

Pride Fighter (Serving - Chapter 5)

n/a

Ready:

Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage. Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.

Philippians 2:5-8

Set

Tim Tebow, the 2007 Heisman Trophy winner and member of the 2006-07 National Championship Florida Gators, wasn't supposed to be a superstar quarterback. In fact, if his mother's, Pam Tebow's, doctors would have had their way, his birth would have been permanently postponed.

In early 1987, Pam and her husband, Bob, were serving as missionaries in the Philippines. Pam was pregnant with Tim when she contracted amoebic dysentery—an intestinal infection caused by the presence of parasites in food or drink. Because of the strong possibility that the drugs she needed to combat the infection would endanger the unborn child, Pam Tebow's doctors strongly suggested that she have an abortion. After all, in their opinion, if the baby survived, it would very likely suffer from severe disabilities.

Every negative report was proven wrong on August 14, when a perfectly healthy boy was welcomed into the world. Tebow lived in the Philippines with his family until he was three years old, but his unusual life was just beginning. In Jacksonville, Florida, he and his four siblings were all home-schooled by their mother, despite the fact that the practice was very uncommon at the time.

“I was the youngest, so for me it was pretty normal being home-schooled,” Tebow says. “But when my parents starting home-schooling, it was an odd thing. No one really knew about it. They didn't always get praise for doing it, and some people frowned upon it. But my parents figured, ‘Hey, there are some things we want our children to learn that are more important than academics.’ It's not that they weren't stressing academics, which they were, but they were emphasizing more biblical things and character more than anything else. That's why my parents chose to home-school—so that we would learn to praise God and have character before learning our ABCs or how to add. I'm thankful to my parents for doing that and instilling those things into me and my siblings.”

One of the persistent knocks against home-schooling has been the lack of extracurricular

activities available to students not attending traditional public or private institutions. But in Florida, that changed in 1996 when legislation was passed allowing home-schooled students the opportunity to participate in local high-school sports and other competitive activities.

Tebow was showing signs of athleticism, and the new law allowed him to play football at Trinity Christian Academy in Jacksonville, where he was a linebacker. But his desire to play quarterback in a passing offense caused him to search out other options. That search led him to Nease High School in Ponte Vedra Beach, where he and his mother moved into an apartment in the same county to gain eligibility. By his junior season, Tebow was on every major college's recruiting list. His status was solidified when as a senior he led his team to the state title. He was also named to the prestigious All-State team. Tebow's exploits as a home-school prodigy eventually led advocates in the neighboring state of Alabama to create the Tim Tebow Bill, which would give its home-school athletes the same rights to compete on local high-school sports teams.

When others try to heap praise on Tebow for the inspiration he has provided to so many people at such a young age, he is quick to give credit to his serving-minded parents, who diligently taught him about Jesus. But ultimately, Tebow says, he had to come to that life-changing decision on his own.

"I was blessed to grow up in a Christian home," he says. "We always went to church every Sunday, but it never really clicked for me until a few years down the road. I realized when I was still pretty young that even though I was a pretty good person, I was a sinner too. Maybe I wasn't doing things that were superbad in the eyes of the world, but I was still a sinner, and I needed a Savior. I realized that Christ died on the cross for my sins, and if I put my trust in Him, I'd have eternal life in heaven. I knew I needed that. I needed a Savior, and Jesus Christ was knocking on the door of my heart. So I received Him into my heart, and He's there with me today."

When it came time to choose where to play college football, Tebow's faith was a strong component in the decision-making process. He eventually chose the tradition-rich University of Florida, which touted the 1996 National Championship and numerous NFL alumni, including Jack Youngblood, Cris Collinsworth, Emmitt Smith, Ike Hilliard and Jevon Kearse, as well as Heisman Trophy winners Steve Spurrier and Danny Wuerffel.

His choice paid off almost immediately. As a freshman, he played a significant part in the Gators' second BCS National Championship team during the 2006-07 campaign. Although Tebow was a backup quarterback to senior Chris Leak, he made major contributions as a dual-threat option and was called upon regularly in several key moments—including two touchdown passes and a rushing touchdown against Southeastern Conference opponent LSU and a touchdown pass and a rushing touchdown against Ohio State in the 2007 BCS National Championship game.

