

BUCKINGHAM

REPORT

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

SPOTTING THE DANGER SIGNS

The recent exposure of moral problems in the lives of Christian leaders has sent shock waves throughout the Christian community. Big questions appear. Knowing that Jim Bakker was capable of what he did, why didn't his co-workers act on it? Were they blind, afraid of their own jobs, involved in their own immorality, naive—? How was it possible for Jimmy Swaggart to live a double-standard of morality and his co-workers not suspect something?

Swaggart, Bakker and others who fall into the category of "rich and powerful," often "submit" to authorities who are as awed by their power and influence as their employees. Such awe often desensitizes discernment. We so want our leaders to be perfect that we are blinded to their imperfections.

Yet when it comes to discerning problems and flaws in our co-workers or our subordinates, we should be more objective.

At an idea exchange meeting in Orlando four years ago I listened—and applauded—as the group recognized the re-emergence of a "restored" Roy Harthern into the public ministry. Harthern, former pastor of the huge Calvary Assembly in Winter Park, Florida, and one of the co-founders of the Idea Exchange, had, two years before, confessed to sexual sin. He then submitted humbly to the discipline imposed by his denomination, which meant stepping out of public ministry for two years.

It is not my intent to discuss the ineffectiveness or the inconsistencies of the rehabilitative program used by the Assemblies of God in restoring fallen ministers. To his credit Harthern did submit and was later declared "restored." I am proud of him for taking it on the chin (just as I am proud of Jimmy Swaggart) and equally proud of Harthern's wife for standing by her man. I am happy to endorse them.

Now, with the disclosures of the hidden flaws in even more prominent leaders, the question once again presents itself. Is it possible to spot the danger signs in a falling leader and help him before disaster strikes? Are there

certain signals which should set off our alarm bells? What do we look for in the lives of our co-workers? What are the danger signs we should be aware of in a staff member or volunteer workers which should trigger our alarm bells?

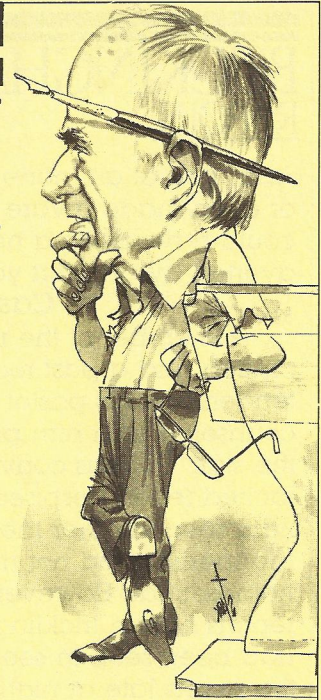
Case Study

Todd Johnson (not his real name) is the youth/children's director in a 600-member South Carolina church. On two occasions he listened as his volunteer assistant, a 22-year-old man who was in charge of the "children's church," made off-hand remarks about a particular sixth-grade girl. On both occasions he mentioned part of the girl's anatomy, saying she was growing beautifully. The first time Todd just grinned and reminded the worker he was no longer a sixth-grade boy in the next desk. But when the worker mentioned it a second time, Todd grew nervous.

Todd confided in his wife, Cindy, and asked her to begin sitting in on the children's church—and to keep an eye open for problems or strange behavior on the part of the worker. One Sunday morning Cindy discovered a small hole which had been drilled in the wall which separated the ladies' rest room from the next-door men's room which was used by the children. It was strategically located so someone in the men's toilet stall could peep into the ladies' toilet stall. Alarmed, she told her husband.

The following Sunday Todd quietly followed his worker when he entered the men's room. He discovered him uncovering the hole which had been stuffed with paper to make it inconspicuous. He confronted the man who immediately confessed he was a child voyeur—and pleaded for help. Todd insisted on a conference with the pastor.

The outcome? The young man was removed from all children's ministry and is now undergoing counseling. Confidentiality has been maintained. The man is being helped.



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BUCKINGHAM REPORT

And, best of all, none of the children was hurt or even made aware of the problem. What could have been a horrible situation was averted by an alert youth worker.

Case Study

A member of the musical staff of a large church had a past record of homosexual tendencies. His pastor knew of this and had counseled with him prior to and after he joined the staff. He was convinced that, while the man lacked (even despised) the macho characteristics seen in other men, his effeminate mannerisms did not mean he was an overt homosexual. However, after two years on staff, reports began trickling in that the staff member had been seen in seedy areas of town, walking the streets late at night wearing suggestive clothes and carrying a woman's purse. The pastor immediately confronted his musician who adamantly denied the charges. The pastor did nothing.

