

Leaders for Life

Rev. Roger L. Skinner
Huntington University Commencement Address
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Mr. President, members of the Board, distinguished members of the faculty, graduates, parents, friends, and students. It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be with you today, and to be a part of this graduation ceremony for the class of 2007 from Huntington University.

I would like to talk with you today about being a leader, and being a leader for life. Now you may not automatically think of yourself in those terms, and you may say 'that's not me'. I understand that, and in fact I recently read a story about a young missionary in Africa that expressed those same kinds of feelings. This young man wrote these words, "a couple of weeks ago I'm in Zambia bouncing along in a jeep with a Zambian pastor. We are heading out into the middle of nowhere to train rural pastors on how to study the Bible and prepare sermons. Trails get progressively worse until we get to a village and stop at a mud-walled church. It's like going back to 17th century North America; there is no electricity or running water, just mud huts, some farming and a tribal culture. I'm a big hit with the younger kids because I'm the first white person some of them have ever seen. The pastors in rural Zambia are starving, but not for food. They are starving for biblical training. Even though they are intelligent, they have never had the opportunity to get the spiritual training they need to take care of their churches. They are already thanking me for coming, and I haven't even said a word yet. As we walk around, a thought goes through my head, 'what's a schmuck like me doing, training Zambian pastors – God must be desperate'."

Well, that young missionary schmuck has all the resources to be a leader for life, just like you do. You are educated, you have an understanding of the world in which you live, and you know something about many subjects such as medicine, politics, geography, agriculture, finances, music, and religion. You have an amazing background upon which to draw to be a leader, whether in the United States or somewhere around the world.

As a young missionary I soon discovered that my idea of leadership was not quite accurate. I learned that being a leader did not necessarily require a title, such as president or vice-president, or an office with a desk and a window. But being a leader many times meant being courageous in the face of persecution and suffering. Of pursuing goals far beyond one's reach, and having a faith in God that was contagious. These things I learned from some of the humblest Ecuadorian pastors with whom I had the privilege to work.

Learning about leadership is a life long endeavor and involves many topics. However, I would like to share four practical principles that I believe can be helpful as you become a leader. These principles I would like to alliterate with the following letters D, C, D, and D.

1. **Discover your passion** – The first principle is 'D'

- What are you passionate about?
- You have studied at Huntington University
- You have concentrated on at least one major subject
- And you may think that that area is your passion, and only time will tell whether it is or not
- But many a graduate has found that what they majored in did not excite them once they got into the business world
- Did that mean that their education was in vain and wasted?
- Not at all
- What they received gave them a solid base upon which to build
- For example, I majored in Philosophy
- But I found my passion was sharing the reality of the one true living God with people who had never heard about Him, or who didn't understand
- I loved to open the Bible to tell someone about Jesus, and then watch the Holy Spirit open up their minds to the truth / sometimes it might be in a small hut or in an elegant home
- So, as you leave Huntington, don't get stuck in a routine that wears you down and takes away your energy
- Ask God to help you discover your passion, and then use it to help develop your leadership abilities

2. **Continue to learn** – The second principle is 'C'

- Your education and training has given you a base upon which to build, but don't stop there
- Let me tell you what I usually would tell every new missionary that came to Ecuador
 - Keep your eyes open
 - Observe, watch, and learn from others
 - Read about the country and learn its history
 - Learn how they do things, how they communicate, and how they think
 - What are the rules they live by every day
- As a new missionary I soon learned that there were two important rules about driving in Guayaquil, Ecuador
 - #1 - The streets running parallel to the river had the right of way
 - What did I need to find out? Where was the river!
 - #2 - A hand signal from a car or truck meant "here I come"
- Ideas, customs, and language are different in every culture
- And you will soon learn that everything has its culture
- Whether it's a hospital, a bank, a law office, or a school
- Continue to learn, and do your best to adapt your leadership skills to the culture in which you find yourself

3. Don't take life for granted – The third principle is 'D'

- You cannot predict or control what will happen to you in the next 30 hours or 30 days
- Your university degree does not make you invincible
- Nor does your diploma guarantee you a life of wealth and ease
- Accidents, illnesses, or unexpected tragedies may come your way at any time
- So, live each day to the fullest
- "This is the day the Lord has made, I will rejoice and be glad in it" is the advice we read in Psalms
- And it doesn't matter what your circumstances are
- Live each day with purpose, seek to do your best
- Ask God to help you make wise decisions and give you common sense
- Be grateful and thankful for what you have
- Recently I saw some staggering world statistics
- Over 2 billion people will make less than \$1 today, and another 2 billion

will make less than \$4 today

- You are privileged, so share what you have with love and mercy to those who have so little
- Let kindness and compassion be the pillars of your life and leadership

4. Do the next thing – The fourth principle is ‘D’

- I can’t begin to tell you how many times this principle has touched my life and the life of my family
- You will experience difficult times, frustrations, and misunderstandings
- And at those times remember that God is near, and that the problem you face may have come as a surprise to you, but it didn’t to Him
- Let me tell you a story: A number of years ago when we were starting a new church in Ecuador, the Lord began to bless, and the church began to grow. We needed more space so we agreed to rent a nearby store. We had made all the arrangements and went with money in hand to seal the deal. When we arrived, however, the owner told us that he had just rented it to somebody else. Well, that sure caught us by surprise, but didn’t catch God by surprise. As I looked at my fellow missionary we said, “Praise the Lord, God has something better for us.” And then we did the next thing. You know what that was? We took the money back to the bank. [Well, a few months later we saw God’s great provision as He led us to a piece of property that was many times larger than the small store we had tried to rent]
- You see, no matter the situation, God's promise is always true, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'
- Trust Him, do the next thing in the face of trials and difficulties, and others will gain confidence in you as a leader

These four simple principles of **Discover Your Passion, Continue to Learn, Don’t Take Like For Granted, and Do The Next Thing** can serve you in many ways to help you become a leader for life.

But principles alone are not enough. So I want to share one final thought with you and it is about God our Heavenly Father and Creator. As high as the heavens are above the earth so high are His ways and thoughts above ours. And yet, He wants us to understand who He is, what He is like, and He wants us to

have a personal relationship with Him. And so to help us, He reveals Himself to us in at least two ways, through His words and through His deeds. When I think of His Words, I think primarily of the Bible, which speaks to our mind, our reason, and our heart. And when I think of His deeds I think of those things that He does which allows us to see His power and His presence in action.

As you seek God and draw near to Him, you will find that He will help you in your life and leadership in ways that you never dreamed possible. As you incorporate valuable leadership principles into your life, and learn to trust in Him, you will discover that He is the one who will give you courage, wisdom, and discernment. He is the one who will help you find solutions to difficult and sometimes impossible problems. And He is the one who will make you not just a leader, but a leader for life.

Graduating class of 2007, my final words to you are these:

“May the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, [that great shepherd of the sheep]...equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in [you] what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”¹

¹ Hebrews 13:20-21, KJV & NIV