

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

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

CONFERENCE ON RESTORING FALLEN LEADERS: September 19-22, Melbourne, FL

Anyone who has driven in the mountains has seen those signs: "Look Out for Falling Rocks." Anyone in the ministry has seen other signs, just as critical: "Look Out for Falling Leaders."

The numbers of wounded and fallen leaders have reached epidemic proportions. These include not just pastors and evangelists, but also a growing number of lay leaders who are under severe attack.

Can leaders be restored? If so, what methods should be used? Who is most effective in the restoration process? Our first annual conference on restoring fallen leaders will address this subject in depth—and give answers to many of the how-to questions pastors are asking.

Besides being editor-in-chief of this magazine, I am also senior pastor of the Tabernacle Church in Melbourne, Florida—a church long involved in restoration. This conference will be jointly sponsored by the magazine and the church.

My wife, Jackie, and I will be teaming with Don and Helen Crossland to lead the conference. Don (himself a restored leader) was formerly pastor of Highland Baptist Church in Waco, Texas.

Joining us in the general sessions and the workshops will be evangelist David Alsobrook, restoration leader Mickey Evans, pastor Peter Lord and *Ministries Today* columnist Jack Taylor. Others involved will be Michael Thompson, minister of worship at the Tabernacle Church, and John Chisum, vice president of Worship Resources at Star Song Communications and worship leader at Bethel Chapel in Nashville.

The conference is open to all ministers and laypersons interested in restoring fallen leaders. Participants will stay at the beautiful Melbourne Beach Hotel on the Atlantic Ocean. Spouses are invited.

The conference begins Thursday evening and closes Saturday morning. Participants are invited to stay over Sunday morning and attend services at the Tabernacle Church.

Registration costs are \$75 per couple or \$50 per individual. Hotel accommodations are \$60 per night per couple or \$70 for four adults. For full details and a brochure, write: Conference on Restoring Fallen Leaders, P.O. Box 489, Melbourne, FL 32902. Or phone the Tabernacle Church at (407) 259-2024. Registration is limited, so make your plans to attend now.

THE CHURCH'S SHIFTING CENTER OF GRAVITY

According to missions expert David Shibley, author of *A Force in the Earth* (Creation House) and founder of Global Advance, the church's "center of gravity" is shifting. Shibley, who recently returned from a leadership conference in Kenya, says, "The emergence of strong, indigenous church leaders is one of the most hopeful signs for world evangelization."

This rise of indigenous church leadership causes Shibley and many others to say there is a shift in the church's "center of gravity." The new power base of the church, they assert, has already shifted from the United States and is now in the younger churches of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Some Western missions leaders disagree. They believe the problems of "syncretism" disqualify the congregations in developing nations as true churches. (By syncretism, they mean the seeming blend of the gospel with tribal customs or cultural mores.)

Such assessments, however, are made by Americans who fail to see how the Americanization of the church has created an even worse syncretism. Let the Western church rejoice and be glad that the children of our missionary churches have finally outgrown their parents!



JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

THE NECESSITY OF SERVING

Few people are born longing to serve others. They have to be disciplined and trained to serve.

In his latest book, *It's Not My Department*, motivational speaker Peter Glen illustrates the value of learning to serve. He tells the story of a man named John Barrier, who went in to cash a \$25 check at the U.S. Bank of Washington in Spokane. In his Ace Concrete Company baseball cap and dungarees, Barrier looked like an ordinary customer.

As he left the bank, he tried to drive his pickup truck out of the parking lot. The young man at the parking booth, however, told Barrier to cough up 60 cents, or he'd have to go back into the bank and get his parking ticket validated—proving he had done business at the bank.

Annoyed, Barrier backed up, parked his truck and went back into the bank to have the teller stamp his ticket. He couldn't find the original teller, and the one he did find refused to validate it. She thought he was a deadbeat.

This time, Barrier was really ticked off. "Give me the \$1 million I keep here!" he snorted. "I'm taking it next door."

Alarmed, the teller called a supervisor, who whispered to her that her customer was a multimillionaire real-estate developer. The bank apologized and quickly stamped his parking ticket—but it was too late. Barrier withdrew his money and took it to the new bank down the street. Because of its un-serving nature, the bank was out \$1,000,000.60.

A lesson for leaders. Christian leaders can learn from this story. Everyone we meet is important. There are no big people and no little people in the church. How many church offices, for instance, would have prevented a John Barrier from using the phone to call his office? How many ushers would have held him up at the door to the pastor's Sunday school class because he arrived late, telling him he'd have to wait outside until the lesson was over?

