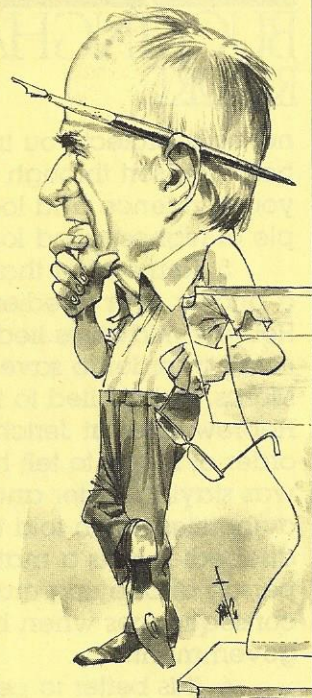


BUCKINGHAM

REPORT

AN IN-DEPTH CRITIQUE OF THE ISSUES, PEOPLE & EVENTS AFFECTING TODAY'S CHRISTIAN LEADERS



Jamie Buckingham

HOW MUCH TO TELL

A worker in an electronics firm, in a counseling session with his pastor, confessed he had been stealing designs from his company and selling them to a competitor. The pastor cautioned him to stop. In the next session the man said he had done it again. He needed the money to get out of a tight financial squeeze. After the man left the office the pastor called the man's supervisor—and told him the situation. The supervisor called the man in and gave him a choice of resigning—which meant he could not collect unemployment—or facing criminal charges. The man resigned and said, "If you can't trust your pastor, who can you trust?"

It always sounds odd to hear a thief say you can't trust folks these days, but his situation raises a sticky question. How much should a counselor reveal?

In some states a counselor who knows a person is homicidal, suicidal or an abuser—and does not report that person to state agencies—may be guilty of criminal neglect.

In St. Louis the principal of an Assemblies of God day school knew a teacher had sexually abused a child. Although the matter was handled internally, the authorities later arrested the principal for withholding information.

In California a pastor knew a man was suicidal. When the man committed suicide the family sued the pastor, saying he should have reported the man so he could have received "help" from government agencies.

In Florida when a man who was known by his pastor as a child abuser later murdered his child, the pastor was arrested and charged as an accomplice to the crime.

What do you do when right and wrong are clear, but the consequences of your actions are not?

If a husband is seriously contemplating walking out on his wife—and the wife could be hurt by his actions—does the pastor have the obligation to tell her? If a woman says she is going to kill her boyfriend, should the pastor tell the police? What if she is only fantasizing?

Pastors often face these difficult moral questions. One staff member confessed to his pastor he was seeing prostitutes when he was out of town. Should the man be fired? His confession was voluntary. More important, should the pastor tell the man's wife—who could be infected with AIDS?

A wife confesses she is pregnant by a man other than her husband. The husband is an elder in the church. She refuses to tell him. What does the pastor do? Another wife confesses she has discovered her elder-husband is embezzling money. She is the only one who could possibly know. She's afraid her husband will physically harm her if he discovers she knows—and has told. What does the pastor do?

Pastors often feel at loss in handling these difficult situations. Here are some guidelines to help.

1. Never keep a sticky situation to yourself. All our staff pastors have agreed they will practice pastoral confidentiality—but only in a plural sense. All sticky questions are brought to the weekly pastoral meeting. Each counselee is informed of this ahead of time. He is assured no pastor will reveal any confidence without the cooperation of the counselee; but no information is for one man's ears only. In the company of counselors there is wisdom.

2. If the information needs to be revealed to someone else—that is, a man has confessed he wants to kill his wife's lover (or his wife)—then the senior pastor and/or professional counselor should meet with the man and explain the necessary procedure.

3. Having a legal friend who is on call by the church staff can help. Laws are changing rapidly and some moral questions need legal interpretation—just so you will know what you are getting into.

4. Extensive notes—and perhaps a confidential tape recording—of all procedures will

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

not only protect you in the future, but will also help you sort through your decision. Check your evidence and logic, and act on the principle of highest good for the glory of God.

5. Remember that obedience to God takes a priority over obedience to the state. The Hebrew midwives lied to the government officials in order to save the life of the infant Moses. Rahab lied to the officials to save the Hebrew spies at Jericho. The magi defied the order of Herod to tell him where the baby Jesus was staying. Peter and John defied the authorities when told to cease preaching. Civil disobedience is a matter of conscience, but the person disobeying must be willing to pay the consequences when he chooses God over government.

