

## **“Leadership in the Home”**

by

Danny and Charlotte Akin

On May 27, 1978 we began a great journey together. From the beginning we had a commitment both to the permanence of marriage and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We could never have imagined then where God would take us and what all He would allow us to experience. We have been blessed with four wonderful sons who know and love the Lord, and our life together has been a fantastic adventure. We have laughed and cried, succeeded and failed, been glad, mad and sad. Through it all, however, we have attempted to follow God’s guidelines found in Scripture for marriage and family. The Bible has been our compass and we, to the best of our ability, have allowed it to chart our course.

When it comes to leadership in the home, we recognize that God has designed distinctive roles and assignments for the husband and wife. Texts that inform us of what God created and redeemed us to be include Genesis 1:26-31; 2:18-25; Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Psalm 1; 127; 128; Proverbs; Song of Solomon (!); Matthew 19:3-12; 1 Corinthians 7:1-7; 11:2-16; Ephesians 5:18-6:4; Philippians 2:1-5; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 2:1-8; Hebrews 13:4; and 1 Peter 3:1-7. There is no want for Scripture to show the way. We have discovered that obedience, not knowledge, has always been the greatest challenge.

To understand the issue of leadership in the home, it might work best if we each talk about what God has shown us, and how we have struggled and grown in what God wants us to be. Then we will talk about parenting and share a particular experience where we sought to practice what we believe Godly, biblical leadership looks like. Ladies should always be allowed to go first, so Charlotte will begin by sharing her thoughts.

### Charlotte on the wife/mother role

I entered marriage with a lot of hopes and dreams. I also brought some painful baggage as well. My parents were alcoholics and divorced when I was 8. My sister, brother and I bounced from home to home until we were placed in the Georgia Baptist Children’s Home in Palmetto, Georgia. I was 9, and I lived there until I was 18 and graduated from high school. While those were difficult years, there were some good times as well. It was while I was in the Children’s Home that I received Jesus as my Savior and Lord, and God became my perfect heavenly Father (John 1:12). As we began our marriage I had no difficulty accepting God’s assignment for me as a wife and mother. The Bible was God’s Word and whatever it said I believed. Still, believing it and living it are not always the same thing. The Bible says “submit to your husband as to the Lord.” That is easy to do when your husband is obeying God and doing what you want. But what about those times when he doesn’t? Danny is a loving husband and a very smart

man. However, there are times when I cannot for the life of me understand what he is thinking. Because I had to watch out for myself as I was growing up, it is easy for me to just do things my way, the way I think is best. But this is neither honoring to God or to Danny. When I honor him by following his lead, even when I disagree, I am also honoring Jesus. This doesn't mean I cannot voice my concern and give my opinion. Neither does it mean I follow Danny if he were to ask me to do something unbiblical, unethical, immoral or illegal. Ultimately my Lord is Jesus not Danny. Gratefully, I can never think of a time where I had to make a decision like that.

Personally, God's pattern in Genesis 2:18, along with Ephesians 5:21-24, has been the most helpful to me. There God says, "It is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helper comparable to him" (NKJV). The word "helper" is used elsewhere in Scripture of God as He condescends to help us. There is nothing demeaning in this at all. Danny is a gifted man with strengths and abilities. He also, like all of us, has areas of weakness. One of the joys of my life is filling those gaps. Danny often compares marriage to a football team. To be successful you need a head coach and a quarterback. It is also essential that they work well together as a team. Danny is my head coach and I am his quarterback and God is president. Good teamwork requires mutual love, respect and understanding. I believe Danny is really good at being a man, husband, father and leader. That is the way God planned it. I also believe I am really good at being a woman, wife, mother and helper. This is also the way God planned it, and when we follow his plan the family works well.

### Danny on the husband/father role

Being the leader of our home has been an awesome assignment and one I am completely inadequate to fulfill on my own. I will be the first to admit that when we were first married I had a lot to learn. I tended to be selfish and self-centered. I was delighted for Charlotte to wait on me hand and foot and meet my every desire. However, over the past 23 years God has been growing me in my understanding of what it means to lead your wife and family. Two truths in particular stand out when I think about Charlotte.

