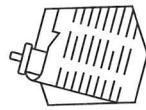


THE UNIT STRUCTURE: LEARNING A CONSISTENT STUDY PROCESS 4



Study the Scriptures

The following passages will help you think through the need to be skillful in the work that God has given you. Let these verses motivate you to be diligent in learning the new skills needed to be effective with this new approach and method.

On the need for skill in leading:

- Proverbs 22:29
- 2 Timothy 2:15

Record your thoughts:



Consult the Scholars

Now we will approach the new skill set needed for this approach and method, as discussed in the introduction. Most of you will not be very proficient in these skills, even those of you who graduated from seminary, since your preparation there probably taught a different skill set.

What exactly is the skill set needed? It appears that there are six primary skills. We will work on the first four skills in this session and the remaining two skills in session five.

Socratic Method Skill Set:

1. Doing Biblical Theology
2. Reading an Article for Relevance

3. Leading Socratic Discussions
4. Thinking Deeply and Integratively
5. Qualitative Assessment
6. Constructing a Life Development Folio/Portfolio

Skill One: Doing Biblical Theology

You will exercise this skill in the “Study the Scriptures” section of each session in each booklet. Many people you are training will be scared to death of the large blank spaces for writing. They have not been taught to think, so it is logical that one of the first problems they face will be how to organize their thoughts on paper. “What thoughts?” they may ask. “If I write things down, it will be apparent to anyone reading them that I don’t know what I’m talking about. And furthermore, I don’t know how to improve my skills.” The following is a little guide to knowing what to write in the “Study the Scriptures” section of every session. This section always asks you to identify the “core teaching.” What is the core teaching and how do you find it?

Concept of the core teaching of a passage:

It is the essential or main teaching of a passage. It is the core idea and other main points that build off of the main idea. That main teaching is in essence what we also mean by the first principles of the faith. They are the foundational teachings and ideas. Each passage has a main idea and probably several parts of the idea are also included.

“How do I find the main idea—this core teaching?”

1. First, look for clues of what the author intends to say. Does he help you by saying things like “I am writing this that...” “Therefore I want you to...” etc.?

To get the main idea, you need to ask three questions?

- What is the author talking about?
- What is he saying about the subject?
- Why is the author saying it?

You can then put the answers to those questions in one short paragraph or one long sentence.

2. Then clarify any parts of the passage that you do not understand in light of the author’s main idea or purpose of the passage.

- Look up any words you do not understand.
- Study the background of any cultural example you do not understand (though usually you will have clues in the passage itself to help you understand the cultural example).

- Go back and read earlier in the Bible concerning any events, people, or previous teaching the passage refers to.
 - Always ask: What is the big idea or teaching? What are the smaller ones?
3. Organize the author’s main ideas or teaching in some way—an outline, a short essay of a couple of paragraphs, or maybe even a diagram or chart.

Remember the big idea or teaching of the author is the big idea of the passage, not your idea of what is most important.

“What do I write in the large blank space?”

Now that you have done the above work, here are the things you will write in the large blank space provided:

- A brief paragraph or long sentence summarizing the author’s main idea that he is trying to get across.
- Any proof from the passage that your statement is accurate.
- An expansion of the main idea using any of the following:
 - An outline showing the main ideas and the smaller ones.
 - A diagram of the main idea and its parts.
 - A chart of the main idea and its parts.

This then is the core teaching and actually the data of the first principles of the faith. First principles of the faith might be the following:

- A command to guide our lives.
- A teaching to guide our lives.
- A principle for how to live life.

This main idea (or chart, diagram, or outline) in the form of a teaching, command, or principle is your biblical theology of the passage. It is your attempt at organizing the author’s ideas that are in the text in a way that you can see them. At the end of each booklet, you will pull together the core teaching of all the passages from the first five sessions. This will be your biblical theology summary of some of the first principles of the faith. After you have gone through all thirteen books of *The First Principles Series*, you will then prepare a twopage summary of the first principles of the faith from all of your little biblical theologies compiled in session six of each booklet.

At this point, you may want to study Series III, Book One, entitled *Handling the Word with Confidence*. The whole booklet is devoted to the method in this section. Advanced material of a similar nature can be found in BILD’s Leadership Series course: *Interpreting the Word I*.

Skill Two: Reading an Article for Relevance

You will exercise this skill in the “Consult the Scholars” section of each session in each booklet. Again, you are faced with what to write in the space. We will first focus on how to read an article and then what to write.

“How do I read the commentary or extended quote from an article or book?”

