

PREZ RELEASE

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WHAT DO YOU REMIND PEOPLE OF?

I will admit to periods of time in my life when I am a sports fanatic. I'm a life-long fan of a baseball team that has had a bad 20th Century. . .the Chicago Cubs. I love the excitement of college football and basketball. Having attended the University of Illinois I am partial toward the Big Ten conference. Recently one of the icons of Big Ten basketball has been under fire. Bobby Knight, the fiery coach at Indiana University has been under attack for allegedly grabbing a player by the throat during a practice. The sports commentators are certainly enjoying waxing eloquent on this issue. While there's all kind of analysis on this issue it seems as if opinions are quite polarized; **either people want to see Coach Knight fired or think that this is just sports and winning coaches must be given space.**

The media coverage of this "event" has focused on an alleged home video taken of Coach Knight with his hand on the player's throat. The other image that ESPN, Fox Sports and CNN/SI have offered us (ad nauseum) is Bobby Knight throwing chairs at referees. In fact when we think of Bobby Knight most of us remember little but images of flying chairs and choking basketball players.

For every Christian the current focus on Bobby Knight poses a very poignant question.. What do you remind people of? When people, particularly those you know well and work with, think of you, what images come across their minds? That reminder/image of our character is a powerful part of our witness as a Christian, and a crucial part of our effectiveness as a leader.

Just as Jesus commands us to "do this in remembrance of me. . .until I come" as we partake of Holy Communion, it's also appropriate for us to ask ourselves what people remember about each of us when we are apart. In other words, we sometimes think that the only way we can influence someone is when we are face to face. Could it be the very memory of a person also has a powerful impact? (For example, my only grandchild, Dara Nichole Goodwin, can brighten my day simply by me seeing her picture or thinking about the last time I held her.) Our pragmatic tendencies may ask the question, "Ok, how can I remind people of a loving God?" The more important question may actually be, "who am I as a reminder to people of a living God?"

Henri Nouwen, in his wonderful little book, The Living Reminder says that before any professional skill, we need a spirituality, a way of living in the presence of God by which all we are and all we do becomes a form of reminding.

As a Christian leader I am well aware that the strategy of the principalities and power is to disconnect me from the memory of God. All my activity may serve my organization, but when I'm not walking in the presence of God, I can't remind anybody

of God. I may, in fact, end up being “in the way” of people experiencing God. Rather than walking in God’s presence I simply end up walking in a vicious cycle of activity and pulling other people into that circle.

Nouwen says that to be a living reminder of God, we must first be concerned about our own intimacy with God. Once we have heard, seen and watched the Word who is life, we can’t do anything but be living reminders and do so as a spontaneous response.

There are certain people we want to be in our corner when times are rough. My experience has been that these people are most likely deeply rooted in a relationship with God that impacts us. When we look them in the eye or when we are apart, these people point us to God and an assurance that despite what seems to be tragedy, God is still Ruler of His kingdom.

So I’ll let ESPN and CNN/SI take care of evaluating the Bobby Knight case – **I just know flying chairs don’t connect us to God!**

NOTE: books and websites yet to come.