

Rock Solid The Courageous Leader

BLOG

February 2010 – The year was 1947. It was a time in America when words like “racism” and “segregation” were slapped across the front pages of every local newspaper.

In the middle of those tumultuous times, in an unprecedented decision, the Brooklyn Dodgers baseball team signed Jackie Robinson—baseball’s first African-American player.

Jackie Robinson was an extraordinary athlete, but that did not exempt him from unrelenting opposition—opposition that ranged from players who would move to another table when he sat down to eat with them to numerous threats on his life.

The tension reached its apogee one day at Crosley Field in Cincinnati. Jackie was unmercifully taunted by both the fans and the opposing team. The ridicule had grown to a fever pitch.

What would happen next would change the course of baseball history and beyond.

In the middle of the taunts, his teammate, Pee Wee Reese, team captain and Hall of Famer—a man short in stature, but more importantly a man tall in courage—walked over to Jackie and put his arm around him and faced the crowd.

And the stadium grew silent.

If you’re like me, you look in the rear-view mirror and wonder what you would have done in that moment. Don’t you?

You know it like I know it—physical stature has nothing to do with size of one’s heart to do the right thing in the right moment regardless of the cost. It takes COURAGE to step up. And out.

Courage is the resolve that you see in the Old Testament account when Esther, faced with a do-or-die decision, unequivocally states, “If I perish, I perish.”

Winston Churchill was spot-on when he announced, “Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities, because it is the quality which guarantees all others.”

So what are some of the marks of a COURAGEOUS leader?

- Courageous leaders act out of deeply-seated convictions, shoving aside the shifting sands of opinion polls
- Courageous leaders initiate...they take the first step...they make the first move

- Courageous leaders call out wrongs and injustices—especially when those wrongs and injustices are the well-established forms of the day
- Courageous leaders face the harsh realities of life in full, but don't accept them as final
- Courageous leaders speak truth whenever and wherever it needs to be spoken, including speaking truth to those who can make life very uncomfortable for them in so doing
- Courageous leaders say “no” to many things, so that they can say “yes” to the best things
- Courageous leaders, after looking at the size of the challenge, move quickly to looking at the size of their Creator
- Courageous leaders dream of what COULD be, but they don't stop there; they are compelled to move to action that it MUST be
- Courageous leaders know deep in their own soul that when God has given them an assignment, especially a big one, that He is all that they need to see it to completion

Tests of courage, if you've got your eye on the ball, happen all the time. Occasionally they are easily identified, but often they are subtle and nuanced. Just look around. They happen in your community. They happen in your workplace. They happen in your church. And they happen in your home.

And while most of us will not have our courage tested in a stadium full of angry people, it will be tested. And when it is, courageous leaders bring to their corner of life and leadership a recognition that doing the right thing will often require them to stand alone. But in that moment of aloneness they are rallied by the reality that there is Someone standing right beside them—with support. And words of “well done”.

Lord, in my life and leadership, grant me eyes to see where You are asking me to bring not just a heart of courage, but the hands of courage that I might make a difference in the sphere of influence that You have strategically placed me.