6. It is better to persuade the person to confess than to confess for him.

7. There is no set rule that covers all situations. Always trust God for a miracle.

STEPPING ASIDE

Can you imagine the pastor of a growing church, or the head of a rapidly expanding mission board, firing himself because the ministry had overcome his capabilities?

Rarely is it done in business, but when it happens it makes news. Recently F. Stephen Wyle, founder of Lisp Machines, stepped down as chairman of the board. "I found I was managing the company brilliantly in crisis," he said, "but I needed to get somebody who ate up the idea of managing day to day."

There comes a time when a pastor or head of a growing ministry may have brought all he can to his job. Some pastors start racing their motors at that point, hoping to drown feelings of helplessness and fear of failure in obsessive work. Others get stuck someplace in the past. Like a phonograph needle stuck in a groove, they play and replay a particular winning strategy that's no longer winning. Others start dabbling in speculative businesses such as Amway, vitamin sales schemes, diet products or real estate. Some just get bored, slack off and find themselves swamped. A few—usually the Class A types—may become enamoured with another woman or start experimenting with drugs or alcohol.

Recently the youth director in a growing church resigned, stating he could not function under the restraints his supervisor put on him. The restraints, I discovered, were flexible and reasonable. The real reason the youth director

resigned was his inability to function in a changing organization which demanded flexibility as well as submission to supervision. He was about to break and wisely resigned.

The wise leader knows his own limitations—and steps aside when he reaches them.

LINKED TO THE PAST

An ideal time to educate your people on the transcendent purpose of your church or ministry is at the beginning of a new project. When a large church in a fast-growing neighborhood entered a building program the pastor wisely saw it as a wonderful opportunity to bring all the new members up to date on why the church did certain things in certain ways. This was done by preparing and publishing a classy, four-color brochure which went all the way back to the founder's dream. He ran pictures of the church in its early years and printed certain quotes from the founding pastor—his immediate predecessor—which firmly set the direction of the church. After describing the founder's ideals, he showed how they guided subsequent choices—including the building of the new children's building and school gymnasium. What they were now building was not just the idea of the present pastor, but the continuation of the dream of many who had gone before.

People function better if they understand they are part of something bigger than themselves—something with historic purpose as well as on-going meaning. The wise leader will always try to link his people with the past so they can both understand the present.

Pastors and leaders often fail to differentiate between goals and purpose. If a task can be "over and done with," it is a goal or objective. If it continually regenerates itself, then it is part of the transcendent purpose. In this case the goal was to build a children's building. The purpose, however, was to win, educate, disciple and send children out into ministry as adults. That task would never be completed, so it was a transcendent purpose.

Last year our church celebrated its 20th anniversary. The anniversary celebration was a goal. We used the occasion, however, to educate the many people who have joined us over the years on the original purpose of the church. We did this through a multi-media presentation of the history of the church—mixing slides of our beginnings with slides of current projects. We did this to show the people they are part of an on-going dream. We had a lot of fun, but equally important we educated and informed about the past in order to inspire and motivate to future action.

BOOKS YOU NEED TO READ

Life's Ultimate Privilege by DeVern Fromke is for all who struggle, as Fromke did, to start and maintain a consistent devotional life. The book is not intended to be read through in one sitting. It is written as a journal for a 15-day spiritual journey—forcing you to meet God daily at an appointed time. Having been through the book myself, I have now ordered a large quantity to be used by all those undergoing personal discipleship in our church. Of all the people I've met over the last 25 years, I know of no one I would rather spend 15 days with than DeVern Fromke. This is your chance to meet him but even better to get to know God at a deeper level. Order at cost (\$3 postage included) from: Peter Lord Ministries, 2585 Keiser Court, Titusville, FL 32780.

Today's Handbook of Biblical Characters is the finest book of this nature I've found. A panorama of valuable information on 740 of the major men and women of the Bible, it combines historical data and penetrating spiritual insight with some of the most beautiful language I've read. Written by the late E.M. Blaiklock, professor of classics at Auckland University in Australia, this is not only fascinating reading for your private devotions, but an invaluable reference work in sermon preparation. It is newly published by Bethany House.

Dreams Lost and Found will stimulate you in a thousand ways. Written by Larry Lea's associate, David Shibley, this book is the stuff good sermons are made of. If you have folks in your flock who are having trouble starting over after disappointments; if you have folks whose dreams seldom come to pass, this is for them—and for you. Newly published by Chosen Books.

