

# Leadership & Submission

– Sunday School Notes –

## Review of previous week

During the last four weeks we have studied one type of men who does lead and one type of women, who does not really follow. In both cases it was crucial to find out how these men and women view themselves, because that was the main cause for the problem. The withdrawn father and husband often struggles with a lack of confidence that makes him unable to fill his role as responsible leader of the family. The “doormat” type of woman often has a feeling of inferiority which makes her submit not out of free choice but almost against her will. For both the solution begins with a more realistic view of themselves, that is understanding how God sees them, because this truth will eventually set them free from their misleading feelings. We also talked about healthy habits that will lead to a change. If you missed that, I recommend reading the chapters 5 and 9 of the book again, or to look up my notes on my web page. (<http://www.cs.cornell.edu/home/kreitz/>)

## 7 The Workaholic

Today, we want to talk about a different type of man, who is very active in the outside world but far from being an active leader of his family. And you may not be surprised to find that this type of man also has a problem with his self-image and his value system. Actually, one might say that a wrong values or a false self-image are always the cause for absence of leadership or submission. Men and women who see themselves as God sees them, have accepted their role in the family and know how to fill them out.

So our topic today is the *workaholic*, the man who values work so high that gives it priority over almost everything else. Yes, women can be workaholics too, but there are many more men who fall into that trap than women. To a certain extent, a man is designed that way. He is the “doer”, the one who has to go to the outside world and provide for the family. He is the ones who is supposed to work hard (recall **Genesis 3:17**) to bring in the support for wife and children. But the workaholic is much more. He is so busy that he almost never has time for anything else. He uses all his strength to do a good job. And he sees that as his way of serving his family. But he hardly has any time for his family. He doesn't have time to get in touch with his or somebody else's feelings. So his wife often gets the impression that she is unimportant for his life – or even worse – that he doesn't love her. Although this is very likely not the case, all his actions seem to point in this direction.

## 7.1 Why do men work?

So the crucial question for us is: what is the difference between a man who needs to work hard to support his family and a workaholic? Why do some men have a tendency to work much more than necessary? To find out, let us ask ourselves the question: *why do men work at all?* And let us try to separate these reasons into uplifting reasons, and reasons that rather press men down. ACTIVE PHASE!!

### 1. Uplifting reasons to work

- The bible commands us (**Proverbs 10:4**,.....)
- We work to provide for our family
- .. to express who we are *(I am what I do)*
- .. to have a purpose for living
- .. to leave our mark on humanity
- .. to be part of a greater purpose
- .. to achieve social improvement (higher living standards)
- Working itself is satisfying

### 2. Other reasons for work

- Work as indirect expression of our love
- Work is a hiding place for our feelings
  - emotions that we cannot express
  - fear of failure
  - feeling of inadequacy as man
  - frustrations
- Work is an excuse for not having to participate in other activities

The reasons in the first category are perfectly good reasons for us to go to work. In fact, when work becomes satisfying, then a man will return home from work happy and balanced. Of course, he may need a few minutes to relax and adjust and there will also be strenuous days at work, but in general he will have plenty of energy left for his family.

Not so the workaholic. His approach to work is clearly not a healthy one anymore because it lacks balance. What he finds at work is entirely different and often belongs the second category. Work gives him a chance to avoid dealing with his inner problems. Most workaholics are not even aware of these, but they drive them nonetheless.

So, the question is: *why is this so? Why do some men hide behind their work?*

We will discuss a few typical reasons for that and possible solutions that can help an overworking man to get back to a normal life. If you can spice what I am saying with examples or own experiences, please do so. It may open the eyes of some of us who are in danger of becoming a workaholic, if they hear about similar situations. Actually, I noticed that I am in danger myself, so working on this lecture was quite revealing – including the fact that I spent more than 8 hours to prepare it.

