do your Bible intake. Also decide where you are going to do it. I suggest that you do not do it while you are in bed. Your mind does not do well when it knows that the bed is the place to sleep, not to do important work.

#4 – Begin to meditate on God's Word. Here are some suggestions from Don Whitney to help you begin meditating. Select a verse, a part of a verse, or a

phrase from your reading. Either write it out on a 3x5 card, put it in your PDA, or memorize it. Repeat it in different ways. By that he means emphasize each word separately and think about how the truth glows in these different lights. Think carefully and deeply about each insight that comes to mind.

Don Whitney gives this example from John 11:25 in *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (page 49):

“I am the resurrection and the life.”

“I *am* the resurrection and the life.”

“I am *the* resurrection and the life.”

“I am the *resurrection* and the life.”

“I am the resurrection *and* the life.”

“I am the resurrection and *the* life.”

“I am the resurrection and the *life*.”

This is not an exercise just to repeat words, but should be done with your mind in gear and having prayed for the Holy Spirit to illumine your mind.

Other ways to meditate are to rewrite the portion in your own words. Use as many words as you need in order to get the meaning across. Or, look for applications of the text. What would God have you do, don't do, say, think, or any number of other application points. Or, you can pray through the text just like you did when you emphasized each word.

These are just a few ideas for getting you going in disciplining yourself to the splendor of regular intake of the Word of God. If you do not begin with God's Word, then the chances of your leadership not being God-honoring are increased greatly. Please see Don Whitney's books for more help in this area.

## Prayer

Reading and meditating on God's Word is one part of being a God-honoring student in the school of leadership. The second part is prayer.

### Problems in praying

Does anyone else here have problems in praying, or am I the only one? Once again, Don Whitney helped me at the NANC conference come to terms with this problem in my life. He contends that the problems we experience in prayer are not a problem with us as much as it is a problem with our methods. This seemed to be his theme at the conference. But as he explained, I believe he is right.

He said that the main reason we struggle in prayer is because we get bored with prayer. We say the same old things about the same old things and it gets boring. We have a great desire to pray, but our desires collide with our experiences of prayer and it doesn't make prayer something that warms our hearts. It is not something that we can't wait to do. It is a duty. And duties are not fun things to do. Dr. Whitney maintains that there are only 6 major areas in which all of our prayers can be categorized: our family, our future, our work or school, our ministry or church, our finances, and the present crises in which we find ourselves. Are these areas wrong to be praying

about? No. Should we not be praying about these areas? Of course not! This is our life and what impacts our lives. This is where our hearts are. Of course we are going to be occupied with them in our thoughts and beliefs.

## Praying the Scriptures

The solution for boredom in prayer must be simple or it will never happen. So here is one method recommended by Dr. Whitney, and others, that is simple, yet effective. It is praying the Scriptures. If the problem is that we pray about the same old things saying the same old things, then using the Scriptures as our basis gives us new ways to say things. We aren't saying the same old things about these same old things. We are using the Scriptures to pray in fresh ways about these same old things.

One of the best places in Scripture to use as our basis for our prayers is the Psalms. Praying the Psalm is different from trying to interpret the text. We are using these Psalms as a prompt to think about life from a biblical prospective. We are being prompted to think in terms that bring a Godly focus to life.

Let's take an example that Don used at the conference. You all know Psalm 23. The first part of verse 1 reads, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." How can we use that to pray? "Lord, I am so thankful that you have faithfully shepherded me these many years. I am thankful for how you have taken me through so many difficult situations and how you have stood by me when times were tough. And I am asking that you would shepherd me today as I have this important presentation at work. Shepherd my thoughts and my words. Shepherd my reactions to questions and criticism. And Father, please shepherd my children today as they go to school. Shepherd them as they face the evil and the evil one. And please shepherd our pastors at church as they shepherd us."

Are you getting the picture? Whatever comes to mind is what I pray about. And yet, there is a freshness. I haven't even gotten to the second part of the 1<sup>st</sup> verse and there is still more that I can pray about as I think about the Lord being my Shepherd.

Let me recommend some resources for you. The first two books are by Don Whitney. They are *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, and *Simplify Your Spiritual Life – Spiritual Disciplines for the Overwhelmed*. The third book is *Praying the Scriptures – A Field Guide for Your Spiritual Journey* by Evan B. Howard. The first two books should be in every home.

## Being a God-honoring Spouse

As we develop and grow in our understanding of God's Word and the principles of God-honoring discipleship, we are able to work on being a God-honoring spouse. As Russ taught this morning from 1 Peter 3:7, we are to live with our wives in an understanding way, showing honor, love, and grace as joint-heirs of the grace of life. I am borrowing from two books for this section: *The Exemplary Husband – A Biblical Perspective*, by Stuart Scott and *The Complete Husband – A Practical Guide to Biblical Husbanding* by Lou Priolo. Both of these men have been speakers at our annual Family Enrichment Retreat in years past.

## Understanding Your Wife

How can we understand our wives? Doesn't everyone know that you can't understand women? They've even written books about men and women and Mars and Venus. But I'm sorry. That just doesn't fly. God has told us we must understand at least one woman in this world – the wife that He has given to us.

So what are some ways that I can do that? I'm glad you asked. Stuart Scott gives three ways that you can get to know your wife: observe her, ask her questions, and experience her world.

You observe your wife by looking, listening, and learning. Just take some time and observe her in different situations. Remember how you used to observe her from afar before you were dating. Observe her again, only this time it will be different because you are not after the chase, but after the gold of knowing your wife.

Asking her questions is not like 20 questions, or the inquisition. You don't sit down with a list of questions and say, "OK, question #1, what is your favorite color? Question #2, what is your favorite food?" That is now what this is all about. Lou Priolo has two helpful lists of questions that will help you get to know and understand your wife. He also has an entire appendix dedicated to guidelines for asking questions of your wife. He suggests that you start by asking her questions about you such as: If you could change three things about me that would make me more Christ-like, what would you change? Then he suggests asking her questions about her such as your home, her friends, her family, her aspirations in life. Again, the better you are at asking questions, listening, and probing for more information, the better you will know your wife.

Stuart Scott makes the point that even though you may initially think that this kind of thing is a big waste of time, this is precious time that is well spent as you seek to please the Lord by knowing your wife. Many wives complain that their husbands don't talk with them, unless they want something.

The last area is experiencing her world. As time allows, you should do all you can to "walk a mile in her shoes". I once saw a Dr. Phil show where he had the husband be the mother for a week-end while the wife went to a glamour place to indulge herself, courtesy of the Dr. Phil show. The outcome was a husband who could now relate to his wife in a way that was meaningful. I'm not advocating that, necessarily, but we should be doing what she does so you have her perspective on life.

But remember, when you take the time to know and understand your wife, you better use that information well in your living with her. Not only does God know your heart, but your wife will more sensitive to you. She reasons in her heart that you have no excuse for not being considerate of her. You understand her, now.

## Honoring Your Wife

Peter told us that we also must honor our wives. Your wife doesn't know what is in your heart. But she will know what she means to you by your words and actions toward her. Do you tell her what she means to you? Do you tell her how thankful you are to God for her? Do you hold her hand in public? Do you prefer her to others? Do you open and hold doors for her? Do you belittle her in public? Do you normally speak to her in a deroga-

tory way? Are you sarcastic most of the time? Is everything a joke to you? Do you treat her as your servant? Do you focus on her character and her love for the Lord more than on her shortcomings? Do you serve her? Do you talk her up to the children?

These are the kinds of things that show you honor your wife. Granted, these can be done with a heart that is not sincere. But remember what Peter told you – your prayers will be hindered if you are not in a God-honoring relationship with your wife.

## Loving Your Wife

Even though Peter did not specifically mention loving your wife in 1 Peter 3, it is implied. Love for your wife will be the natural outworking of understanding her and honoring her.

Lou Priolo devotes 2 chapters to loving your wife as well as an appendix that lists 108 ways that you can show love to your wife. Stuart Scott devotes an entire chapter to this topic. Both men take their cues from Ephesians 5 about the husband loving his wife as Christ loved the church. Lou Priolo defines love this way:

*Love is giving others what they need without having some temporal reward as the primary motive. (page 90)*

Stuart Scott defines love like this:

*A selfless and enduring commitment of the will to care about and benefit another person by righteous, truthful, and compassionate thoughts, words and actions. (page 106)*

Stuart goes on to say that there are hindrances to love. You can love with wrong motives. You are doing what you do for your own benefit. Pride is a hindrance to love because it focuses on you, not your wife. The fear of how your wife will respond is a hindrance to Biblical love. You are more concerned about her getting mad at you than you are about loving her enough to tell her the truth. And bitterness shows its ugly head when a husband is always finding fault with his wife. Love believes the best about another, including his wife.

What are some of the ways that Lou has listed for you to show your wife that you love her: telling her frequently that you love her. The old joke that you told her at the altar when you were getting married that you loved her and that you would let her know if it changes just doesn't get it. Writing notes and love letters to her. Calling her during the day for no particular reason except that you miss her and would rather be there with her. Admitting when you're wrong and seeking forgiveness. Noticing her appearance and complimenting her before she asks you. Reminiscing with her about the early days. Giving her your undivided attention when she wants to talk to you. There are 108 listed in Lou's appendix, so you shouldn't run out in a lifetime. But don't take a lifetime to begin!

## Being a God-honoring Sustainer

I think that I can hear some of you right now. "You know Greg, this all sounds nice and right and I know that I should do it all. But you don't understand. I cannot possibly do all of

these things. I am so overwhelmed right now I can't see straight. I want to read my Bible. I want to pray more. I want to understand my wife, honor her, and love her. But ..."