This last week I started re-reading, for the third time, Leonard Verduin's 1964 *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren*. This is must reading for every evangelical, charismatic, Pentecostal and Roman Catholic.

If you want to read one book about the church's origin, the problem in establishing the New Testament church in today's secular society, and the tensions that exist between the church as a force and the church as a fortress—this is the book.

This book strikes at the root of our problems involving holiness, discipline, church and state, and "lay ministries."

Before you vote for Pat Robertson and certainly before you vote against him, you need to read this classic. There's enough preaching material here to keep you going for a year. Beware, however, for truth can destroy your present structure.

DURABLE POWER OF ATTORNEY

A close friend of mine is currently going through an agonizing time with her live-in aging mother. The 83-year-old woman, while in good physical health, has severe problems with memory. This has caused unbearable problems when it comes to her finances. Because of her memory loss and attitude, she thinks her daughter and son-in-law are "out to get her" and refuses to cooperate with any of their beneficent plans for her.

The couple's lawyer says there is nothing he can do until the old woman assigns her children power of attorney. However, at this stage, she is unwilling to do that—causing great hardship and heart anguish on all involved. The only other alternative is to have the state declare her mentally incompetent. But that is an expensive and degrading option which they do not want to take.

In a recent issue of *Discussion*, the in-house publication of Wycliffe Bible Translators, Davis Smoot, legal coordinator for WBT, gives some excellent advice on what is called durable power of attorney. It may apply to you. It will certainly apply to members of your flock.

Smoot is aiming at couples where one spouse may need to take care of the other in old age or in case of incapacitation. It also applies to a single person who needs to have a friend pick up for him if he becomes mentally or physically incapacitated.

"The usual power of attorney, which is legally the appointment of your personal agent, lasts only as long as the one who gives it is mentally competent. A durable power, on the other hand, is a more complex document with the objective of surviving the incapacity of its maker. Its first name 'durable' sets it apart from the usual power of attorney and makes it useful from the standpoint of what I will call 'life plans.' Thus, if an individual grants a durable power of attorney, he or she may be assured that the person he has appointed will be able to function on his behalf if the granting individual becomes incapacitated."

The "durable" power does not begin to operate until its grantor arrives at a state of mental incapacity or physical inability to manage affairs. Thus, according to Smoot, the grantor keeps control of his or her affairs for the longest time consistent with the ability to do so.

The person you appoint will serve as guardian of your person as well as manager of your personal business.

Durable powers of attorney are given only while the individual is still in good mental health—long before he or she reaches the state of my friend's mother. The document is drawn

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

up by a lawyer, customized to meet the individual needs of the person who wants to give it. Cost ranges from \$50 to \$200 depending on the lawyer. However, failure to do this may result in the need for a court-appointed guardian of the person or of the business affairs of an individual and could cost up to 10 times as much to produce the same effect.

A LIVING WILL—THE BEST WAY TO GO

I stood in the hospital recently watching an old friend wired and tubed. He had been there for seven months and the doctors—who visit only enough to draw their large fees—say he could be this way for years. It made me wonder if medical technology—for which I am grateful—is being used to save lives or to keep patients alive so the doctors can get rich.

There are deep theological points of debate which are involved. Several years ago when a well-known theology professor and his wife—both of whom had terminal cancer—took their lives in a joint suicide pact, many Christians were stunned. However, after the dust settled, a number of us asked, "What would I do in a similar situation?"

It's one thing to say, when you are young and healthy, "I'll never allow myself to become a vegetable." But when your choice is death or vegetation, would you willfully choose death? More critical: would your loved ones choose it for you?

All of us want some control over our future. When is it time to say "enough"? I am not talking suicide or euthanasia. But under common law, any adult of sound mind has the right to refuse medical treatment necessary to sustain life. But if you become incapacitated and unable to speak, you may require written proof of your wishes. Even though medical doctors say they are not required by law to abide by these wishes, loved ones, armed with a living will, are in a position to protect you and your family from the indignity, heartbreak and financial devastation that your protracted death may mean.

Your Legal Rights

According to *U.S. News and World Report* (August 24, 1987), more than 10 million Americans have drawn up living wills. These documents state your unwillingness to be subjected to useless life-prolonging medical measures should a catastrophic injury or illness leave you no chance of recovery. We know there are exceptions. Last fall a young minister

finally, tearfully, gave permission for the doctors to pull the plug on his wife. Moments before they did, she returned to consciousness from what experts had called an irreversible coma. We all know of miraculous instances of healings. None of these negates the need of your being in control.

