

Fear and Pride—Deterrents to Service

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2014, published in the Oct, Nov, Dec 2014 issue of the “In CASE” Newsletter

Have you ever felt inadequate? Maybe it was just before some significant event, and you were wondering whether you would survive the stress. Or maybe it was just after some situation where you unquestionably blew it--and you wondered if you'd ever be able to show your face again!

Maybe you've never allowed yourself to admit this common human experience, a feeling of hopelessness. We usually don't share our shortcomings publicly. But if you open yourself privately, someone who loves and accepts you will provide the support necessary to see you through the angst.

The Bible tells us repeatedly “Do not be afraid!” Still, fear is common among us humans. Fear is often associated with some kind of loss--loss of power, position, status, or prestige; loss of respect, loss of turf, loss of security, loss of health, loss of face, etc. Your experiences could probably add several others. Further, think of the various losses imagined by individuals you've counseled.

A surprising relative of fear is pride. Many prideful people call it confidence. Many of the people who have to live or work with prideful people call it haughtiness or arrogance.

I sought counsel from colleagues about individuals who seemed prideful to the point of cockiness. All who had experience with such an individual felt (or knew because of disclosures made by the individuals) that the behaviors were a cover for some kind of fear.

Both fear and pride come from an underlying focus on self and concern for what others think of you. They stem from playing to some audience other than God--your boss, your spouse, your neighbors, your friends, your competitors, your direct reports, etc.

Both fear and pride separate us from others. We compare ourselves, and we're rarely happy with the outcome. If we judge ourselves superior, we're not sure we deserve it. If we are inadequate by comparison, we've confirmed our fears and we know our pride is a lie. Sometimes it feels like you just can't win. And “winning” is important to all of us, isn't it?

There IS another option. 2 Corinthians 3:5 says that we are not “adequate in ourselves, but our adequacy is from God.” (New American Standard Bible) Acknowledging the truth, God is the source of all that we are, every gift that we can contribute, and every opportunity we have to serve. We have no legitimate right to be filled with pride or fear. They are insidious obstructers to our humbly serving others.

If we are good at some skill, God gave us that ability and allowed us, through our ability to choose, the option to develop it beyond a primitive level. Teachers came into our lives and influenced us in the ways we should go. God has provided each of us with unique abilities and opportunities to use our strengths to serve others.

Consider your strengths. What is their source? Inheritance? Environment? You had no control over your selection of ancestors or your early childhood guidance. You did not consciously select most of the teachers who influenced your interests. Do you think they just appeared in your life by accident?

Maybe you don't even believe in God. Maybe all this talk about a Messiah's birth in a stable is something you've not investigated. Maybe this is the year you'll go to someone you trust, someone who seems to have more faith than either fear or pride, and start seeking some new awareness.

It may be too late to provide this Christmas gift to your leadership team, but you could certainly consider it as a New Year's learning project. The *Lead Like Jesus* study guide is an excellent resource for collectively building your skills with your colleagues. Authored by Ken Blanchard, Lee Ross, Phil Hodges, and Avery Willis, it is a superb learning source about the healthy alternatives to feelings of inadequacy, fear, and pride.

If you would like guidance on how to conduct a study group with your team, contact me. I'll provide a simple one-pager to get you started. It's a great way for your stronger team members to support, encourage, and provide practical guidance for the rest of the team.

Dennis Hooper is an executive coach in Atlanta. His website is www.buildingfutureleaders.com. He welcomes your comments and questions at dennis@buildingfutureleaders.com or 770-286-2250.