First, I am to love her. That is the thrust of Ephesians 5:25-33. The love described there is quite detailed and particular. I am to love her sacrificially, "as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her." Such love is volitional not emotional. It is an act of the will, which seeks the best for another. I do not love her "if" or "because" ... I love her period, including those times when she is unlovely. I love her sanctifyingly with a goal of aiding and encouraging her to be more like Jesus. My love is to be sensitive. "Husbands ought (there is a moral imperative) to love their wives as their own bodies." Care and concern should characterize my love. My love should be satisfying, "nourishing and cherishing her just as Christ does the church." I always knew Charlotte had as goal of her life to make me a success. I now understand that one of my goals as a Godly leader is to make her a success, not before the world, but before God. Nourishing and cherishing love is essential. My love is also to be specific. Verse 33 says "nevertheless, let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself." This

verse has taught me the importance of being a “one woman kind of man.” There should never be any doubt in the mind of Charlotte or the boys, family, friends or foe that Danny Akin is in love with and committed to only one woman, and that woman is his wife. In trying to provide a model of leadership Charlotte can trust and our sons Nathan, Jonathan, Paul and Timothy can follow: I committed, when we were first married, to never be alone with a woman other than Charlotte. That commitment has caused me to be criticized as a Neanderthal, sexist, Pharisee. It has also won the heart of my wife and the confidence of my sons. I can live with that.

Second, I am to know her. First Peter 3:7 says that a husband is to love his wife according to knowledge or with understanding that his prayers will not be hindered. Charlotte is a very talented and gifted woman, far more than she realizes I believe. But Charlotte, like all women, has some very particular needs because of the way God made her. She needs me to be a spiritual man of conviction, courage and commitment. She needs to know I appreciate her for all the many things she does as a wife and mother. She needs romance and affection, and in a language she appreciates and understands! Sex may or may not be a part of the package. She also needs me to be honest and open and engage her in heart to heart conversation. She needs me to bring security to our home by my presence and involvement, and she needs to know that after Jesus, nothing is more important in my life than she and our four sons. As I strive to be the man God saved and Charlotte and the boys need me to be my priorities look something like this:

- 1) Jesus
- 2) Charlotte
- 3) Nathan, Jonathan, Paul, Timothy
- 4) Highview Baptist Church
- 5) Southeastern Seminary

I do not always follow these as I ought, but I continually keep them before me as I seek to be the spiritual man and leader God wants me to be.

### Charlotte and Danny on parenting

Having the privilege of parenting four sons has been one of the great blessings of our life. Often we are flying by the seat of our pants doing the best we know how but not certain it is. We have visited numerous emergency rooms and had our assortment of broken bones, but to this point it has been a wonderful experience and we would not exchange it for anything. Several principles and precepts of Scripture have influenced our style of parenting. While this list is certainly not exhaustive, it summarizes what has guided us as we sought to develop Godly sons who would love Jesus and live for Him.

First, we always tried to see life from their perspective. God entered our world through His Son (John 1:14; Philippians 2:6-8) and showed us He loved us, and so we have tried to get into the world of our sons as well. We try and weigh their age, maturity, interest and challenges, and gain their viewpoint about what is going on. Doing this is easier said than done, but it is essential nevertheless.

Second, we have worked at being good partners. Good partners almost always make good parents because seeing mom and dad love each other 1) brings security into the world of the children and 2) it models for them a healthy marriage.

Third, we discipline them. In our family we have tried to provide a big playing field not a small one. Why? Because kids are kids and, if the box is too small they will break the rules constantly and you will probably not be consistent in your discipline. We have always told our boys they will establish the size of the playing field. If they are faithful, truthful and trustworthy, the playing field will get bigger and bigger. If they are unfaithful, untruthful and untrustworthy, the playing field will get smaller and smaller. We have also adjusted the way we discipline as they have grown older. We believe spanking, in moderation and always under control, is both biblical and effective when the children are small (e.g. Proverbs 29:15). However, as they grow older, unless the situation is extreme and exceptional, the rebuke and restriction is a more effective way to mold and shape their character and behavior.

Fourth, we love them with our eyes and tongue (see Proverbs 20:12; James 1:19). We have come to understand the power of both the eyes and tongue. With a look of the eye we can build up or tear down, communicate love or contempt. Words, of course, are powerful weapons. They can bless or curse. Parents will often say things to their child that they would never say to a stranger and seldom to a dog. We have failed far too often in this area, and it is something we must constantly work at.

Fifth, we have learned that love is a beautiful four-letter word. It is sometimes best spelled T.I.M.E. When the boys were small, Danny traveled much less. As the boys have grown he is out in the churches more often. We miss him when he is away, but we are glad to share him with others. Still, he works hard at being at important events in the life of the boys. He gets football and basketball games on his calendar at the earliest possible date, and he is faithful to not let anything replace them. When Nathan and Jonathan were seniors in high school, the four boys together played more than 70 basketball games! We saw almost all of them, and our boys more than once told us how much it meant to them.