Living wills are recognized by 41 states. Even in those states without specific legislation, living wills usually are considered evidence of the patient's intent and so can ease a doctor's fear of civil or criminal liability if he abides by a dying patient's wishes. If you have a personal physician, it is good to talk it over with him since some physicians, as a matter of conscience, feel they must prolong life—regardless of the patient's desire or condition—as long as he has the power to do so.

Once the will is written, give copies to anyone who speaks for you. Include a copy in your medical records. If you someday change your mind, simply sign a witnessed notarized statement that the document is no longer valid—or just destroy all copies of the original.

More Information Available

It is a sad commentary on the church that the world has to lead the way in these efforts. I believe God has a plan for every life, and there are biblical ways to discover that plan. However, until the church begins to publish godly statements on this issue, showing God's people how to find God's will, we're dependent on the world for information. The American Civil Liberties Union, for instance, has an excellent book by John Robertson called *The Rights of the Critically Ill*. Cost \$4.95 (postage included). Write ACLU, 132 West 43rd Street, New York, NY 10036.

You can also obtain free samples of the kinds of living wills recognized by the laws of various states—as well as information on "durable" powers of attorney I mentioned in the foregoing article—by writing: The Society for the Right to Die, 250 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10107. Include a stamped, self-addressed, business-size envelope. You may also phone Concern for Dying, (800) 248-2122.

The best book on this from a Christian perspective is John Sherrill's beautiful little book on the surrounding problems and death of his mother. It's called *Mother's Song* and is published by Chosen Books. It contains a sample of a living will.

I suggest you appoint some interested person in your congregation to compile this information and then distribute it to your congregation in abbreviated form. Some churches provide these services to their senior citizens through the church office.

MAKING DECISIONS

Case Study

Howard is 30 years old and has been on the church staff as administrative pastor for one year. He came to that position from a large industry in the area where he served in the personnel department. He has an undergraduate degree in psychology and a master's in counseling. He has been very effective in his present position and has virtually unlimited freedom to expand his ministry any way he wants. Recently his former company offered him a job to direct the Employee Assistance Program where he would be responsible for helping employees with health, emotional and dependency (alcohol and drugs) problems. The new job offers not only a substantial pay increase over his present job at the church but opportunity for promotion in the company. What should he do?

Case Study

Fred is the senior minister at a large, growing church in the Southwest. Membership now exceeds 4,000. He has a number of capable pastors working under him. For the last five years he has found his ministry broadening to include a twice-a-week radio program which is now aired on more than 200 stations across the nation. He has also written four books which have been widely accepted by his radio listeners and sold reasonably well in the bookstores. This last year he has traveled extensively, speaking in leadership meetings and conferences and occasionally in large churches. As a result of his exposure and acceptance, he has far more invitations to speak than he can possibly accept. Many of these invitations are for overseas ministry. How does he decide which ones to accept?

Both of these case studies are actual. I have changed the names only. They are classic examples of the struggles many of us face as our ministries grow and expand. To help me define priorities I have developed a simple formula which I use to help make decisions when an opportunity presents itself.

1. Does the matter fall in the realm of God's overall approval? Some offers are obviously anti-biblical. By that I mean they involve means which are not acceptable to God such as taking advantage of people, using illegal means to accomplish an end or finding ourselves set up to oppose the work of God. Last year I was approached by a major media network asking if I was interested in hosting a program which would have pitted me against

certain controversial ministries. I determined that was the work of the devil and quickly turned it down.

On the other hand, I know a West Coast pastor who accepted a part-time job with an organization which is a front for an illegal business operation. He justifies it because he earns enough money that he no longer has to receive salary from his church.

2. Does it enhance the priorities God has already established as my life's purpose? I have a "life's purpose" statement which I drew up several years ago. I re-evaluate this every so often to see if God has anything new in mind. (So far it has remained the same for the last eight years.) This is a one-sentence statement as to why God has placed me on planet Earth. Anything which does not conform to this statement of purpose—even if it is something which would glorify God—is automatically put in the "no, thank you" category.

