

## Leadership Letter 21

(Note: this is the 21<sup>st</sup> in a series of "Leadership Letters." You can read previous letters at our web-site. Go to [www.GraceGlobalNetwork.org](http://www.GraceGlobalNetwork.org) and look under the "encouragement" section.)

### The Blind Side

I just started reading an intriguing book. You maybe familiar with Michael Lewis, author of *Money Ball*, a look inside the world of major league baseball. Now Lewis has turned his attention to football, with the release of his newest book "*The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game.*"

It's the sort of book that you might categorize as just another true story about football. After all, there are X's and O's of a diagramed play on the dust jacket, and the opening chapter vividly recounts one of the most famously gruesome moments in the history of the National Football League, when Lawrence Taylor of the New York Giants broke the leg of Washington Redskins quarterback Joe Theismann in a nationally televised game in 1985.

But Lewis goes much deeper. He tells the story of Michael Oher (pronounced "Oar"), one of 13 children who grew up in a poverty-stricken neighborhood in Memphis, Tennessee. When we are first introduced to him in the book, he's uneducated, painfully shy and raised haphazardly by a drug-addicted mother. He's a physical presence: 6-foot-5 inches and 350 pounds, but he had hardly ever touched a football. In short, this back teenager is as far removed as one could imagine from the exclusive Briarcrest Christian School on the other side of town – which he would improbably attend – and from the Tuohys, the wealthy white evangelical Christian family who would tutor him, nurture him and make him one of their own.

Lewis focuses on Michael's position – left offensive tackle, which protects the blind side of a right-handed quarterback, and describes how that position has evolved into one of the highest-paying jobs in the NFL – and touches on the larger issues of education, race, socio-economics and the business of big-time college athletics along the way.

In a recent interview, Lewis said, "*It became very clear to me that if Michael hadn't crossed out of poor, black Memphis and made his way into rich, white Memphis, he never would have been discovered. If he hadn't been protected by this affluent and savvy family, his career probably would've been over before it really started.*" Lewis says one of the most shocking aspects of Oher's story is the fact that he was overlooked for so long, "*because he's the most conspicuous person you've ever seen.*"

Recruited intensely by major colleges, Oher chose the University of Mississippi, the alma mater of Sean Tuohy (pronounced "TOO-ee") and his wife, Leigh Anne. He has just completed his sophomore season as the starting left tackle for Ole Miss and, barring injury or some other setback, seems destined for greatness – and riches – in the NFL.

## **The Left Tackle**

Getting blind-sided is no fun. I remember watching the game that Monday night in 1985 when Lawrence Taylor blind-sided Theismann and broke his leg. It didn't just break – it snapped, and you could see it and hear it all over the stadium. It ended Theismann's hall-of-fame career ... and underscored the need for a left tackle that would always have his quarterback's back.

*"I've got you covered."* That's what a left-tackle is supposed to do. Give the quarterback the time to get the throw off to his receivers. In a word, protection.

That is precisely why enormous, athletic kids are being groomed and heavily recruited in high school for a job that, as recently as 20 years ago, was as unheralded as any other along the offensive line. Quarterbacks need protection.

How does that apply to us? Recent moral failures by Christian leaders remind us again of our need for protection also. We fight a real enemy – and he is out there throwing real darts. Ephesians 6:14-16 says,

*Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*

## **Protecting Our Blind Side**

Who's got you covered? And who are you covering? Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, *"And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him — a threefold cord is not quickly broken."* We need each other. You need someone else protecting your blind side – and someone else needs your encouragement and protection also.

How do you protect someone? Certainly God protects us. He gives us His Spirit as a seal (Ephesians 4:30). He promises never to leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He delivers us, protects us, provides for us, and gives us Himself as a place of safe refuge (Psalm 34).