## 7.2 A sense of inferiority

One major reason for a man to overwork is a feeling of inferiority. Something in his past, maybe during his childhood, has left in him the impression that he is not as good as other people in what he does. So he tries to prove his worth to himself by reaching for higher standards – standards so high that he can never achieve them within the usual amount of time. He believes that the *quality* of his work is not good enough in comparison with others, so he tries to compensate that with higher *quantity* – more work, which shall eventually enable him to keep up with others. If he works more than others, the sum of all his accomplishments might be big enough.

This, of course, does not work, because no matter how much you do, you cannot really replace quality by quantity. We are rarely rewarded for the amount of time we put into something but mostly for the results. **1. Corinthians 3:13** tells us:

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

So the attempt to work more in order to feel as a success is doomed to fail. His standards are so harsh that he can never really achieve them. He will never be satisfied with his achievements, so he will never dare to go away from work.

This situation is very typical in university environments and affects students, researchers and professors quite often. I have to admit that I have to be very careful not to fall into that trap because research gives you so many questions that you want to see answered and there seems to be never enough time to solve them.

The problem here is, however, not the amount of work that *needs* to be done, but what we *believe* how much we must be able to achieve. The reason is that men often define themselves by what they accomplish at work. As long as this is the central basis for our self-esteem, we will focus too much on the work that we have to do and too little on the real quality of life.

So the answer to this problem is to get a better grasp for reality. What is it that really counts in life? Is our work the center of our life or just the means for having a good life? Do our family duties keep us from working, or does our work keep us from our family duties? Do we feel acceptable only when we're good at work or are there other things in life that make us feel valuable? If we think about it, we may realize that we probably associate too much value with our work.

If overworking is caused by a feeling of insufficiency, then the solution is very similar to what we discussed in the previous lessons. We have to **learn to base our convictions on truth** – on God's truth, because this is the truth that will set us free. And what does God say about us?

He considers us valuable, he loves us, and he accepts us *as we are*. And this does not only have to do with our sins, but also with our accomplishments. God trusts us enough to give us a very important and valuable task – to be witnesses for him with

our life. If he thinks, we're sufficient for that, we should not set our standards higher. If we look at God's word from this perspective, then we will find out that we don't have to work as hard and as long as we do.

Yes, God expects us not to be lazy in what we are doing. But that doesn't mean we have to be able to achieve the same as others. We just have to do a job as good as we can do it. There may be others who accomplish much more than we do – but that doesn't make us insufficient.

Remember the parable of the talents in **Matthew 25:14–30**? God has give us different talents and expects us to use them. But what did he say to the servant who earned just another two talents? Did he say *“you lazy and wicked servant – why didn't you bring me five more talents as the other one did?”*

No, he said *“Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter into the joy of your lord.”*. If God sees it that way, can't we do so as well?

A wife who realizes that her husband overworks because he feels insufficient can do a lot to help him. If he feels accepted when he comes home, he will have it easier to realize that the biblical truth is reality even for him.

### 7.3 Excessively high standards

Another common reason for men to become workaholics are overly high standards. While this seems to be very similar to the character we just discussed, the motivation behind these high standards is different and reveals the “real workaholic”. His motto is that of the perfectionist: “I must be able to do everything and this at the highest level of quality”. He always needs to show that he is better than others and that he can achieve much more than the average. So his work has become a real obsession. He attempts to accomplish what to most humans is simply infeasible.

Such a man has a full job, takes courses at the university to get a higher degree, exercises constantly to keep in shape, teaches sunday school, has a few voluntary offices – all at the same time – and .... he almost forgot ... a family.

Surprisingly he succeeds in many of the things he attempts but the success just drives him to higher, more impossible tasks. Besides, his achievements come at a high cost, because he is usually worn out from the many things he tries to do. Because he tries to be perfect in everything, he loses what is most valuable to him – his wife and his children. For him, all his toil is an expression of love, but in reality he distances himself more and more from his family.

A hopeless case?

