

Becoming a Bible-Reading Leader

Detailed Outline Part 1 of 3

Welcome to a series that is very dear to my heart. I call this series “Becoming a consistent, persistent Bible-reading leader.”

I. Holy Scripture and the Elders’ Qualification for Eldership

Writing to Titus, Paul makes these very important statements:

“This is why I left you in Crete so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. . . . 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 1:5, 9)

1. To qualify as an elder, a person must “hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught.”

A biblical eldership is an eldership made up of people who know the Bible, the Scriptures. They have to cling tenaciously to the Word as taught by the apostles in order to do two things: “to instruct in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

2. This starts with reading the whole of Scripture.

The Bible is a divine book. J.I. Packer says, *“The Bible is God preaching to us.”* It is God’s voice. God’s sword. God’s hammer. God’s light. God’s food. It’s the monarch of books. It’s the best-selling book in the world. It’s a divine Book written by the Holy Spirit. God is the author of the Bible. That’s why we need to absorb it and spend our entire life studying this Book.

If we are to understand this great Book, we have to devote ourselves to it. We have to make sacrifices. If we want our church to be mature, healthy, and growing, then the elders need to know the Book, love the Book, and be excited about the Book. *Weak elders produce weak churches.* Weak, ignorant elders produce biblically ignorant churches.

II. Holy Scripture and the Elder’s Personal Growth

Our Lord said in John 17:17: *“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”*

We are all facing a tsunami of secularism and godlessness. It’s washing over the whole Western world. How can we counteract this? We have to feed our minds on truth and on the purity of God’s Word to make us a holy people and to mature in Christlikeness. We must absorb the Word into our minds and drink deeply of truth and of the sanctifying words of God.

Two major points about the Scriptures:

1. Scripture reveals Christ! We know nothing of Christ outside the Bible.

In the words of Jesus: *“And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, he explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures”* (Luke 24:27; NASB). If we’re to know Christ, to mature into Christlikeness, to walk with Christ, we must learn of Christ through the Scriptures.

2. Scripture transforms us into Christlikeness.

a) It does this by the new birth.

“For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.” (1 Peter 1:23; NASB)

Martin Luther said, *“No book teaches anything concerning eternal life except this one.”*

b) It nourishes the new life in Christ.

Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation. (1 Peter 2:2; NASB)

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17; ESV)

Note: God breathed-out Scripture is *“profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”* So, if you don’t know the Scriptures, you’re not competent to lead God’s people. You are not equipped for every good work.

John Stott writes, *“Do we hope either in our lives or in our teaching ministry to overcome error and grow in truth, to overcome evil and grow in holiness? Then, it is to the Scripture that we must turn. For Scripture is profitable for these things.”*

In his farewell to the Ephesian elders, Paul says, *“And now, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace which is able to build you up”* (Acts 20:32). Paul is leaving. But God will be with the elders, and the Word of God will be with them to build them up. The Word cannot build them up if they do not know the Word of his grace.

Acts 20:28: *“Pay careful attention to yourselves.”*

1 Timothy 4:16: *“Pay careful attention to yourself.”*

You have to be the kind of leader who knows how to care for your own spiritual life. How do you do that? The first fundamental way is consistent, persistent reading of the whole of the Scriptures.

Acts 20:27: *“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”* What is the whole counsel of God? It is Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22; it is the storyline of the Bible, the grand story of redemption. To teach others “the whole counsel of God” you need to read and know the whole of the Bible, the whole story, and know it well. Then you can teach and guide others with the Bible.

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III. Holy Scripture and the Elders' Work

The means by which we shepherd God's flock is the Scriptures, the Word of God. By means of the Word of God we protect, feed, lead, and care for God's people. God's Word is the guidebook to shepherding, the food for feeding the flock, the path for leading the sheep, and the balm for healing the sick.

1. Protect the flock by the Word of God.

Only by the Word of God can we even know what is true or false, or spot false teachers. So, it is by means of the Word of God that we protect the church and the gospel.

2. Feed the people the Word of God.

It is the duty of the elders to see that God's flock is fed on the Word of God and given "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

3. Lead God's people by the Word of God.

It is the duty of the elders to see that God's flock is led in the way of truth and the will of God. If we're going to lead God's flock properly, we need to be guided by God's Word, or we'll take the people in the wrong direction, which happens so easily.

4. Care for the flock by the Word of God.

There are many practical questions to be answered, people to be counseled, families to be guided, sick people to be comforted, and endless problems to solve. All this is to be done by means of opening the Word of God to guide, comfort, and encourage the people.

IV. Practical Helps for Reading Holy Scripture

I now want to deal practically with how we can become consistent, persistent Bible-reading leaders.

1. Develop a plan for regular, disciplined Bible reading and study.

If you have never read the whole of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, that's what you should do. Do it as quickly as fast as you can, like reading a novel; get through the whole book.

If you have read the whole Bible through, consider this plan. (1) Read the Old Testament over a two- or three- year period. For example, the first year, read the Pentateuch. (2) Read two gospels a

year, e.g., Matthew and John the first year. (3) Read Acts and Revelation every year. (4) Read through the letters of Paul, John, Peter, James, and Hebrews twice a year.

2. Create a place and a time.

a) Have a regular place to read and study.