But we must also serve as brothers in protecting one another. And that's where accountability comes in. Accountability has become a popular term in the Christian community in the last twenty-five years, but I've always been plagued with one question: how can you hold someone accountable who doesn't want it? Answer: you can't! I've known guys who have lied to their accountability partners. I've known men who skirted (no pun intended) the accountability process and pulled the wool over the eyes of guys who thought there was honesty, openness and vulnerability in their relationship. Accountability will take you only as far as both of you want to go.

Having said that, it remains true that accountability is critical. Each of us needs to be accountable to someone else – and there are a couple of key principles we need to remember that will help protect us.

## 1. The power of "being there"

"Just listening" sounds unimportant, maybe even unhelpful. Nothing could be further from the truth! We all need someone to listen to us, to empathize with us and to be a fellow-feeler as we go through life. It's the power of knowing that someone cares, that they are there for you. I recently told a friend of mine how important he was in my life with the words, "I know you're always there for me."

Fifteen years ago, Linda knew her dad was dying. It would be his last Christmas – and she struggled with what kind of a present to get her dad. She finally settled on writing a letter that she presented it to him on Christmas morning. Here's what it said:

*Dear Dad,*

*This Christmas I wanted to give you something very special. As I looked around and shopped, nothing seemed to be the right gift. Either it was out of my budget's reach or it just wasn't right.*

*The more I thought about it, I decided to give you a special "Thank You."*

*I know that you and I won't have many more Christmases together on this earth. And I'm going to miss the warm hugs and kisses, smiles, and hello's on the phone. Dad, our relationship is so special and one that I pray daily for Becca and Henry to have.*

*So Dad, I want to wish you a special Merry Christmas and to say THANK YOU! Thank you for leading and guiding our family in the way that you have for all of my 34 years.*

*You have led our family through many trials and many joys with dignity and upstanding morality and ethical judgments. You should be proud, Dad. I am.*

*Dad, one of my favorite books is "What Is A Family," by Edith Schaeffer. It talks about how the family unit as a living, loving unit is being threatened today as never before and it presents a heartening view of family life.*

*The chapter titles about the home include "The Birthplace of Creativity," "A Formation Center for Human Relationships," "A Shelter in the Time of Storm," "A Perpetual Relay of Truth," and "A Museum of Memories."*

*Dad, our home growing up contained all of these. And it still does. I think of the chapter "A Museum of Memories." There are so many memories of growing up in our home. You and mom were always there to say "I love you," or "It's going to be all right."*

*You and mom sat through many gymnastics meets rooting me on. You kept the nightly watch as I left for dates, and you prayed I would get home safely. I'll never forget the time you sat in the hospital with me when I had arthritis and you cried. That's the first time I ever saw you cry and I told you, "Daddy, I love you. It's going to be all right." I remember the day you gave me away to Henry, with a smile on your face and a tear in your eye.*

*And I have fond memories as you held each of my children only minutes after each one was born. And even today, how all three of them love to go see Memaw and Pepaw and sit on your lap and play rocket ship as we used to do.*

*Dad, thank you. Thank you always for being there for our family. Thank you for always being truthful with us, and for making us be truthful with you. Thank you for disciplining us and making us understand the value of right and wrong.*

*But most of all, thank you to you and mom for sharing Jesus Christ with us. The greatest gift ever given to us by God was Him, and the gift does go on. Understanding that personal relationship with Christ has provided hope for the*

*future, an understanding that success is not found in monetary value, but in the hope of salvation through that relationship with Christ, eternal life, and a peace in my heart and life that can handle most anything.*

*Dad, thank you that you lived out a relationship with Christ in front of us. You showed us your failures as well as your successes; and no matter what happened you always trusted Christ to take care of us and see us through. And you modeled that trust in front of us.*

*Today, as I look at my family, I have a husband who loves me dearly, and one who is a great and loving father to our three children.*

*As Henry and I share with others the love of Christ and what a difference He can make in their lives and their marriages, Dad, remember that you and Mom played a major role in each time we share. I had a great model to show me how to live.*

*I want you to know, Dad, how much I love you! What we have in our relationship is special.*

*Dad, whenever the Lord calls us home to heaven it will be wonderful. But I know at least when you get there, the Lord will say, "Son, you ran the race, you finished the course. Job well done."*

*Thank you Dad, for being a dad that I can be proud of. Love, Linda.*

I submit that on that Christmas morning, Linda's dad got the greatest gift he could receive. He had "been there" for Linda – and now he knew how much that meant to her.

