

Rock Solid The Humility of a Leader

BLOG

November 2013 –

*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 former professional boxer Muhammad Ali before his legendary fight with George Foreman. Inarguably ranked among the renowned heavyweights in the sport's history, Ali was provocative. He was outrageous. He was entertaining. And he was never lost for words. His circus-like press conferences were always peppered with outlandish statements, most notably, "I am the greatest!"

Talk about bravado. Suffice it to say that if you chased down "humility" in your Merriam-Webster, the odds are good that you won't find a photo of Muhammad Ali.

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

Allow me to stake out the topic from three perspectives.

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; to have a modest opinion of yourself and your capabilities. Or as someone has observed, it is being really good at something and knowing how good you are without feeling the need to announce it to the world.

If you look at humility from the perspective of current leadership literature, you will be reminded of one of the key 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.

Finally, and most importantly, if you look at humility from the perspective of the Bible you quickly come to terms with a proverbial head-on collision when you are confronted with 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 been valedictorian of my graduating class, but I certainly know what side of THAT equation I want to be on. You with me? Think about it. Is there ever a moment when you want to deliberately place yourself in a position where God Himself is against you?

I didn't think so.

Me neither.

So the next time you are tempted to have an inflated view of yourself, simply hit the pause button and reboot your memory that everything you are and everything you have are not deserved earnings but rather undeserved gifts.

And as you do, feel the rush—and embrace the wonder—of the grace of God.

How have you managed to keep pride at bay?

Join the conversation. Post your comments [below](#).