Tebow took the reins as quarterback as a sophomore in 2007 and proceeded to break multiple SEC and NCAA records. He became the first NCAA player to rush for 20 touchdowns and pass for 20 touchdowns in the same season. Tebow's ability to run and throw at equally high levels of proficiency earned him numerous accolades, including the Maxwell Award, the Davey O'Brien Award and consensus First Team All-American honors.

He topped off his second season by becoming the first sophomore to win the prestigious Heisman Trophy, generally recognized as the ultimate prize in all of college football. Yet

amazingly, Tebow has done his best to deflect much of the praise and redirect it elsewhere.

“I am not out there playing for myself,” Tebow says. “I love the game, but I am playing for the Lord Jesus Christ. I am going out there and loving the game and giving everything I have 100 percent and hoping that they can see the love of Christ through me.”

Some might assume that Tebow’s humility has more to do with his laid-back personality or perhaps his humble beginnings in a missionary family. But there’s so much more to his selfless style of leadership than meets the eye. In fact, Tebow looks at his role as a high-profile quarterback the same as any other position in life.

“I think anything can be a ministry, especially football, because you have a platform,” Tebow says. “You have 100 guys in the locker room with you every day. But more importantly than that, you have 1,000 kids looking up to you and a lot of people all across the country—you have the opportunity and platform to share with them, and to not take advantage of that would be a big mistake.”

According to the University of Florida media relations department, Tebow has received more than 200 requests for appearances and speaking engagements since his on-campus arrival. These inquiries have ranged from a diverse list of organizations including churches, youth ministries, schools and civic groups across the southeastern United States. Tebow credits Fellowship of Christian Athletes for much of his current understanding of what ministry looks like. He attended FCA events with his father and brothers as a five year old and has been involved ever since. His brother Robbie Tebow, in fact, is the organization’s area director over North Florida.

Even with such a solid supporting cast of family members and spiritual mentors, Tebow says playing football on such a large platform presents its challenges. Thankfully, the wisdom that has been imparted into his life thus far provides an escape from the temptation of letting pride, self-importance and out-of-whack priorities take control.

“It’s tough,” Tebow admits. “You love a game like football. You love to play it. You love everything about it. It’s tough once you’ve done it for so long to not let it become the number one thing in your life, not to let that become your god. You always have to realize that there are more important things than playing football or winning games or throwing a touchdown pass. It’s more about how you’re treating people and your relationship with Jesus Christ. Are you giving Him the honor and glory for everything? It takes staying in His Word and staying humble and realizing that there are things that are more important than football. I think that’s the number one thing for me.”

Tebow has also benefited from the example of boldness, courage, strength and humility that his father has set for him. Having those attributes engrained into his heart, mind and soul has given him a unique understanding of the difficult concept of serving.

“To me, serving means putting others’ needs in front of your needs,” Tebow says. “It’s doing what you can to take care of other people before you focus on your own wants and needs. I learned the biblical principles of serving when I was very young, especially seeing how my parents have given of their time, life and money to serve others around them.”

Although Tebow was only three years old when he and his family moved back to Florida from the Philippines, he has been privileged to make several trips back to the heavily populated

islands located in Southeast Asia. The experience has been both positive and educational.

“Meeting all of those different people who have nothing and are poor gave me an appreciation for what my family and I have,” Tebow says. “It provided me with the perspective of taking nothing for granted. It also allowed me to see the effect that I could have on those people. For some, the belief in Christ is all that they have and is much more important than money or material possessions.”

Tebow believes that his experience has also helped him to not get caught up in all the stress that is involved in being a leading college quarterback. “Going to the Philippines with my dad and being at the orphanage and hanging out with the kids help keep me from getting too wrapped up in what’s going to happen on fourth down,” Tebow says. “Instead, it lets me realize how much of a blessing it is to have the athletic ability to go out there and play football. That takes a lot of pressure off. It lets you go out there and enjoy playing and have fun.”