Two months later, after the musician returned from a ministry trip in Sweden, the pastor received a phone call from a Swedish pastor in Stockholm. He asked if the musician was homosexual. The musician, the Swedish pastor said, had spent an inordinate amount of time dressing like and consorting with a homosexual group in Sweden. Although all of the evidence was circumstantial, the pastor acted immediately. He insisted the staff member submit himself to a Christian therapist. The results have been excellent. The musician admitted to his growing homosexual compulsions and has received deliverance along with his counseling. There is evidence of life changes. Tragedy has been averted because the pastor read and acted on the danger signals.

Please Help Me

Often people with deep, even criminal problems will try to tell you something—while maintaining secrecy at the same time. We've all heard of the "help me" killers—criminals who deliberately left clues at the scene of their murders hoping they would be apprehended.

The same is true of workers with deep problems. They want help but don't know how to ask for it. Therefore they may give obvious hints—hoping their supervisor will pick up on them and step in.

The manager of a California manufacturing firm told me of his secretary who posted her overtime parking tickets on the wall behind her desk. It was her way of saying, "I need help."

A writer friend has papered the walls of his

studio with rejection notices from various publishers. This says a great deal about his self-esteem. It is his way of saying, "I'm a failure and need help."

Shouting preachers are often angry men. While he shouts against sin, his real anger may be at himself for his inability to live up to his preaching. He may be angry at his parents, his childhood environment, his denominational restrictions. These signals of overreaction are often danger signs which, if examined, lead to deep areas of inner sickness.

Sometimes a person will reveal a weakness or bad habit in casual conversation. Why? It may be his way of saying, "I'm human. If you expect too much from me I'll let you down."

Case Study

Several years ago we installed an associate pastor in our church. The man had been the pastor of a large, Midwestern church but had been forced to leave after it was discovered he was having affairs with several women in the church. I walked with him through an informal rehabilitative process for more than a year before putting him on staff—believing he was healed. On several occasions, after he had started back to work, he joked with me about his sexual escapades—testing the waters to see how much he could actually tell me. I failed to pick up the danger signals, even when he told me about reading pornographic magazines and sometimes masturbating. On two occasions he told me bizarre stories of being propositioned by women who were total strangers. One, he said, motioned him off the road and approached him, asking if he would follow her home and have sex with her. Proudly he told me how he had resisted these approaches.

None of these things by themselves would have alarmed me, but when I stepped back and viewed the entire scene I realized the man was sending me signals, trying to tell me something and I wasn't listening.

Before I could act—he did. He announced he was going to divorce his wife and marry a young divorcee he had been counseling. Despite our efforts to help, he persisted in his course. I finally had to fire him—and make public declaration of the circumstances. Had I been more in tune, reading the warning signals, I could have saved us all a lot of pain by acting before he did.

At times a worker—or a staff member—may hope to divert his supervisor from looking at other significant behavior. These half-confessions may puzzle and annoy the boss—and even act as smoke screens for greater problems.

When a worker does incriminate him or herself, look for a pattern. If he periodically mentions arguments with his wife or problems with his children, he may be trying to tell you of something much deeper which one day may explode.

If he talks of his anger toward his children's school officials or his dislike of a former pastor, he may be hinting at having trouble with authority, including yours.

If he mentions past failures or a series of phobias, he may be anxious about some assignment—or pending assignment.

Watch for the person who is overly adamant. The man who brags, "I might have lustful thoughts but I'd never in a thousand years steal from the petty cash drawer," probably needs to be watched in both areas.

Keep your eye on behavioral changes. The middle-aged slouch who suddenly gets a face-lift, grows a beard, dyes his hair, buys a sports car and decks his wrists and neck with gold and starts wearing open-necked shirts to expose his chest hair is a volcano about to erupt.

Researching Problems

Often a pastor may suspect a developing problem but has no way to ferret it out. Face-to-face confrontation may bring forth a denial, even though the person desperately wants help. In such cases the pastor may need to try the back door.

Tammy Faye Bakker, even though she did not know the details of her husband's infidelity, had sensed for years that something was wrong. However, communication was poor between them, and true friends (the kind who refuse shellac and keep on digging when they suspect problems) were nonexistent. She finally gave up— withdrawing into her own sad world of drugs, illicit affections, wild spending sprees and hopelessness.

