

Rock Solid

The Focus of a Leader

June 2010 – Stop. Look. And listen.

Listen to these soul-searching words from Eugene Petersen in his book, *Working the Angles*.

It is with God with whom we have to do. People go for long stretches of time without being aware of that, thinking it is money, or sex, or work, or children, or parents, or a political cause, or an athletic competition, or learning with which they must deal. Any one or a combination of these subjects can absorb them and for a time give them the meaning and purpose that human beings seem to require. But then there is a slow stretch of boredom. Or a disaster. Or a sudden collapse of meaning. They want meaning. They want more.

And then Petersen closes the deal with these words of crystal-clear clarity.

They want God. When a person searches for meaning and direction, asking questions and testing out statements, we must not be diverted into anything other or lesser.

Potent stuff, huh?

When you rehearse the job description of a leader, bullet point #1 reads something like this: **In the middle of life and all of its contingencies, keep the conversation centered on God.**

Life lived on cruise control quickly reverts to the horizontal – the things that we see, the obstacles in our path, the challenges that we face.

It's the leader's job to shift the focus from looking around to looking up.

That's exactly what David did. For a moment, journey back with me to that familiar Old Testament account. The battle lines are drawn. Army against army. Israel against the Philistines. The Philistines' perennial superstar, Goliath, huge of size and armed to the teeth, figures to wreak havoc and make life intolerable for Israel. The stakes high; the outlook bleak. This was not going to be pretty. The presses were already rolling with the news of Philistine victory. Game – set – match.

But in the middle of inestimable odds, David, still surrounded by the stench of the shepherd's field,

steps undaunted into the rumble, and poses a provocative question. Annoyed to the core, he wants to know who is this person ""...that he should taunt the armies of the living God?""

Don't you love it?

David, the leader, armed with a sling and a few stones, was also armed with a question — a question that single-handedly shifts the focus from the horizontal to the vertical, from the seen to the unseen, from the challenge to the Creator.

Let's be honest. In the middle of crisis or confusion or chaos, it's easy to lose our way. We become fearful. Or we second-guess. Or we panic. Or we want to turn tail. Or we make short-term, short-sighted decisions. And at times, all of the above.

All God wants to do is take you where you cannot go alone and make you what you cannot be alone.

-Erwin McManus

And it is in these moments that perhaps the greatest gift leaders give to those who look to them for guidance is to size up the battle, not by looking around but by looking up.

Where is God in the middle of these against-all-odds circumstances?

- What is He exposing about my life, my faith?
- What is really going on here, in the spiritual realm?
- What new level of communion is He inviting me into?
- What unfathomable way of God am I being asked not to figure out, but simply to embrace?
- What scaffolding have I erected in my life that He wants to dismantle?
- What uncharted territory of trust is He asking me to enter into?
- What show-stopping victory is He offering me a front-row seat to experience?
- What new chapter of testimony does He want to write in the storyline of my life?

The bottom line is this: when those who are in our circle of influence are searching for meaning and direction, it is our privilege, and more importantly, our responsibility to confidently draw their attention to the sometimes hard-to-see, yet ever-present hand of God. And in that sacred moment, our call is to center the conversation not on what we think they may want, but on what we know they must have.

That's what we have to offer. Nothing more. And certainly nothing less.

Lord, I want to be THAT kind of leader – a person who in the middle of the chaos of life, centers my attention, and the attention of those around me, on You, and on the reality that You are good, gracious, able, and purposeful.