Off the field, Tebow has quickly earned the reputation of having an eager willingness to serve the community, though, he admits, he must constantly be on the lookout for the enemies of serving, which include personal ambition and pride. “I think pride is an issue for everybody,” Tebow says. “It is always an issue for everybody. You have to stay humble and realize that God gave you your abilities, and He can take them away at any time. You just have to be thankful for them and try to use the talents that God gave you to influence as many people as you can.”

Long before Tebow was a Heisman Trophy winner and an All-American, his ministry-focused parents laid a solid foundation that has since helped keep his pride in check. “It’s funny, but when I was very young in t-ball and stuff, my parents would never let me tell anyone how many home runs I hit or how many touchdowns I scored,” he recalls. “They would never let me say it until the other person would ask me. So when I was five or six or seven, I’d always want to be like, ‘I just hit three homeruns,’ but I was never allowed to tell them until they asked me. That was a lesson I learned when I was really young. God blessed me with athletic ability, and that can be taken away in an instant. So I’ve just been thankful for it and never let myself get too proud. Just because you play football doesn’t make you any more special than anybody else.

“I like to think that I’ve been able to use many of the valuable lessons that my parents have taught me. I am fortunate to have family members, coaches and teammates around who can help me stay focused on the right things for me to be successful. For me, every day includes four things: God, family, academics and football—in that order. And that’s thanks to my family. Seeing how my parents have raised us and provided everything we can possibly need is a comforting feeling. I have been so blessed to have an amazing support group, and knowing how passionate they are about God and us kids has inspired me.”

Ironically, Tebow says that being a high-profile athlete actually has made serving easier. That’s because opportunities to spend time with others and to share the gospel with them are always lurking around the corner. But Tebow still remains careful to convey a message of humility and selflessness to the various groups he addresses. He passionately points others to Jesus, who, according to Philippians 2:7, “emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men.”

“Jesus was the best leader ever, so you can learn everything about leadership from Him,” Tebow says. “Seeing how He died on the cross for you and just learning from the best leader

ever, you can just take that and apply it to your life in every aspect—not just leadership but also how you handle talking and interacting with people.”

Tebow can't predict his future, although most NFL Draft prognosticators seem to think he will have a long professional career ahead of him. One thing is for certain: Finding ways to reach out and serve others will always be a part of his life. That includes working with his father's ministry—the Bob Tebow Evangelistic Association—and assisting more than 40 national evangelists working in the Philippines.

“After football, I'd like to be involved again in the ministry in some way,” Tebow says. “The Philippines are pretty special to me, and every year in high school up until college, I've been part of a group my dad would take there. It is a great experience. We go into medical clinics, hospitals, prisons, market places and schools. You preach and help out. We go to the orphanage and a lot of things like that. It's a great experience. I love going every year, and I can't wait until I go back.

“The Philippines is definitely in my future after football. When you come back home, you're grateful for everything that God's given you, and you see how blessed you are.”

Go

1. Tim Tebow's story is wrapped in many elements of humility, including the circumstances of his birth, his early life in the Philippines and his subsequent home-schooling background. What parts of your life story might help you to remain humble amid personal success?
2. Tebow says, “Maybe I wasn't doing things that were superbad in the eyes of the world, but I was still a sinner and I needed a Savior.” Read Romans 3:23. When did you first realize, like Tebow, the truth found in that passage? How did it change your life?
3. After winning the 2007 Heisman Trophy, Tebow could have easily given in to prideful thinking, but instead he chose to remain humble. Read Isaiah 2:11. How can that passage help you to keep an attitude of humility regardless of the amount of success you achieve? What are the dangers that often accompany pride?
4. Read Philippians 2:5-8. In what ways did Jesus display humility when He was on Earth? How might the average person have acted differently if he or she possessed the same divine heritage? To what extreme did Jesus take His selfless attitude? How does that sacrificial act inspire you to follow in His footsteps?
5. How does eradicating pride from your life make it easier to serve God and others? What are some ways that you might be able to rid your heart of pride?

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Bible Reference:

Philippians 2



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