Although Frances Swaggart has remained honorably closed-mouthed about her husband's problems, she no doubt knew, as any wife would know, that Jimmy had a "dark side."

Both Bakker and Swaggart advertised they had a pastor. Whether these pastors were blind, out-of-touch or intimidated is moot at this point. A wise and loving pastor knows he has responsibilities to his flock, and especially to his staff, which go far beyond the responsibilities held by a boss over his employees. Thus, when a pastor senses danger signs he must use every means possible to save his friend from moral disaster. If the problem person will not share honestly when approached, he may need to go to the person's spouse—who will not only often supply the missing pieces of the puzzle but will be the key to healing.

Case Study

Susan is a volunteer receptionist who comes in three days a week to answer the phone. One day the pastor mentioned the possibility of asking her to be responsible for directing transients—who often come in to the church office during the day asking for money—to the local rescue mission. In the past all transients had been referred to the full-time church secretary who works in an inner office.

The next week, during a coffee break, the receptionist mentioned to her pastor that her father was an alcoholic. Later that same week she told him of the time her father had come home after losing his job and frightened her badly. Her father had been dead 15 years.

What was the receptionist trying to say? Unable to come straight out, she was giving all kinds of signals saying, "I'm not sure I can handle this pending assignment."

What should the pastor do? For one, his reassurance is important. He should be sensitive to her fears. He may want gently to suggest ministry for the healing of these bad memories. He should be careful he does not ask too much at once but should be aware that this assignment, in itself, could be an important step in helping her overcome a lifetime of fear in dealing with alcoholics and transients. He should follow up, periodically, by asking her how she's handling her new assignment and offering suggestions. If, in counseling, she is unable to open up, he may want her to talk to her husband and see if he can shed additional light on the problem and so help bring healing.

A manager should always take hints seriously. Sometimes they indicate a worker is not ready for an assignment or is incapable of handling it. You may occasionally misjudge. You're on safe ground, however, as long as you point out behavior and its effect on performance. Avoid psychologizing: that is, telling the person what his or her thoughts or motives are. **Remember: the best way to uncover true problems is by asking questions—not drawing conclusions.**

If the "confessions" are indeed a cover-up for a deeper problem and not just a reluctance to do a tough job, ministry may be needed. Look especially for hints of hatred of authority figures, low self-image, out-of-place confessions of sexual activity or fantasies, bad taste jokes and changing patterns of behavior. These can be early warning signs of big problems about to develop.

HELP FOR WOUNDED LEADERS

The pressures on today's Christian families are enormous. The stresses between family life

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

and career are complex. Choices are unclear. The result of not knowing how to cope with these issues is often burnout, communication breakdown, infidelity, divorce.

Helping wounded pastors and leaders is a specialized field. It must be handled by one who understands—preferably one who has been wounded himself. Forrest Mobley is one of those men. I've known Forrest for a number of years. He was the rector of a charismatic Episcopal church in northwest Florida before joining the staff of St. Phillip's Cathedral in Atlanta. During this time he had some personal problems which left him deeply wounded. Now those have been resolved. Forrest and his wife, Nancy, are now heading a retreat center in a rural setting in Tallahassee, Alabama, where wounded leaders and weary Christians may go for help.

Although called Lake Martin Episcopal Retreat, the ministry is not limited to Episcopalians but is open for all. At Lake Martin the Mobleys provide a place, an atmosphere and a staff where Christians can come to find ways to enrich their family life and seek a new balance between the pressures of today's world and their shared dreams and desires.

For full information write: Lake Martin Episcopal Retreat, Rt. 1, Box 169-M, Tallahassee, AL 36078, or call (205) 857-2165.

CHRISTIAN WRITERS' WORKSHOP THIS FALL

Last year I conducted a Christian Writers' Workshop at the Community of Living Water in Cornville, Arizona. The workshop was so successful I am repeating it again this year.

The beautiful but isolated retreat center is located two hours north of Phoenix in the desert foothills, just an hour south of the Grand Canyon. The workshop will begin at dinner on Tuesday, October 4, and close out with lunch on Friday, October 7. It is open to any serious Christian writer, published or unpublished.

Joining me again on the faculty is my long-time friend, David Manuel, former *Logos* editor and now editor of Paraclete Press in Orleans, Massachusetts. David has co-authored books for Peter Marshall, David Mains (of 100 Huntley Street), David du Plessis and others. We will lead discussions on fiction and non-fiction techniques for all types of Christian writing as well as how to get published.