Guys, we may not have all the answers – but we can at least "be there" for our friends. We can "be there" for our wives and kids. Communicate your commitment to them.

## **2. The protection of "asking the tough questions"**

What do I mean by "tough questions?" Those are the questions that are often uncomfortable to ask someone else. One of the reasons may be that we would find ourselves uncomfortable in answering them if they were asked of us. Questions like:

- Have you been anywhere on the Internet that you would be ashamed if someone knew about it?
- Have you been looking at pornography?
- Have you had inappropriate physical contact with a member of the opposite sex?
- Have you had lustful or impure thoughts?
- Have you told me the truth and not lied?

Pat Morley has designed an accountability questionnaire for men that many have found helpful over the years. Designed for guys who meet on a regular, weekly basis, it helps them protect each other and is reproduced below.

## **The Weekly One-Hour Accountability Check-Up**

adapted from Patrick Morley, *The Man in the Mirror*

### **Suggested Guidelines**

1. Try to ensure each person gets "equal air time." However, if one of you has a particularly hard struggle one week, be flexible enough to focus on that issue even if it takes the entire hour.
2. Let each person work through a section at a time, then let the other(s) answer. This will keep things moving better.
3. Don't neglect the prayer time.
4. Review these notes on Accountability once every six months with the group. Your understanding of accountability will grow and change over time.
5. Stick it out. You will want to quit, perhaps often. Ask God to strengthen you when you want to give up.
6. Hold each other accountable for the goals you set for yourselves and to the standards of God's Word.
7. Never forget the purpose of accountability: to each day become more Christ-like in all of our ways. Remember it is Jesus who is the object of our search, our devotion, our sacrifice, and our affection. Anything else than intimacy with the living Lord will be a pallid achievement of your time together.
8. Finally, if you are uncomfortable with the format, feel free to alter these questions and type up your own accountability checklist. The substance is more important than the form. You may want to divide the key areas among more than one accountability partner.

### **Questions to Start Off the Meetings**

1. How has God blessed you this week? (What went right?)
2. What problem has consumed your thoughts this week? (What went wrong?)

### **Spiritual Life**

1. Have you read God's Word daily? How long? Why not? Will you do it next week?
2. Describe your prayers? (for yourself, for others, praise, confession, thanksgiving . . . )
3. How is your relationship with Christ changing?
4. How have you been tempted this week? How did you respond?
5. Do you have any unconfessed sin in your life?
6. Are you walking in the Spirit?
7. Did you worship in church this week? Was your faith in Jesus strengthened? Was He honored?
8. Have you shared your faith? In what ways? How can you improve?

### **Home Life**

1. How is it going with your wife? (attitudes, time, irritations, disappointments, progress, her relationship with Christ)
2. How is it going with the kids? (quantity and quality of time, values and beliefs, education, spiritual welfare)
3. How are your finances doing? (debts, sharing, saving, stewardship)

## **Work Life**

1. How are things going on the job? (career progress, relationships, temptations, work load, stress, problems, working too much)

## **Critical Concerns**

1. Do you feel in the center of God's will? Do you sense His peace?
2. What are you wrestling with in your thought life?
3. What have you done for someone else this week? (the poor, encouragement, service)
4. Are your priorities in the right order?
5. Is your moral and ethical behavior what it should be?
6. How are you doing in your personal high-risk area?
7. Is the "visible" you and the "real" you consistent in this relationship?

## **Prayer**

Close the one-hour accountability check-up with ten to fifteen minutes of prayer. Focus on concerns for the week.

Hey guys, who is protecting your blind side?