

Bible Devotions: Lock Stock & Barrel
Devotional Reading for Outdoorsmen
(Old Testament)

Deuteronomy 6:4-7

How To Sharpen a Knife

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

These verses contain the Judaic confession of faith, better known as the Shema (the Hebrew word for 'hear'). It comes up again when a scribe asked Jesus, "*Which is the first commandment of all?*" (Mark 12:28). Jesus responded by quoting the Shema, after which He added, "*And the second, like it, is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" (Mark 12:29-31). There is nothing greater than loving God and loving people. That's the truth.

When we dig into this truth, we discover that there is deeper meaning to the words *teach them diligently*. In the original language, the idea is conveyed of a repetitive action like whetting or sharpening a blade. The spirit of the command, then, is to repeat the teaching process over and over until the child can say, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? ...There is none upon earth I desire besides Thee" (Clarke, 1762-1832).

The man who sharpens his own knives understands this metaphor on whetting. The blade – his child – is under his complete care. The father trains his child lovingly and consistently, shaping him in finer and finer ways as the child grows. This whetting makes the child keen, like a finished edge on an elegant weapon. The grown up child will have been nurtured in Biblical precepts, life lessons, and wholesome living. It is very much like transforming a raw piece of steel into an exquisite form of cutlery.

As I reflect on how I sharpen my own knives, I have a better understanding of this Scripture and my relationship with my own son. I start by holding a rough blade in my hand, dreaming about what it will look like after careful and constant work. I am the bladesmith and the end product is up to me. When my son was a little boy, I often considered what the man would look like. I am a Christian father and I knew that it was pretty much up to me.

The first passage is with a coarse stone. I grind away stuff that I don't want, sculpting the rough edge into a general shape. I set the angle of the cutting surface, somewhere between 20 and 30 degrees. Likewise, there were a lot of things I didn't want for my son, like bad habits and certain life style choices. I worked hard, sometimes in coarse ways, to remove undisciplined stuff out of his young life. The angle was constant: love God, love people.

I then move to a medium whetstone, applying a sheen of fine oil to float away small, undesirable particles from the developing edge. I push the edge into the stone as if I were slicing away very thin layers. First one side, then the other. My motion is consistent. The angle is the same. Somewhere in my son's young life, I moved to deeper training. Discipline centered around Biblical precepts, first on one side when he knew it was expected, then on the other side when he didn't see it coming. The angle remained the same – love God, love people. The oil of a father's love floated away the junk that marred his development. I was slicing away the boy and whetting out the man.

The final stone is hard and fine. I keep it oiled as I push the edge of the blade into the whetstone. Same angle. Consistent motions. Same amount on each side. I must be careful now that the edge is getting sharp and well-proportioned. As my son grew through his teenage years, I kept up the constant angle – love God, love people. Love God, love people. My love for him deepened like oil in a fine whetstone, carrying away any ugly particle that came off of the developing young man; keeping him focused on turning out sharp and well-proportioned. I remain diligent in teaching, watching as he changes from formable boy to formidable man.

The stone work is done. Next, I move the blade's edge back and forth across a steel, making complete, consistent motions from heel to point. I can't see it but I know that tiny pieces of metal are drawn off by the magnetism of the dressing rod. My son is also put to the steel. Little pieces of boy are pulled away by the magnetism of manhood. Sometimes it's hard to see but I know it's happening. My

angle has been unfailing – love God, love people. This has helped him gain the edge in living a life for Christ.

Finally, I'm at the last stage. I have a piece of leather imbedded with jeweler's rouge. I drag the blade carefully across the strap, first one side then the other. The rouge polishes the edge into a mirror finish. It glistens brightly. Rarely do I return to the coarse stone and only occasionally to the other stones. Under normal use, the steel and strap keep my knives in good working order.

I'm now in the final stage with my son. This stage will last his entire adult life and my remaining adult years. He has been diligently taught, like stages in sharpening a knife. Oh, I've made a few blunders and had to go back and work it out with him, rarely to the coarse stage thank goodness. But we made it through. Now, my adulthood is polishing his adulthood. He's bright. Sharp. He's been whetted by the hands of his earthly father on behalf of his Heavenly Father.

I so much want my son to be the mirror image of me but that should never happen. I'm a fallible man just doing the best I know how to do, enabled only by the grace of God. My diligence and energy should be consumed in teaching him to be the image of Christ the perfect Man, whose word is sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12).

We dull up quickly when we're anything less. And that's the truth.

Savior, Teach Me Day By Day
Jane E. Leeson (1807 – 1882)

Savior, teach me day by day love's sweet lessons to obey;
Sweeter lesson cannot be, loving Him who first loved me.
With a child's glad heart of love at Thy bidding may I move,
Prompt to serve and follow Thee, loving Him who first loved me.
Teach me thus Thy steps to trace, strong to follow in Thy grace,
Learning how to love from thee, loving Him who first loved me.
Love in loving finds employ, in obedience all her joy;
Ever new that joy will be, loving Him who first loved me.
Thus may I rejoice to show that I feel the love I owe;
Singing, till Thy face I see, of His love who first loved me.

Bible Devotions: Hook Line & Sinker (study guide)

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HOOK

1. What knife do you use most often in your outdoor activities, and why?

2. How do you test a knife's sharpness? Explain why you think your method is reliable or useful.

3. In detail, tell how you sharpen a knife. If you don't know how, tell how you think you'd do it.

LINE

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My angle has been unflinching – love God, love people. I remain diligent in teaching him, watching as he changes from formable boy to formidable man. He's been whetted by the hands of his earthly father on behalf of his Heavenly Father.

Our diligence and energy should be consumed in teaching our sons to be the image of Christ the perfect Man, whose word is sharper than any two-edged sword.

We dull up quickly when we're anything less. And that's the truth.

Describe the two most important lessons you will teach your children. How will you do this?

How has your father shaped your manhood in a Godly way? Or, if you are a boy, how is your father helping you grow to be a Godly man? If no answer, tell what you want your father to do.

SINKER

Take a few minutes to write your thoughts on this devotional. Reflect on your own experiences.

Key words: teach whetting love