Each applicant will be required to submit a 1,200-word manuscript written to strict speci-

fications. Manuscripts will be evaluated on research, originality and the ability to follow instructions. Much time will be spent critiquing style and content of each manuscript in the workshop sessions. You will receive complete instructions on your assignment when you register.

Cost is \$195 which includes tuition, board and room. A \$25 non-refundable deposit is required in order to register. Non-writing spouses who attend must pay full tuition but may spend the daytime hours wandering through nearby Oak Creek Canyon or visiting the Indian ruins. You will be responsible for your own transportation. If you fly into Phoenix, the community will arrange rides from Sky Harbor Airport to Cornville.

Registration is limited. First preference goes to last year's attendees and the readers of *Ministries Today*. Register NOW before all beds are taken. Contact: Kathy Fetveit, Community of Living Water, Box 443, Cornville, AZ 86325. Phone: (602) 634-4421.

VIDEO BIBLE STUDY CURRICULUM READY

For more than a year I have been preparing three video/workbook Bible study curricula to be used in Sunday school classes, home Bible studies or institutional settings. These have just been published by Paraclete Press.

Each series is designed for a 10- to 13-week basic Bible study and includes a video tape with 10 teaching segments. Each introductory video presentation of me teaching on location in Israel is 12 minutes long. Following completion of the video-showing the class discusses the subject and answers questions directly from the Bible using an extensive workbook I have written. Each student needs his own workbook. The course subjects are:

"Ten Miracles of Jesus"

"Ten Parables of Jesus"

"Ten Bible People Like Me"

These, along with a similar curriculum series I prepared last year called "Steps to Spiritual Maturity" based on the Exodus and filmed on location in the Sinai, are now available to churches and home study groups for a nominal fee. Check with your Christian bookstore or call 1-800-451-5006 for free information, including how you may qualify for discount prices.

Free to Jail and Prison Ministries

My original reason for producing the video Bible study curricula was to distribute them through Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship into America's federal penitentiaries. However, generous donations have made it possible for me to give the entire curriculum to every jail

and prison ministry in America—free of charge.

If your church has a jail or prison Bible study, or if you know of such a ministry, please let us know.

We will send a free video tape along with 20 free workbooks and 20 free certificates-of-completion as soon as a representative of the ministry—regardless of its size or scope—makes the request. When the study is completed we will send the next free tape and free workbooks. All we ask in return is a class evaluation by the Bible study leader as soon as each course is completed. My goal is to get these Bible studies into every jail and prison in America. I need your help to make that possible.

Place the order for your free materials by writing Paraclete Press, Hilltop Plaza—Route 6A, Orleans, MA 02653-9990, or by calling the toll-free number 1-800-451-5006.

Remember: the free materials are for jail and prison ministries only. If you're ordering for your church or home study group, there is a charge.

THE INDISPENSABLE PASTOR

A friend of mine, pastor of a 700-member church, recently persuaded his board he needed a telephone in his car. Wanting to make things easier for the increasingly busy pastor, the board complied. Now the pastor can make phone calls while driving the 12 blocks from the hospital to his office, can call ahead to his secretary letting her know he's "on his way" after leaving the house in the morning and can receive calls from members of TIC (The Inner Circle), who have his mobile number.

Is all this necessary?

Absolutely, if you are the kind of person who needs toys and gimmicks to make you feel important; if you are so insecure you must impress your friends with the "in gadget" to convince them you are now big-time; or if you are so hyperactive you cannot stand to spend the time in your automobile "shut away" from the world of useless "busyness" that rages around us all.

The same thing is true of the new craze that calls for pastors to wear beepers. I'm reminded of the comment by Gilbert Millsteir, news editor of "NBC Nightly News," who spoke of "two and one half million of the unspeakable vermin (beepers), whistling, crying, trumpeting, commanding, beseeching." Now tell me, are pastors that indispensable?

Some think they are. Among some leaders I know, work (ministry) is the only activity that fulfills their need for mastery, affection,

dependency and progress toward their driving goals to succeed. When a pastor is this dependent upon his church he also needs to feel it is just as dependent upon him. Yet, the pastor who feels he is indispensable tends to overwork and often burns out.

Even if burnout does not occur, leaders who do nothing but work, narrow their focus and block the voice of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit who would otherwise reach them through visual observation and times of solitude and meditation. Besides, management experts know that people who feel indispensable seldom open themselves to change and eventually become stumbling blocks to church growth.