Sixth, we have made it a habit to hold, hug and kiss them. Love touching has taken different shapes and forms through the years, but it has always been a healthy and vital part of our family life. Now that the boys are 20, 20, 18 and 16, it is still going on!

Seventh, we have tried to make life and our home fun. Indeed, making our house a fun house, a place where the boys would be glad to bring their friends has always been a top priority.

Eighth, we have tried at appropriate times and in appropriate ways to push them out of the nest and let them develop their own wings. One day, not too long from now, all four of them will be gone from our home. It will be just them and the Lord. Our goal is that when that time comes, we will have led them in such a way that they will be O.K.

Ninth, we invoke seven magical words in English whenever it is needed: "I am sorry. Will you forgive me?" We are not perfect and our boys know it. Why lie about it and lose their respect? When we blow it we admit it and ask their forgiveness. This is a sure way to raise the respect factor.

Finally, we prayed for their salvation and continually talked to them about Jesus and the things of God. In His mercy and goodness, God has saved all four of our sons. Nothing this side of heaven has meant more to us as parents.

### Putting leadership in the home to the test

In December, 1995, Al Mohler contacted us about the possibility of coming to Southern as Academic Vice-President and Dean of the School of Theology. Well, this came out of nowhere and was quite a surprise. We were extremely happy at Southeastern Seminary where we had served since 1992. Danny had been working alongside Paige Patterson, his father in the ministry, since 1988 and really never thought of ever being anywhere else. Furthermore, we had only been in a new house, which we had built, for just over a year! Well, Danny traveled to Louisville, met with Al (and also his better part, Mary and the kids!) and it seemed that God was in this. We both remember a Sunday night phone call from Louisville back to Wake Forest. Charlotte somewhat playfully (!) said if things had gone well with Al she really did not want to hear about it. Danny responded by saying, "Well, I guess we don't have much to talk about then." God, to Danny's great surprise, knit his and Al's heart together almost immediately. What were we to do? And, what about the kids?

Both of us have noticed through the years that some sad and unhappy families sometimes show up at seminary. God has called Dad, we must go, end (actually it never began) of discussion. To even raise a question would be a clear evidence of sin and rebellion against God. So, off they go, confused, hurt, whatever. This is not Godly leadership in our judgement.

As the God designated leader of our home, I (Danny) believe I am to lead not drive. Furthermore, I think there is great wisdom for every husband and father found in Proverbs 12:15, "a wise man is he who listens to counsel" and in Proverbs 11:14, "but in abundance of counselors there is victory." As a husband I have always sought Charlotte's counsel, her perspective. We have always made "we decisions" in our marriage, and also in our family. Big decisions like moving from Wake Forest, N.C. to Louisville, KY should not be made dictatorially, autocratically or solo. I was sure God was leading us to a new assignment, but Charlotte and the boys needed to know and believe that too. For several weeks Charlotte and I talked, and often, about this decision. We prayed together and individually. Because of the many lessons God had taught us

and His consistent faithfulness, we were united on one thing: find and obey the will of God. In January 1996, we took a trip to Louisville to visit and it was then that God made it crystal clear to both of us: Louisville is to be our new home. I again want to emphasize, this joint decision was reached over several weeks not several days, and it was one in which I allowed God to work in Charlotte's heart without forcing the issue.

Now we turned our attention to the boys. When they first heard that we might be moving they were not thrilled. They loved Wake Forest. All of their friends were there and they were at an age where a move was not on their radar screens. Again, I did not push and neither did Charlotte. We prayed and we talked with the boys individually and together and usually in a casual kind of context. For us that has always worked best and fits my style of managing one's own household (1 Timothy 3:4). After a couple of months had passed, I remember we were riding in our van somewhere when, I believe it was Jonathan said, "Dad, we've (the boys) been talking about moving to Louisville and we've decided if that is God's will then that is what we should do. We're not real excited about it, but if this is what God is telling you to do then He will take care of all of us and we'll be fine too." As a father, I cannot tell you what that meant to me; that my sons had that much confidence and trust in God, and also in their dad. I must confess that this approach to leadership was foreign to me earlier in our marriage. Like far too many Christian men, I misunderstood the Bible, believing that leading meant barking out orders and giving commands. This "my way or the highway" mentality was not only unChristlike, it was sinful, hurtful and ineffective. To lead you must set an example worth following. To lead as a Christian you need to follow the example of Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:1).

We have come a long way in our marriage and family. We have both matured in our roles as husband/father and wife/mother. We have not arrived nor do we expect to this side of heaven. That will not, however, keep us from pressing on " 'til death do us part" or Jesus comes again. Godly leaders keep their word. By God's grace we intend to keep ours.