A Trap You've Got to Avoid

Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee.
His hands can't hit what his eyes can't see.
Now you see me, now you don't.
George thinks he will, but I know he won't.

If you follow sports at all, you know that those are the oft-quoted words of late boxer Muhammad Ali before his legendary fight with George Foreman. Ranked among the renowned heavyweights in the sport's history, Ali was provocative. Entertaining. And he was never lost for words. His show-stopping press conferences were always peppered with outlandish statements, most notably, "I am the greatest!"

While I lean strongly in the direction that Ali was the greatest heavyweight boxer of all time, let's just say that if you chased down "humility" in your favorite online dictionary, the odds are good that you won't find a photo of him.

So let's talk about humility; and more importantly, its place in the life of a leader.

Allow me to explore the topic from three vantage points.

1. Humility DEFINED.

If you look at humility from the perspective of a definition, you will be reminded that it is the quality of not thinking you are better than someone else. It is to have a modest opinion of yourself and your capabilities. C.S. Lewis observed that "humility is not thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less." One metric of walking in humility is when you know that you are good at something, but don't have the need to announce it.

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2. Humility DISCUSSED.

If you look at humility from the perspective of the leadership literature, you will be reminded of one of the central takeaways that Jim Collins sets forth in his classic book Good To Great; namely, the best leaders (what he labels as "level five leaders") are "self-effacing, quiet, reserved, even shy—these leaders are a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will." Or check out Tim Irwin's book Derailed where, in tracking down the demise of six high-profile CEOs, he pinpoints a lack of humility as one of four character deficits common to leadership failure. He goes on to say that "arrogance is the mother of all derailers."

3. Humility DECLARED.

Finally, and most importantly, if you look at humility from the perspective of how God defines it, you are quickly confronted with the these make-no-mistake-about-it words: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Let me run that up the flagpole once more. “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Now I may not have a degree in mathematics, but I certainly know what side of THAT equation I want to sit on. You with me? Think about it. **Is there ever a moment in your life when you want to deliberately place yourself in a position where God Himself is against you?**

I didn’t think so.

Me neither.

So how DO you keep pride in check? How do you steer clear of the trap of arrogance?

Let me take a cut at that question…and perhaps prompt your own self-reflection. Since I am often leading in a small group context, it is tempting to take a posture of ‘sitting back and pontificating’, projecting a know-it-all attitude. That’s pride. Instead, more and more, I want to present this attitude: “Here is something God has been teaching me lately, and admittedly, I’m a work in progress. I trust it will contribute to your life and leadership as it has in mine.” Big difference.

So the next time you are tempted to have an inflated view of yourself, simply hit the pause button and reboot your memory **that ultimately everything you are and everything you have are not things you’ve earned but rather things you’ve been given—**by the Giver of all good gifts.

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