

GOOD TO GREAT 1: “LEVEL 5 LEADERSHIP”

Last May while on Sabbatical I read a book suggested to me by our Bishop, Mike Coyner. I had heard of the book from a colleague, but since the Bishop recommended it, I thought I'd better read it. I was blown away.

The title of the book is the title of this series: Good to Great. Jim Collins is the author, and he also wrote, Built to Last. Both books are from the business world. The book is a study of 11 companies that made major shifts in their business to outpace the market and outdistance their competition. The author's objective was to study these 11 companies to discover if there were any common denominators within them that sustained their growth and turnaround for over 15 years! (The research in the book is most impressive.) The hope was then to describe these common principles to see if they might be translated or employed by other companies desiring to move from being good companies to great companies. Jim and his researchers discovered 7 different factors that were evident in each of the 11 companies, and lacking in the other comparison companies. It is these 7 common factors that will occupy our time for the next few weeks.

You are probably (or maybe should be) asking a number of questions! 1) Why do we need to be looking to the business world to figure out how to better be the church? Good question. I have always maintained that the church of Jesus Christ ought not be governed by what is happening on Main Street.

Too often in too many churches, business principles and practices are implemented that can literally 'take the spirit' out of the church. Granted there is business that needs to be done in the church, but the church's agenda is not set by what happens or works in the business world.

That being said, I was more than intrigued as I read the different principles. If they were true, honest and legal, then might there be something we could translate or at least learn for the church. If all truth is God's truth, and these principles are true, might we learn some things about ourselves from looking at these truths? I hope the answer will become plain as we move along. Also, I'll not be preaching to you from the book Good To Great, but from the Good Book with the Greatest News! My great joy and challenge was and is to discover these timeless truths in the middle of God's Word, and draw them out so we might apply them to our church and to our lives.

2) Why should we worry about being great? Another good question! Jesus never said "Well done thou GREAT and faithful servant, did he?" But he did say WELL DONE, which means what? The best. I believe God desires all God's churches to be great. I believe it is we who settle for "Good", and thus fall short of being all God wants us to be. Great has nothing to do with being the biggest, or even being bigger, but simply with being the best we can possibly be! Being the best we can be, coupled with the best God has for us, will make us a great church.

Two principles from the book must be mentioned. 1) **Good** is often the enemy of **Great!** I think; if we'd be honest; this truth would be self-evident, even in our church. We often settle for Good, when Great is within our reach. We often couple being "Good" with another word, "Enough". We are "Good enough", what we are doing is "Good Enough". It's "Good Enough" for the church. We are big "Enough"; we have given "Enough".

I have often challenged people to define 'enough' for me, and no one yet satisfactorily has. 2) Being **Great** takes no more effort than being **Good**; it just takes a **different Focus.** Collins maintains and I tend to agree that it takes no more effort, or energy, or will power, or work to be great than it takes to maintain mediocrity.

Often much energy and time are spent dealing with the natural frustrations people experience while settling for mediocrity, when we all inherently know that Greatness is within our reach.

All that being said, let me introduce you to the first principle Collins and his team discovered as a common denominator in his 11 Companies that made the leap from being Good to being Great. I doubt it will surprise you, but I bet the definition will! The first principle is what he calls: Level 5 Leadership.

Those of you familiar with or engaged in business, or even you casual observers of the business world, might assume that for a company to transition from being good to becoming great would require that a hotshot, charismatic CEO type hired gun be brought in to fire up the team, to cast a new vision, to inspire new confidence and get this thing turned around, right? Not exactly. What Collins discovered was almost the exact opposite. What he found when looking at these companies was leadership that had a unique style and distinctive focus that we'll now define by considering the two paradoxical, distinguishing marks of a Level 5 Leader. Go ahead and use the definition to compare what you see in me and my leadership role here at FUMC, but don't be surprised when I also apply the definition to other leaders in the church, not just on the staff, but you lay leaders, and Administrative leaders too. Even you who lead in Children's ministry, Youth ministry, teaching, outreach and nurture ministries. The definition of level 5 leadership must apply from the top to the bottom. So here goes. See if these definitions don't sound like another leader we know...

1. LEVEL FIVE LEADERS HAVE AN **UNASSUMING** PERSONAL **HUMILITY**

I was amazed to read of this discovery. I assumed the above-mentioned description of leadership would be necessary to turn a company, or a church around. Instead I read of leadership that sounded strangely out of place... but faintly familiar.

Listen:

“Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. He then began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel he had around him.”

John 13:3-5

This was Jesus’ example of Level 5 leadership, and it was not explained on an overhead projector or a fancy whiteboard, it was being lived out in front of the wide-eyed disciples; who, for the record; had just been arguing about what? Which of them was the greatest!

