

# Know a Man's Heart

In 1980 presidential candidate Ronald Reagan, realizing he was a controversial figure, won over the news media by opening his heart. Reporters traveling with him on the campaign tour aboard his chartered plane felt positive. On board the atmosphere was warm and upbeat. At every takeoff, Willie Nelson's *On the Road Again* was played on the p.a. system. Nancy Reagan would stand at the front of the plane and roll an orange down the aisle, trying to get it all the way to the back. Reagan would walk the aisle, chatting. Close relationships developed between Reagan and the reporters. The result was "good press," written and spoken by those whose natural critical spirits were blunted by a man who let them into his heart.

If you know a man's heart, you'll be slow to criticize him—and slower to receive it of him.

If a man accuses my wife, he will very quickly have to deal with me. My stock answer: "I know my wife. Therefore, to keep from paying high dental bills I suggest you shut up."

The same holds true when folks try to bad mouth my friends. I won't receive it.

Several years ago some of my friends openly condemned those who were in the "discipleship movement," likening them to cult leaders. I urged them to go slow with their book burning and tape erasing. "I know these men," I argued. "Just because you disapprove of a man's methods does not mean you should disapprove of the man. Look upon their hearts."

People don't like to judge a man's heart. They prefer to judge his words. Or his deeds. Or his doctrine.

I am glad for the laborious time I have spent in the past cultivating relationships. These are not based on doctrinal agreement or similarity of ministry. They are based on respect—and friendship.

The best way I know to settle a doctrinal argument is on a volleyball court. Once you've sweated together, it's hard to condemn. Sometimes it's good to spend time rolling oranges. It gives us an opportunity to know each other's heart. Thus, when accusations arise, we can defend, rather than join those who reach for stones.

Recently I flew to Dallas to spend an afternoon and evening with Bob Tilton, the dynamic Dallas pastor and businessman who has established a national TV satellite network. From his spacious transmitting station in north Dallas, Tilton beams up seminars, motivational teaching courses, specialized leadership classes, and his own church services to more than 1,500 enthusiastic churches around the nation—each with its own satellite receiving dish.

I had heard all kinds of criticism of Tilton. But when I listened to him preach on TV, even though I was almost overwhelmed by his methods, I could find little theological fault. I decided to go see for myself. Any man who stirs that much controversy can't be all wrong.

Tilton opened his heart. He showed me his financial structure. He showed me (without showing off) his operation. He introduced me to

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his people at the 9,000-member Word of Faith Church. I was impressed that

everyone at the 8-year-old church—including the paper hanger in his sparkling new \$5 million office building—called him "Bob." I admire that kind of security.

I also admire the way he runs his business. He is selling a product to those satellite-connected churches which subscribe to his service. For this he collects a fair fee. That's honorable. Therefore his expensive automobile and plush offices do not offend me for they are not bought from tithe money. His TV funds come, for the most part, from the sales and rentals of viable products to appreciative audiences.

A few weeks earlier, Dr. W. A. Criswell, pastor of Dallas's First Baptist Church—the largest Southern Baptist church in the world—had paid a similar visit to Tilton's church. After sitting through an exciting Wednesday night healing service and listening to Paul Yonggi Cho from Korea preach, Criswell came to the pulpit and prayed emotionally, "Lord, I'm overwhelmed by this whole effort. I just can't imagine such a thing...I can see these crutches hanging on the walls. Somebody's been healed...."

Getting to know a man's heart changes your perspective on criticism.

I don't agree with all of Tilton's methods—or all his theology. But doctrine is not my criterion for fellowship. I don't agree with my wife's theology; but the possibility she is a heretic does not prevent me from sleeping with her.

Early in my pastoral career my criticism of other men of God grew out of personal insecurity. I was afraid some TV preacher might shear my sheep—or even steal them. But healthy sheep, I've discovered, don't stray from their fold. As long as I feed them they stick with me. Now I even encourage my flock to share a little wool with those shivering fellows out there in cold TV land.

Later my criticism was based on envy. I wanted to do what the big boys were doing. Only when you are secure in your calling, satisfied with your gifts, can you be grateful for another's calling and gifts. Recently my wife and I spent a few days at Gerald Derstine's beautiful Christian Retreat in Bradenton, Florida. One peaceful morning, walking across those manicured retreat grounds, Jackie said, "You could have built something like this."

"No," I said. "Retreat building is Gerald's gift. Mine is something else."

Today it's not insecurity or envy which activates my critical spirit, it's judging before I know what's in a man's heart. Some deeds call for judgment. Injustice, dishonesty, filching from widows in the name of God to fatten one's personal larder...as Jesus judged those things, so shall I. But knowing a man's heart dissolves the critical spirit and opens one to fellowship.

Me? I went back to my church in Florida and installed a TV satellite dish—hooked up to the Word of Faith network. All because a man let me look into his heart. ↵

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