1. The commentary—just read it to improve your own work.
2. The quote from an article or book—
 - Underline key words, phrases, or sentences with a yellow highlighter so that you can just glance back and remind yourself of the ideas.
 - Write notes in the margin.
 - Consider using the following marking system, placing symbols by the appropriate paragraphs throughout the booklet:

CC = core concepts

? = issues, questions

Q = significant quotes

 = growth/development ideas

“What do I write in the space?”

1. First, record insights from the commentary that you can use to improve your summary of the core teaching from the previous section.
2. For the article, write down any or all of the following:
 - State the main idea.
 - Describe the core concepts.
 - Diagram or chart the key ideas.
 - Summarize key issues and questions (possibly in the style modeled in the “Think Through the Issues” section of each unit.
 - Record significant quotes.
 - List any growth or development ideas.

You are the judge of what is relevant to write in this space. Read the quote in light of its relevance to the issue that you will discuss in the next “Think Through the Issues.” Use it to help you learn to think, so only write what seems relevant to you.

Skill Three: Leading Socratic Discussions

This skill is the most foreign to those learning the Socratic method. It is a skill that can be learned with practice. But again, we must first be sure of what we are talking about. What exactly is a Socratic discussion?

Socratic Discussion: A sustained discussion around a set of ideas, which gives birth to new insights around and implications of those ideas and helps participants develop greater skill in thinking clearly and translating those ideas into a wisdom base for future development.

The idea of a Socratic discussion is not leading the discussion to a predetermined point of conclusion, but rather sustaining the discussion around a set of ideas long enough to clearly grasp them and their implications and to begin exploring their application and use in a variety of situations. According to Mortimer Adler, a clear issue to discuss and four or five really good questions will sustain a discussion for two hours, if the discussion leader is really good.

Preparing and Leading Socratic Discussions

We have divided the process into four movements. The movements cover the process from study to the conclusion of the discussion.

Movement One: Preparing for the Discussion—Develop critical understanding and master the significance of the issues.

- Carefully study the biblical passages.
- Carefully work through the readings.
- Think through the issues, jotting down your own insights.
- Work through your own project, completing the assignment for each.

Movement Two: Engaging the Early Stages of the Discussion—Demand accurate interpretation.

- Insist that all biblical passages and theological readings used to discuss the issue be validated by textual evidence of the author’s intended meaning.
- As quickly as possible, try to gain a consensus of the central meaning of the texts being used, in order to discuss the main issue of the Socratic discussion.

Movement Three: Fully Engaging the Socratic Method—Pursue truth in community (developing theological one-mindedness).

- Take time to explore all facets of the issue—follow questions with questions, rephrasing, etc.
- Keep the discussion centered on the key issue, visiting and revisiting the core three or four questions.

- Help each person clarify his thoughts, articulate his argument, and defend his position (see Socratic skills).

Movement Four: Bringing a Sense of Closure to the Discussion—Lay foundations for further discussion.

- Summarize the progress, conclusions, and growing consensus.
- Clarify the remaining issues.
- Challenge to further study and reflection.
- Relate this discussion to the main issue of the course, and review the group's overall progress.

The above movements should not be seen as steps in a linear process, but rather moving back and forth with a lot of overlapping, but still giving a sense of overall progression through the four movements to an appropriate sense of closure. The leader should never ask questions merely for questions sake, otherwise the discussion will go nowhere.

In addition to skill in orchestrating the above movement, Socratic leaders need to develop the fine art of asking questions. The following guidelines are designed to help you learn to ask good questions. They are summarized from Mortimer Adler.⁷

1. You should approach Socratic discussions with two primary goals in mind: (1) to bring out and clarify issues and ideas in a common area of study for the purpose of growing in understanding and (2) to make sure that whatever has been read or studied is accurately understood.
2. All of your questions ought to fall into two categories: (1) foundational questions designed to make sure the issue or idea has been understood accurately and (2) exploring questions, designed to surface the basic ideas and issues in such a way that the group may explore them together, engaging in two-way talk as a group.
3. The best kinds of questions are those for which there is no simple answer.
4. It is important to define the direction of the discussion at the beginning of the session by asking a series of basic "issue" questions and following up the initial answers with questions that draw out the implications of the given answer.
5. It will often be necessary to rephrase questions several times until all the issues are grasped by everyone involved.
6. Hypothetical questions and situations are often helpful in surfacing crucial issues.
7. It is important to stick with a question until it has been adequately addressed, insisting on relevant, to the point responses, or the participants' minds will not be sharpened.
8. The Socratic leader must control the argumentative participant who only wants to win an argument, and he must challenge the indifferent, uncritical participant.