Let me tell you – I hear your pain. And we still have 3 more Sundays of this after tonight including a 2-day retreat! You ain't seen nothin' yet!

But let me encourage you. God will sustain you. He will give you the ability to work for His glory. He doesn't expect you to make 100 changes overnight. He isn't expecting you to be a perfect leader at home by next Sunday. We are all a work in progress. But we must be at work!

May I give you some suggestions? Start out with one change that you are going to do daily. Let me suggest that you begin to read and meditate on Scripture. Choose your time when you are going to do it; choose the place where you will do it; and choose where you are going to start in the Scriptures. Then begin. Share your desire and resolve with your wife. Ask for her help. Ask her to pray for you. Ask her to encourage you when you are loosing desire or when life is busy and hectic. Share your insights from the Scriptures with your wife regularly.

And then one more change. Ask your wife if you can pray together once each week. Agree on when you will do this and where. Ask her to help to facilitate it. And then choose a Psalm and pray with her. I'm only suggesting that you start with once a week. This isn't a major commitment for right now. But I guarantee that once you develop the habit of taking this time with her, you will desire it more and more. And it will become easier. You will also find that your daily time with the Lord in His Word will become sweeter and more desirous than the TV or the newspaper as your meditation helps you to see your entire world from the perspective of Scripture . You will be loving Him more and more and wanting to bring Him more and more glory. You will be wanting to know more and understand more. It will bring a closeness to God that you have probably never had before.

As you gain success with these little changes, then you will find that making other changes will be less difficult. You will be surprised at how much you can change as you work at it for the glory of God.

And one word to you wives: please do not discourage your husbands as they begin their new journey. I remember a couple that I was counseling. I asked them to pray once in the coming week as part of their homework. The next week when they came in, I asked the husband if they had prayed once that week. He answered yes, but he would never do it again. When I questioned him he told me that his wife said he didn't know how to pray right. Wives, don't discourage your husbands. Give them all the encouragement that you can, even if he can't pray right, whatever that means!

If you haven't figured it out by now, Russ mentioned this morning about heart attitudes that were needed in order to be successful in this school of leadership. They are necessary in all areas of life, including this area of our homes. It is not possible to understand, honor, and love your wife without humility, kind-heartedness, sympathy, and desiring to live in harmony with others. Pride, selfishness, and self-centeredness are not compatible with what God requires of husbands who are in the school of leadership. So ask God to help you with the attitudes of your heart so that you can please him with your life. Work hard at being a good student in leadership at home.

I have not gone into some other areas of leadership in the home. I plan on covering them in the evening message in two weeks. This was enough for one message.

What do you need to take away from our time together tonight?

## Conclusion

If you are struggling with the intake of God's Word and prayer, then you need to evaluate the methods that you are using.

The regular intake of God's Word by reading and meditating needs to become a vital part of your daily routine of life.

Your prayer times will become more meaningful and delightful as you begin to use other methods of praying.

Understanding, honoring, and loving your wife, who is your sister in Christ, must become a normal response of your heart toward her, and for God's glory.

Begin with a couple of changes and add others when those become habitual.

Let me leave you with an illustration that might help you understand one of the important issues from today.

I've heard it said by some men, that they wished their wives came with an owner's manual, as if this was some kind of explanation for their not understanding how their wives operated. If nothing else, I hope that you have seen by both this morning's and this evening's messages that we hold the owner's manual in our hands. The Creator and Designer of all of creation has told us everything we need in order to live lives that are pleasing to Him and that are pleasing to others.

This owner's manual is not optional. It is not like those Christmas presents that we think we can assemble without reading the instructions. Oh, we act as if we can get through this life without giving the owner's manual and the instructions very little attention. But, it is impossible to do so. We must know it in all of its beauty and wisdom. It's not like other owner's manuals, in that it does not contain any errors, and it has all that we need to live life and to live godly in this present world.

Someone said that the Word did not become sweet and precious to them until they were in the midst of trials. It was at that time that the light became bright and they couldn't ignore it anymore. It doesn't have to be that way. We don't have to wait until trials come.

Life is complex. People are complex. This world is complex. But the complexity is made simple with the owner's manual. Let's give ourselves during this coming year to the intake of the owner's manual and to the application of it to the operation of all of life – for the glory of God!

Let us pray and help each other as we seek to be good students in God's school of leadership.

## References / Resources

Howard, Evan B. *Praying the Scriptures: A Field Guide for Your Spiritual Journey*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999.

Priolo, Lou. *The Complete Husband: A Practical Guide to Biblical Husbanding*. Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 1999.

Scott, Stuart. *The Exemplary Husband: A Biblical Perspective*. Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 2000.

Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991.

Whitney, Donald S. *Simplify Your Spiritual Life: Spiritual Disciplines for the Overwhelmed*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2003.