

Lessons on Life and Leadership

Lesson 1...Know Yourself

**Do everything you can to discover your gifts and abilities.
Know also what you do not do well.**

In my younger years I wanted to be able to do everything—and to do everything well. I was fearful of failure or of looking bad. I kept meeting people of incredible ability or spirituality, and I envied them. I wanted to speak like LeRoy Eims, study the Bible like Warren Myers or Bob Boardman, know language like my wife Mary, have the professional insights of my colleagues Roger and Ed in the field of astrodynamics. I wanted to sing well, play sports well, be an ideal husband and father. Whatever there was to be or do, I wanted to excel in it.

But soon I began to realize that I was quite average in most areas, and it humbled me. In fact, I had to admit I was really not at all gifted in some skills. I wanted to be “intellectual”, to be respected for my analytical thinking and admired for what I could accomplish. Yes, this was probably not a godly attitude, but it was from an honest heart. Perhaps it is a phase most of us go through as we grow. Whether it was a mixture of pride, ego and ambition I do not know. ***To me it was a normal desire to be something for God—and to accomplish something in my life.***

When I first came to teach astronautics at the Air Force Academy, our Dean of Faculty said to the new instructors, “Remember, just because you are an expert at one thing doesn’t make you an expert on everything.” That was a timely caution. I have come to realize that while I am interested in history, economics and many other disciplines, I am not well educated in them. I can continue to read and learn in a given field, but that will not make me an expert. The knowledge explosion of the late twentieth century means that no one can be a specialist in more than one or two areas!

But I was also encouraged to find I could do some things well. Others I could do fairly well, with hard work to make up for my lack of skill. I could teach. I could be analytical, but not coldly so. I was more emotional and less objective than I would like to admit.

No one but Jesus has ever done everything well. *People were overwhelmed with amazement. He has done everything well,” they said....* Mark 7:37. You will always see in others better abilities than you have or believe you have, and it can tempt you to envy. But when you know yourself you will be more content with the way God made you and with what secular people would call “your lot in life.” Looking realistically at myself through the eyes of the Word, experience and my closest friends, I find I am far more content and at peace with myself and how God made me.

A verse that has guided me in this process is Romans 12:3 NLT: *As God’s messenger I give each of you God’s warning: Be honest in your estimate of yourselves, measuring your value by how much faith God has given you.* God wants us to know ourselves and to know that whatever gifts and abilities we have are from Him.

This does not mean we should refuse to do tasks for which we are not particularly gifted. We often must act outside our gifting just because a task needs to be accomplished. It does mean I should not make such tasks my main focus. I may need to fix a bicycle for my children whether I am good at it or not. Or I may need to lead or organize activities even if my gift is serving, not leadership. We do what we must, but when we have options, we should work with what we do well.

*Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part;
Then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.* I Corinthians 13:12