What's wrong, by the way, with making a phone call to your secretary before you leave the house? Is there a value in letting her know you are "just leaving" as opposed to having "just left"? Most churches would be far better off by giving their pastor a roll of quarters each week—to use in a phone booth—than authorizing the purchase of an expensive cellular phone for his car.

And when it comes to those accursed beepers—well, obstetricians and plumbers may need them, but most of us can get by with an answering machine we check routinely or by simply calling our secretary and asking, "Any calls you couldn't handle or assign to someone else?"

One type triple-A pastor I know, who has been in perpetual motion since he could walk, recently returned from a month in solitary prayer and fasting. An amazing thing happened on that retreat. He became aware of his hyper-spirit. Although he doesn't have a car telephone or a beeper, he realized he could never get in his car without turning on the radio or popping a tape in the cassette player. The result: a much calmer man who not only listens to God but listens to others as well. The compulsive (telephone) talker needs to learn this lesson. No one is indispensable.

HANDLING LOSS

Following the initial shock of the disclosures, the almost universal reaction I sensed after the fall of Jimmy Swaggart was that of grief and sadness. Whether we agreed with Swaggart or not (and many of us did not), no one could deny his influence. Nor could we deny the good he did with his overseas ministry in particular. Millions around the world are now stunned that all that may have come to an end.

The loss of a public figure, even one many are glad to have silenced, brings with it a deep

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

sense of grief. It is at this point the local shepherd is charged with helping his people sort through their feelings and deal with the subject of handling loss.

Loss involves more than losing another televangelist to sin. It could involve divorce and death. It may include losing certain illusions about ourselves, losing dreams of unconditional love, losing hopes and ambitions we've clung to as we've waited for our ship to come in. These losses will either cripple us, or we'll see them as developmental gains.

Although most people do not choose their losses deliberately, they all have some choice about how to deal with them. The task of the shepherd is to help his sheep make the right choice.

Earliest Losses

The earliest loss is separation from mother which comes at the moment of birth. All the rest of life is merely a reenactment, to some degree or another, of that same separation in other relationships. If those early separation processes were flawed, either by the death or the abandonment by a parent, or just by inadequate parenting, we may develop an extreme fear of separation. This means we may have difficulty forming and maintaining close relationships. Early childhood losses make us especially vulnerable to losses that occur later in life.

A much-beloved Christian writer once told me the story of the difficult time her oldest son was going through. In his late twenties, he was unable to establish an ongoing relationship with young women. He would get right up to the point of making a commitment then do something rash or foolish which was obviously designed to destroy the relationship. One afternoon the writer/mother was picking blueberries with her son when she felt strongly compelled to ask him, "Albert, have I ever told you about the events surrounding your birth?" He admitted he knew nothing of those events. She then proceeded to tell him, in detail, how he had almost died in childbirth because the umbilical cord had been wrapped about his neck, strangling him. He listened intently, thanked her and went ahead with his blueberry picking—obviously in deep thought. A few months later he was able to propose to the wonderful girl he had been courting. They later married and now have a warm, happy, committed relationship.

The events surrounding his birth had subliminally affected his relationship with all

women. He was afraid to get too close, fearful of being strangled. When he heard the truth, he was set free.

Other Losses

Other losses occur all through childhood. Siblings are born, and we're no longer Mother's favorite. We sadly discover we can't marry Mommy or Daddy. We learn, often traumatically, that our parents aren't godlike but are just like us—ordinary, flawed human beings who need a Savior as much as we do. We learn life isn't fair, that what hurts can't always be kissed and made better, that some prayers are not answered the way we wish, that our concept of God was incomplete.

It is this latter loss, when we grow up to discover God is not as He may have been described by some teacher or by our parents, which is the most difficult of all losses. To lose a parent or a loved one is tough. But when God dies—or at least the concept of God we have been worshipping—it is devastating.

This is what happens when one of our heroes (idols) falls. The result, however, once the pain has passed, is spiritual growth. We discover God does not always heal, that good people suffer, that godly leaders fall. It is a grief experience and it takes a wise shepherd to lead his sheep through this valley of the shadow of death.

The wise leader knows we grow by losing, leaving and letting go. When we let go of childhood concepts, when we "put away childish things," we grow up into Christ. Growing up means letting go of the extravagant dreams of childhood and *accepting the ever-diminishing options of adulthood*.

As a result we can enter mid-life kicking and screaming and trying to act and look 20 years younger, or we can honestly confront our own morality. The challenge—and the privilege—of leadership is to lead people to truth, then step back as they make their choices.