Churches should have such a purpose statement also. I know of a church in Texas that was tempted to add a psychologist to the church staff. He would counsel church members free but wanted to work two days a week on his own. To keep it legal he would pay rent to the church for the use of his office on those two days. Since the purpose statement did call for the church to separate itself from secular businesses, this was not allowed. Later when the psychologist turned strongly humanistic, the church leaders saw the wisdom of sticking by their purpose statement.

3. What do I want to do? There is a tendency to spiritualize when it comes to decisions. I have discovered that God speaks clearest through my heart. When faced with a certain decision I always ask, "Do I really want to do this?" If the answer is yes, I move on to the next point. If it is no, I put it on the shelf, evaluating it only in the light of number 6.

4. What are the financial rewards? For years I refused to take this into account. I did not want to be accused of preaching or writing for money. However, I have come to look upon money as a necessary tool to achieve other goals. I see my gifts as means to acquire this tool. I now consider money as a major means in determining whether I should do a thing or not. For instance, while much of my writing is without pay, if I am writing with or for someone who has money, I expect my fair share—and am not afraid to say, "If you expect me to help you, this is what it will cost." Money should never be the *determining* factor in any decision unless you want to be a hireling. However, as a good steward of time, you should consider money when making a decision. The person

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

who says, "I never take money into account," is an unwise steward.

5. Can anyone else do it better than I?

Last year I received an invitation to come to South Africa for a three-week ministry tour. As I evaluated the invitation in the light of my little formula, I discovered it fit all the aforementioned categories. But when I asked the question, "Can anyone else do this better than I?" I ruled myself out. I may go to South Africa sometime, but not simply because I am invited. I shall go only if God directs. Why should I join the parade simply because I was well-known because of my writings? Others could do it better than I.

6. Is it something that should be done, and no one else can (or will) do it? Some of the things I do not want to do should be done simply because they need to be done and no one else will answer the call. I often speak at places which are unable to pay even my expenses. I help a certain evangelical mission organization with writing projects, knowing they cannot pay me or even give me public recognition. Every year or so I fly off to some remote mission outpost, usually at my own expense, to share my life with a handful of people doing sacrificial work. There is no pay and the drain on my time and body is huge. I do these things because I can do them, and no one else with my qualifications seems to be willing.

7. Am I willing to submit it to others for confirmation? Several years ago I decided to publish a syndicated newspaper column. I hired a secretary, printed up sample columns, did massive research to get the names and addresses of papers and editors, sent out 3,000 samples—and not a single paper bought the idea. I lost several thousand dollars. Later I checked with my friends in the business. All said they would have advised me against it. I explained that was the reason I did not submit to them in the first place. Every major mistake I have made has been because I either refused to submit it to wise men or went against their advice when I did submit it.

8. Are there open doors? I've learned I should not move unless God opens a door—or allows it to swing open when I push on it. For instance, I do not write anything on speculation. Unless there is someone willing to publish it I take that as a sign it is not to be written. I have wasted countless hours on projects which had no assurance of materializing—and didn't.

9. Are there higher priorities? I was scheduled to go to Singapore last February as one of the six U.S. representatives on a world planning committee to consider a 1990 World Congress on Evangelization and the Holy Spirit. I really wanted to go. I was the only non-denominational representative. My way was paid. My wife wanted to go. It would have been her first trip to the Orient. A side trip to China was planned and I could have stopped in Indonesia to encourage some of our missionaries. However, I had just called our church leaders into three months of early morning prayer, accompanied by fasting. I had asked every elder, ministry leader and staff member to lay down all authority and pre-conceived notions of service and allow God to tell us what to pick up and what to discard. I needed to be home nearly every day during that time frame. A 12-day trip to Singapore—regardless of the reason—was not as important as what was happening in our local church. I had no choice but to cancel out.

10. Is God telling me to do it? All the above may amount to nothing if God is telling you to do it. Take Noah, Gideon, William Carey or even modern-day prophets like Pat Robertson and Oral Roberts—all have accomplished because they heard and obeyed God. Oral Roberts said the epitaph he wanted on his tombstone was: "Here Lies a Man Who Obeyed God." If God is telling you to do it—and you are dead certain—you may have to override number seven and go it alone. Just realize if you go it alone you run a bigger risk of missing God and falling flat on your face. If this happens, don't blame God or others. There are time-honored ways to hear from God, but occasionally one man will be the only one in the world to hear God and obey. Just be sure you are willing to pay the price of failure (and success) before you make your decisions and venture out.