It is best to have a desk or table where you keep your Bible, notes, paper, pens, and Bible helps. This will help you to develop a consistent Bible reading habit.

b) Have a quiet place to read and study.

I cannot express enough the importance of being alone with God and learning quietness. We live with noise pollution all day. Thus, when you're reading the Word of God, you want it quiet, because this is, as J. I. Packer says, "God preaching to us." He speaks to us through his Word, so we need to be quiet and meditate on it.

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IV. Practical Helps for Reading Holy Scripture (cont.)

2. Create a place and a time.

C. Establish a regular time for your Bible reading.

We live in a very busy world today, so we need to fight back and push back and take control of our time. The time is there, we just have to use it properly.

How often should we read the Scriptures?

John Blanchard writes:

"Surely, we only have to be realistic and honest with ourselves to know how regularly we need to turn to the Bible. How often do we face problems, temptations, pressures? Everyday. Then how often do we need instruction, guidance and greater encouragement? Everyday. To catch all these felt needs up into an even greater issue, how often do we need to see God's face, hear His voice, feel His touch, know His power? The answer to all these questions is the same; every day. So, we should strive to every day read the Word of God, even if it's for a short time."

Now, I'm realistic about life and I know you will not read every day, but let's be as consistent and persistent as we can.

Now some of you are very, very busy—I know that—so you need to set aside a night or a Saturday morning or a Sunday evening that you have special time with the Lord and you get caught up on these things.

I really advise young men to have one night minimum that you are home, and after you're done with the family you have several hours with the Lord, catching up on your Bible reading. Doing your Bible study, doing reading that you need to do.

3. Use a good, readable Bible and become familiar with it.

It's very important that you have a good Bible. Now, most of you are serious Bible student because you are leaders in the church. You need an essentially literal Bible.

I've seen people with Bibles that the print is so small, you would not want to read it. It hinders you from reading. It should be a good size print, as much white space as you can get so that your Bible's comfortable to you. It becomes familiar to you, and you'll love to open it. I've seen Bibles that I would never read in a million years. You practically have to have a magnifying glass to read the thing, and that's why people don't read it. And then now this is a personal thing, I like to mark my Bible, and I like to cross-reference all the time. You may not want to write on your Bible; but I

like to write in my Bible, and to make it very, very comfortable, and know where things are and find things, so that's often what I'm trying to do with my Bible.

You don't want it to be a foreign book.

4. Read-meditate on the Bible.

Oh, this is a very important point. It's something that I enjoyed most thoroughly. It's really one of my favorite things to do in the day, to read slow meditation on the Word.

Thomas Watson:

"The reason we come away so cold from reading the Word is because we do not warm ourselves on the fire of meditation."

"The tree of your spiritual life thrives best with meditation because it helps you absorb the water of God's Word."

You need to read through the whole Bible, but you also need to learn careful, quiet meditation on the Bible.

Spurgeon:

"You are retired to your private devotions. You've opened the Bible and you begin to read. It is always better to read a little and digest it as meditation than it is to read much then think you have done a good thing by merely reading the letter of the word. For you might as well read the alphabet backwards and forwards as read a chapter of the scripture unless you meditate on it and seek to comprehend its meaning. The business of the believer with his Bible open is to pray, 'Lord, give me the meaning and the spirit of your word or it lies open before me. Apply your word with power to my soul threatening and promise, doctrine or precept, whatever it may be lead me into the soul and marrow of your word.'"

Spurgeon:

"In your private devotions strive after vital godliness, real soul work, the life giving operation of the Spirit of God in your hearts."

5. Use Bible reading projects.

Example: Pick a subject, or maybe a couple subjects, and build your own topical Bible concordance. When I wrote the book *Leading with Love*, this is what I did. I took several years of reading through the Scriptures, and I typed up every verse on love, all from the New Testament; and then I start to put them in categories, and I began to get a mental picture of the whole of Scripture on this topic.

6. Listen to the Bible.

A lot of people do not like to read. They're not good readers. Reading is difficult for them and so listening to the Bible read to you is a good way to read the Bible.

7. Have someone hold you accountable for your Bible reading.

I read about an article about dieting. In it, a scientist was quoted saying, "Send the message to yourself by your computer every day to remind yourself of what you want to do." This is because you forget. The same goes for reading the Bible. Send a message to yourself through your computer or through a friend or spouse.

8. Pray the Bible.

Use your Bible to improve your prayer life. You can pray to God as you read the words of Scripture. You can pray the statements of Scripture back to God. You can also add new words and expressions to your prayers by adopting the words of Scripture.

Sometimes in our prayers we run out of words and it sounds like we just repeat the same old words, but by reading the scripture and bringing the scripture into your prayers it creates new terms and prayers.

You can memorize the Scriptures that impact you. Some people memorize whole books of the Bible so that they have the Scripture in their minds at all times.

The psalmist said, **I've stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.** (Ps. 119:11)

9. Be doers of the Word and not just readers of the Word.

Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourself. If anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror, for he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he is like. (James 1:22-24)

It's not just a matter of reading and knowledge and learning, it is doing, it is living it, it's putting into shoe leather. It is thinking, talking, speaking as the scripture teach us. It's obedience to the word of God, that's what he's saying.

So let us be, as the Christian leaders, persistent, consistent Bible readers; but even more importantly, let us be doers of the Word, practitioners, not just theoreticians.