They too assumed they knew what type of leadership was necessary to move their beloved Judaism back to its prominent role in their society and the wider world. They assumed that a strong-armed, mighty Rome fighting Messiah would come bursting on the scene with a sword in one hand and a scourge in the other. What this “eye for an eye” world got instead was this humble, honest, self-assured, yet selfless Savior, who told them about loving their enemies, and turning the other cheek. This kind of savior could not overthrow Rome...but he could change the world!

Collins discovered that G2G leaders were self-effacing, quiet, reserved, and even shy. The leaders of these 11 companies were more like Lincoln and Socrates than Patton and Caesar. These level 5 leaders demonstrated a compelling modesty, often shunned public adulation, and were never boastful. They act with quiet calm determination and rely principally on inspired internal standards not inspiring charisma to motivate people.

Level 5 leaders accept as their #1 job, surrounding themselves with good people, well qualified, but more than that, people who believe in the mission, who accept the vision, who are self-motivated and committed to building a great company.

I think in the church, we fall victim to thinking that we would be great if we had a better preacher, or a great choir or a better building. None of those factors will make us great.

Choosing to become great is our first step, and it will require some effort! Collins never said building a great company was easy, just possible, and probably no harder than maintaining a good one.

I've not always been a good example of Level 5 leadership. I have an ego, I am selfish at times, I'm still struggling with pride and other sins. But I am convinced that for First Church to become a great church, we've got to have leaders who look more like Jesus, than like Donald Trump; leaders who look to God and God's Word for our direction instead of looking to Wall Street or Smith Barney for our security. Now, the second characteristic, and you'll see the paradox.

2. LEVEL FIVE LEADERS HAVE AN **UNDETERABLE** PROFESSIONAL **WILL**

It is very important to grasp that Level 5 leadership is not just about humility and modesty. It is equally about ferocious resolve, an almost stoic determination to do whatever needs to be done to make the company great. Personal humility **and** Professional will; not a match made in heaven...or is it?

Listen again:

“As the time drew near for his return to heaven, Jesus resolutely set his face toward Jerusalem.”
Luke 9:51

Following the majestic transfiguration experience, Jesus came down from the mountain, and *‘resolutely, set His face toward Jerusalem.’* The key to this verse and this point is that Jesus knew full well what lay ahead of him in Jerusalem; he was going there for the last time, this time; to die.

Level 5 leaders (like Jesus) add to their personal humility, a professional will. They understand the tasks ahead, and they work hard to make them happen. They are relentless, almost driven, not to get themselves ahead, but to advance the company, or in our case the church.

The great irony is that the drive to become a great leader often stands at odds with the humility required to be a level 5 leader. Building a great company or a great church is ultimately not about working harder, but working smarter, being more focused. Collins projects that level 5 leaders may have longer 'not to do lists', than to do lists! It's not about walking over people on your way to the top, but walking with people on the way to greatness. It's not just about doing in the church those pet projects that meet some personal need within ourselves, but about working for the greater good, even if we don't agree with the project or the direction. It's part of being a team player, a winning team I might add. It's not about being the biggest, or even being bigger, it's about being the best, (with God's help) that you can be; and sharing the results, as well as the journey.

We can't all be leaders, or there would be no followers, but whichever role God has called us to fulfill, we must fulfill it! There is no task in this church that is beneath any one of us! There is no way this church will ever achieve any level of greatness if we resort to a mentality of consumer spectators. It's God's church, it's not mine, it's not yours it's not even ours; it / we belong to God, and if we are unwilling to work with a will to make it great, we'll succumb to spiritless mediocrity.

I think we have a wealth of level 5 leaders in our church, I really do. Some of you are hiding under a blanket of false humility, claiming others are more qualified, which when uncovered, is nothing more than selfish pride. I don't buy it, and I don't think God is impressed. Some of you are ineffective because you are not working in areas of passion or giftedness.

Some of you couldn't care less.

Some of you are crippled by bad assumptions, poor examples, and faulty thinking, all of which might be overcome through this series that hopefully will challenge us to think differently, and eventually to act accordingly.

Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. He knew he was going to die. It was his destiny, his calling, his passion. Coupling his personal humility with his professional will, and look what happened! I can't be more excited about what lays ahead of us, as each of us check ourselves against His standard of Level 5 Leadership. I know we'll never achieve His stature, but that is not what God requires, just that we be our best, and our best won't be...just good enough, it can be GREAT!

My friends this Good To Great series is not an attempt to rally the troops to a new level of activity, or a prediction of future greatness by adding to our numbers, or building a new building. For my part, it is an answer to God's call to share some new truth that might make us begin to think differently about the church. It's no new emphasis, or rally cry, or program, its an appeal for greater understanding of Who God is, and Who God wants us to be. Shall we...?

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Two principles:

1. _____ is often the enemy of _____!
2. Being _____ takes no more effort than being _____; it just takes a different _____.

1. LEVEL FIVE LEADERS HAVE AN _____ PERSONAL _____

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