9. The Socratic leader should not allow key words to be used loosely or ambiguously.
10. A good Socratic leader will only need three or four good questions for a two-hour discussion. Rarely will he need more than five, and occasionally one will suffice, depending on the issue.
11. Avoid the temptation to proceed to other questions without fully pursuing the implications of the question at hand.

Skill Four: Thinking Deeply and Integratively

This is the skill needed for the "Apply the Principles" section and session six of each book, "Reshaping Our Lives." All of the "Apply the Principles" sections in the books have specific instructions for doing the projects, so I will focus here on the process in the sixth session of each book. Why have I called it "Thinking Deeply and Integratively"? Why have I listed it as a skill? Several of the skills listed in this section are skills you may already have—reflection (meditation), journaling, prayer, memorizing Scripture, etc. So why is it listed as a single whole? I think this is a large missing piece in most training programs because there is a tendency to focus on the parts and miss the whole. Let's review the Socratic method once more, referring back to session three.

Design structure of a book

- Sustained "living with the matter"—5 weeks of studying the biblical passages and related readings.
- "Many 'conversations' with a teacher"—5 weeks of Socratic discussions around the ideas.
- Then comes "the flame of intelligence"—session 6 is when it all comes together and a wisdom base develops.

The part of the process we want to focus on now is the dramatic point of the process—"the flame of intelligence." It is when convergence of the whole method takes place. It is when practical wisdom becomes like a foundation in a person's life. This is when the illumination of the Spirit comes into full light and that illumination permeates every aspect of life. It is when the integrative core of our life philosophy is fused with the philosophy or mind of Christ, and we begin changing at our very core. This is what was referred to in the Middle Ages as the fourth movement of *Lectio Divina*⁸ (Sacred Reading), called *contemplation*, which has a mystical element through the work of the Spirit, as we meet God in the text. Again, this section must be viewed as a series of movements in which we move back and forth, with a lot of overlap. But there is a sense of progression as well. Here are the three movements:

Movement One: Committing Your Heart—Reflection, Journaling, and Prayer

This movement is intended to promote deeper reflection. The heart is the focus. Three exercises are encouraged, though several other traditional, classical spiritual

disciplines could be called upon—silence, solitude, and fasting. The task is to look back over your work and thoughtfully reflect, write, and pray.

Reflection—Read back over your work in the first five sessions; pause and think about any areas that move you.

Journaling—Write down any personal or motivating thoughts that come to you as you reread your work.

Prayer—Write down a major request that seems to cover the whole matter you have been studying.

Movement Two: Committing Your Mind—Forming Clear Convictions and Memorizing Scripture.

This movement is intended to build the biblical core of your thinking. It is your final biblical theology work around the ideas of each book. It is important to try to build everything around one big idea and then several small related ideas. Take time to reread all of your core teaching sections and build them into one teaching. This will be a major piece of your “thinking base” as you work through movement three and begin the process of thinking through all aspects of your life.

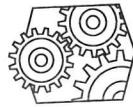
Movement Three: Committing Your Life—Decisions, Personal Projects, and Life Habits

This is when the will comes fully into play. In this movement, reflect back over your journaling and core teaching summaries and both movements one and two. Begin thinking through every area of your life: work, family life, involvement in the community of faith, ministries, finances, use of time, etc. Hold up all aspects of your life to the illumination and understanding received up to this point and ask several questions:

- Are there any big decisions that I need to make in light of this teaching and its implications for my life?
- Are there any new habits I need to build or old ones I need to break?
- Are there any personal projects I need to undertake, large or small?

It is precisely at this point that the process is complete at a first principles level, and we are ready to build on those ideas.

Record your thoughts:



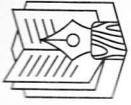
Think Through the Issues

It is critical to master the new skills that are needed for leading a group successfully through this process, as quickly as possible. It can make the difference between whether this becomes just another Bible study or truly a life changing experience for all involved.

ISSUE: The importance of mastering the new skill set

Think Through the Issue Before Discussion:

1. Which skills seem the most foreign to you? Which seem the most natural?
2. What might be the results of not doing good biblical theology work yourself, as the leader of a group?
3. What might be the consequences of not reading the scholarly material carefully?
4. What might be the effects on the process of not preparing well for the Socratic discussion? of not sharpening your skill in asking questions?
5. Why is it critical to challenge everyone to serious involvement in the final three movements of session six?



Apply the Principles

Write an initial assessment of your skill set. Which ones are you strong in, and in which ones are you weak? Jot down thoughts on how to improve your skills so that your skill set becomes sharp.

Record your initial thoughts on the issue before discussion:

Discuss the issue in your small group.

Record your initial thoughts on the issue after discussion: