

# LEADING **BY** GRACE

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## Grace to the Humble

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It was the last day of April. What a magnificent spring morning! I thought as I stepped outside to pray and ponder the upcoming events of the day. In just a few hours, I would be standing at the altar with my oldest son, Randal, and my new daughter-in-law, Erin, as they celebrated their marriage covenant.

Scenes from the previous night's rehearsal dinner came back to me as I walked. It was as if I were still there, my heart overflowing with gratitude and amazement, as Randal and Erin expressed their commitment to God and to the divine process that had brought them together, first as friends, and now to a holy union of lifelong partnership.

Randal had agreed to spend some special time alone with me on this wonderful morning-my final opportunity to disciple my single son. For several weeks I had earnestly desired and prayerfully anticipated this time with him. Apart from answering any last minute questions he might have, I mostly wanted to review those areas where I felt I had been deficient in my own life as a Christian man and father. And I was trusting my confession would motivate Randal to surpass me in his walk with God.

When I got home, Randal and I settled down into the quiet seclusion of the studio apartment he would soon share with his bride. He listened intently as I reviewed my deficiencies and challenged him to rise above my own example. When I was finished, he assured me that by the grace of God, he would do his best. He then responded by expressing his encouragement, his forgiveness, his gratitude, his respect, and most of all, his love. Yet it was what he did next that made the deepest impression on me.

He went into his little room for a minute and came out with a pen and a notebook. Following my example, he began to recall times in his life where he had been unresponsive, difficult and disobedient. Then he went a step further, with his notebook open and pen ready, he solicited my

observations on specific details of his character and how he might improve. Not only, was he inviting correction, insight, and counsel, but it was obvious that he was committed to acting on it.

Even now, I remember his example and am provoked by his example of humility. How understandable it would have been for him to be preoccupied on his wedding day! Instead, recognizing a unique opportunity to hear from his father as he stood on the threshold of great new responsibilities, he seized the moment.

He had provoked me similarly a year before. Erin had flown out to spend ten days with us as our guest, getting to know Randal's friends and family. On our final night together, my wife Dee and I took them out to dinner. After our meal, I asked whether they believed the Lord was directing their friendship toward marriage. Randal (already a wise man) let Erin answer first. She openly affirmed that she felt this was God's leading. When it was his turn to speak, though, he seemed quite cautious and vague with his answers (You should have seen Erin's face!). I then suggested that Erin probably needed to hear a little more than he had expressed.

His response was not what I expected; it will stay with me for the rest of my life. "Dad," he said, "I have learned there are areas in my life where I cannot trust myself. I need your help."

Recognizing the immensity of this decision, he sought something more objective than the whirlwind of his own emotions. He wanted the truth of God's will. And there, in front of the woman he hoped to marry, my son Randal had the humility to ask his father. I think you'll be able to understand why, in that moment, I could not hold back my tears.

In his first epistle, Peter summarizes my reason for sharing this story at length. "Young men, in the same way, be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time." (1 Peter 5:5-6) Pride has plagued humanity from the beginning. It is a deceptive cancer, mutating and multiplying at any point when it is unopposed. "There is no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves," wrote C.S. Lewis, "The more we hate it in ourselves, the more we dislike it in others." His conclusion should strike fear in our hearts: "As long as you are proud, you cannot know God."

Scripture tells us a great deal about how to attain humility. Best of all, it reveals the One who humbled himself on the cross for us. If I had space, I

would explore some of these biblical passages with you. But instead, I'll leave you with one last glimpse of my son...

It was my privilege to perform the ceremony as Randal and Erin became husband and wife. I watched them gaze into each other's eyes, fully enjoying the moment. As I reflected on the humility with which they had submitted their lives and futures to God, I knew their marriage would be anointed with His favor and His grace.