No, but a difficult one, because his wife can hardly reach him once he has come so far. He **must learn to let go**, and accept imperfection in his own life. God loves him even if he is not perfect and so do his wife and children. His peers will respect him even if he can *not* do everything perfectly. He must learn to **say no** – to himself and

to others. And then he will find out that happiness and fulfillment do not depend on achievements but much more on a balanced life.

#### 7.4 Wrong values ('making it' / 'being somebody')

This brings me to another aspect: workaholics often have a completely wrong value system. Their world is centered around success, promotions, status symbols they can buy – that is, the fruits of their work that are visible to co-workers and other people. 'Others must recognize me', is their motto, and they seek attention by what they accomplish.

There is nothing wrong in getting some positive attention. We all need that from time to time. The only question is: do we *depend* on this? What is the basis for our standard of achievement? Is it based on the love of God, or do we – even as Christians – depend on the constantly changing values of the world around us?

The workaholic whose world is obsessed with the idea of "making it" or "being somebody" is an easy prey for commercials. The slogan "You deserve it" is made for him, because it immediately stirs the thought "If I don't have it, am I not good enough", and that is exactly what shall trap him.

A man who runs after these things, must learn to **set his his priorities straight**. In **Matthew 16:26** Jesus tells us

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

So, what do you gain by trying to get the recognition of others by what you accomplish or by what you can afford? You will be constantly under stress and cannot even enjoy what you achieved, because you always have to achieve more. And you will miss, what is truly valuable in life – *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness and self control* (**Galatians 5:22/23**). Jesus gives us a very easy recipe for a fulfilled life in **Matthew 6:33**

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

You have to learn that nothing else really counts. That is not easy if you got used to a different value system. But you will find that your life will have an entirely new quality if you really bibletry it out.

#### 7.5 The wrong focus (long-term plans)

Another reason for overworking that is quite related to the above one is that men often focus only on the big picture, the long-term plan, and forget about the details of the everyday life that they have to live until they reach their goal. Some men work

like crazy to be able to provide a safe nest for the family. They only look at that one goal that is so far in the future – to be rich enough to be able to start living.

If they really think about it – that is what they want: have a life in harmony with their family. But for some reason they think they cannot afford it now – and what is so bad about working terribly hard for a few years if that enables you to have a good life afterwards?

Well, what is God's answer to that?

Look at **Luke 12:16–20**, the parable of the rich fool. Here you see a man who had it all planned out. He prepares a lot of provisions for the future thinking:

Then I will say to my soul, Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take life ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, you fool, this night your soul shall be required of you: then whose shall those things be, which you have provided?

You see what the trouble is? It takes terribly long to get to that final goal that you have in mind. And chances are, that you may never reach it. Some men have a heart attack in their late 40's, you may have an accident, or your family may simply give up on you and leave you. What then? You reached you financial security but those for whom you prepared it aren't there anymore.

*Life is a journey, not a destination.* We cannot waste all of today's life to have one in the future. Today is the day where we really live, not tomorrow.

So, again, it is time to set your priorities straight. There is nothing wrong with planning ahead. But the costs must be reasonable.

## 7.6 Avoid confrontation

Finally, and this is a very sad story: some men overwork to *avoid confrontation with their wives*. Men love competition but confrontation they really hate, because for them it is a win/lose situation. And most men have no desire to lose, nor do they want to make their wife a loser. After all, they have to live with her.

But if a man has the impression that his wife disapproves of him for whatever reason, he gets the desire to stay away from home, because home is the place that makes him feel so incompetent as a husband, father, and provider. For him, this is a no-win situation. So – instead of coming home, where he expects confrontation – he puts more and more efforts into the world where he achieves more satisfaction – his work. This man is not a workaholic by nature, he is just trying to escape pain. So his wife can do a lot to change the situation. If he feels accepted when he comes home, he will quickly let go of his overworking, because home is where he wants to be. So, don't complain that he works too much. Instead, let him feel that you value him – and he will be happy to come home much earlier than before.