

## Finding His “Magnanimitas” within us

We all have moments of truth.

According to Bill Curry, former head football coach at the University of Alabama, Georgia Tech, the University of Kentucky, and Georgia State University, there are times we look back and only then do we realize we had a moment of truth.

“Those are the epiphanies,” Curry said during the discussion he led on “Magnanimitas – allowing His greatest gift in you to be revealed” on Tuesday, May 13<sup>th</sup> at BELIEVES, hosted at Christ the King.

Curry began his remarks sharing with those in attendance that there are two pains in life – the pain of discipline and the pain of regret.

“The pain we experience from God’s discipline is brief as we give up temptation,” Curry said. “The pain of regret lasts the rest of our lives and into eternity.”

On the second pain – the pain of regret, Curry added, “I know God’s forgiven me, but I have trouble forgiving myself.”



When Curry began his football coaching career at Georgia Tech in the 1980s the program – in his words – had fallen apart. They couldn’t sell tickets in the south stands because the stands had literally fallen apart.

Then along came Dr. Homer Rice, Athletic Director at Georgia tech from 1980 to 1997.

Curry recalled, “Homer came in one day and said, ‘We are going to teach The Total Person Program here – spiritual, mental, the whole thing.’ He hands it to me, Bobby Cremins, and the other coaches. We had a lot of energy, but I didn’t get it.”

A few days later, Dr. Rice stopped in and asked how the program was going.

“After I responded,” Curry related, “he said, ‘This Thursday at 11 AM you’ll do this with your whole team and I will be there.’”

According to Curry, over the next 20 years, Georgia Tech experienced the greatest transformation of athletic programs in the whole NCAA – including building a women’s athletics program from scratch raising \$100 million for facilities,

increasing athletic fund raising from less than \$700,000 annually to over \$5,000,000 annually, and bringing national respect back to Georgia Tech athletics.

In fact, The Total Person Program is now the model for NCAA Life Skills Program that is in place at universities throughout the nation.

During one football game against rival University of Virginia, amidst the transformation going on at Georgia Tech, Curry's daughter, Kristin, was interviewed and asked, "Why does your dad always wear black clothes and black sunglasses?"

Kristin responded, "I don't know, but I think he thinks that he looks cool."

The moment was pivotal for Curry.

"She was right," Curry shared with emotion. "I thought it was because of me."

A year later Curry was in Chattanooga, TN, when he saw a word etched in stone at Baylor School. The word was Magnanimitas, meaning "Greatness of Spirit."

"If we do not locate our Magnanimitas, each of us will never be the man or woman God intended us to be," Curry said.

Then he added, "I couldn't see how arrogant I was until my daughter called me on it in that interview response, and I am thankful for it. I'm 71 now, and I don't think I'm cool now. I think you are. You're unique, precious, God's greatest gift."

Curry believes that even today we don't understand Magnanimitas.

"We have all these debates about things that don't matter. It's the moments of truth where things happen," Curry said.

Curry reflected on his NFL playing career next, sharing with everyone that when he finished college and entered the NFL, he was the last draft choice of the 1964 Green Bay Packers. At the time, the NFL had 20 rounds in the NFL draft and the Green Bay Packers were considered by many to be the greatest team in the history of sports.

Curry recalled, "After 19 rounds, I learned that Lombardi told his colleague on the Packers staff, 'It's 2 AM and we've already drafted 19 guys – do something humorous with the last pick.' They drafted me."

In college, Curry had been coached by legendary coach, Bobby Dodd, at Georgia Tech.

"For me, there was quite a contrast between Bobby Dodd and Vince Lombardi," Curry stated. "Lombardi would cuss all the time, and I'd judge him. Lombardi would also always walk telling us – 'Religion, Family, and the Green Bay Packers – in that order.'"

At one point, Curry went to Bart Starr, the quarterback for the Packers, the only veteran Curry said would talk with rookies, and talked to Starr about Lombardi.

"Starr told me, 'Lombardi is religious. He goes to church every morning. After three weeks you'll see he needs to go to church every day,'" Curry said with a chuckle.

Curry shared he would go to practice every day, and line up against Ray Nitschke, the Packers All-Pro middle linebacker, but Nitschke wasn't Curry's greatest problem.

"My biggest problem was I'd never been in a huddle with an African American," Curry said.

Curry added, "Lombardi's greatest strength was that he allowed no prejudice. He cared a lot if you could play football and were a good person."

After being on the Packers for a while, one day, Curry had an unexpected encounter with the defensive captain for the Packers, Willie Davis.

“Davis was our captain, but he was also going for his Master’s at the University of Chicago while on the Packers,” Curry retold. “He broke every stereotype.”

One day Curry said he heard a voice from behind him say, “Bill, I see you at practice. I like the way you work so hard. I’m going to help you make this team.”

The voice was Willie’s.

Curry said he responded, “You are going to help me?”

Then Willie told Curry something he said he will never forget.

“Willie said, ‘Lombardi is 9-1 in the playoffs – the one loss coming to the Philadelphia Eagles. There were a lot of papers on the field that day in Philadelphia, but there were also a lot of regrets,’” Curry recalled.

That moment, Curry said, changed his life.

“It was unexpected. Unrewarded,” said Curry. “When I became the first coach at Georgia State, the first person to speak to our team was Willie Davis – 45 years later, all the way from his home in Los Angeles.”

In the years after their playing careers had ended, Curry would always ask Willie why he did that for him.

“Willie would say, ‘I don’t know,’” Curry said. “Finally, one time later he told me, ‘OK, it was my Christian faith that led me to do that.’ He put it right back on me.”

Curry shared that his animosity towards Lombardi as a player had been extensive. Ultimately, Lombardi put Curry on the Expansion List after a few years. Curry was then traded to the Saints, and then to Baltimore where Don Shula coached.

“Once Shula recognizes your Magnanimitas, he will never give up on you,” Curry shared with a smile.

In Curry’s NFL career, he was the starting center in Super Bowls I, III, and V, hiking the ball to both Johnny Unitas and Bart Starr. He was the only player in Super Bowl III to have played for both Lombardi and Shula.

After Super Bowl III had ended, Curry, unaccustomed to interviews, was interviewed for some remarks.

“I trashed Lombardi in that interview,” Curry said with emotion. “Paul Hornung came up to me later and said, ‘You trashed the old man’ (referring to Lombardi). He’d treat you like his long lost son.’ I told Hornung, ‘No he’d treat me like dirt like on the field.’”

“Talk about a moment of truth – I was invited to the President’s Prayer Breakfast a few years later and as I am walking down a hall, who’s the only person – coming from the other direction – Lombardi,” Curry stated. “I couldn’t avoid him. He greeted me like his long lost son.”

Later, when Lombardi was in the hospital prior to his death, one of Curry’s former teammates invited him to go to the hospital with him to see Lombardi. When he saw Lombardi’s wife, he told her that he came to apologize for his irresponsible remarks about Lombardi.

Lombardi’s wife brought Curry into the room with Lombardi.

“When I saw him and told him this, Lombardi said, ‘You can mean a lot for my life if you’ll pray for me,’” Curry recalled. “What did the great man do for the terrified kid ... he treated him with grace and Magnanimitas.”

Before the session concluded, Curry invited everyone to reflect on moments of Magnanimitas in their lives when the Holy Spirit was present, and several shared comments about memorable moments that brought tears to many.



One moment was shared by Susan O’Dwyer, Director of Business Development, for Habif, Arogeti & Wynne, LLP.

“I have a Coach Curry story,” O’Dwyer said.

O’Dwyer recounted that when her husband and she lived in Michigan they went to the bank to buy a house and it took several hours to work through the bank paperwork.

“The banker we were working with had a picture on her desk of a handsome young man,” O’Dwyer said. “She told us it was a picture of her son and that he played football for Coach Curry at Georgia State.”

A few months later, O’Dwyer was at a luncheon and happened to sit at the same table as Coach Curry.

“I mentioned to you (Curry), ‘I want to tell you this story’ and then described the bank and the banker,” O’Dwyer shared. “It took you less than 15 seconds, and you said the player’s name.”

O’Dwyer said she was amazed Curry could know the player’s name because he’s coached so many young men. She simply couldn’t believe he could remember this one player so well, and asked him how he knew that.

“What you said next is something that I have remembered ever since and have repeated at every leadership event I’ve been to,” O’Dwyer related. “You said, ‘Well, I wouldn’t be much of a coach if I didn’t know my players and their families.’”