Church leaders must have it drilled into them time and time again: Our task as leaders is to serve people—not lord it over them.

I was impressed, standing in line inside a Burger King restaurant, when the young woman in front of me told the clerk: "I was in here 10 minutes ago and ordered three Whoppers and three fries. When I got outside and looked in my bag, I had only two Whoppers and the fries."

The clerk never batted an eye. "I apologize for Burger King," he said gently. Reaching back to the food counter, he picked up two hamburgers. "Here's the one we missed—and an extra one to make up for your trouble."

Maybe the woman was a con artist. It didn't make any difference. Burger King has a standing policy that the customer is always right. The clerk, by serving the customer, guaranteed that she would return. His attitude also impressed all those who overheard him.

Those large companies that have learned the value of serving people work hard at it. Nordstrom, Disney, L.L. Bean, Land's End—all have extensive training courses to teach their employees how to serve. At Nordstrom, for instance, everyone in sales is ordered to give you an instant refund for any reason—and follow it up by sending you a Christmas card.

I continue to buy most of my tools from Sears because of their policy to "cheerfully refund your money or give you an exchange" on all products that break or that you don't like.

Church secretaries and receptionists—those who often are the first to meet the public and field crisis phone calls—need to be trained how to serve. One pastor I know insists his receptionist do three things with every person who walks in the office:

1. Stand up and smile when anyone enters the office.
2. Get off the telephone as soon as possible.
3. Ask at least two personal questions if the person has to wait for any length of time. For example, "Did you have trouble finding a place to park?"

Washing feet. Church leaders need to follow the example of Jesus, who humbly washed the feet of His disciples. Too often, pastors remain aloof, refusing to associate with the sheep in their flock. On Sunday, they remain in plush back rooms until it is time for the "man of faith and power" to make his dramatic entrance onto the platform. They fail to realize how much better their message would be received if they had spent those minutes before the service mingling with the people.

Successful businesses have learned the principle. At the annual board meeting for Florida Power & Light Company, for example, the chairman of the board requires all the general managers and vice presidents to mingle with the

several hundred stockholders who attend, greeting them at the doors, offering to show them where the restrooms are, even driving them to their hotels if necessary.

Pastors should, on regular occasion, visit another church of similar size. They should go, thinking like a visitor. They should take notes of things they liked and things that bothered them.

Was it easy to find the church building? Did someone greet them? Did someone ask if they had children who needed to be in the nursery? Help them find a seat? Show them where the restrooms were? Give them literature about the church?

Did the people sitting next to them greet them? Did the "visitors' welcome" time embarrass them or make them feel genuinely welcome? Did someone specifically inquire if they needed help? Ask if they wanted someone to pray for them? Ask if they were seeking God in a special way? Did someone offer to introduce them to the pastor at the close of the service?

Little things, to be sure; but like the clerk in Burger King, they make coming back a lot easier.

Welcoming visitors. By the way, after going through this process myself, I changed the way we welcome visitors in our morning service. In the past, we asked them to raise their hands and keep them up until an usher stuck something in their face. We've stopped that.

Today's visitors are a far more sophisticated bunch. We simply welcome them, ask them to fill in and tear off the perforated "visitors' slip" in the bulletin they received when they came in, and drop it in the offering bag. I sometimes ask them to raise a hand just so our people can spot them and greet them after (or during) the service.

Many churches have stopped the antiquated practice of asking visitors to stand—or, horrors, to remain seated while the congregation stands "in their honor."

Others do not even recognize them. They respect their right to remain anonymous. But an announcement is made that ushers are stationed around the room wearing badges in case a visitor needs assistance.

Today's visitors are a different lot than the ones who visited our churches 20 years ago. The baby-boomer generation is a generation of seekers. They are not coming to be recognized; they are

coming to find substance for the spiritual vacuum left by their parents. The easiest way to insult them or to scare them off is to embarrass them with some kind of hokey welcome, or worse, to ask them to stand and "give a brief testimony."

People are looking for servant-leaders who genuinely care about their spiritual condition. What a grand opportunity is before us! Let's not botch it by not caring.

LESSONS IN THE WILDERNESS

Many of you are also readers of our sister magazine, *Charisma*. If so, you know from my Last Word column in the June issue that I have re-entered cancer treatment. Last summer the surgeons removed my cancerous kidney and were surprised that the lymph glands, earlier diagnosed as cancerous, were not. But they gave no guarantees that there might not be a new attack.

I just didn't expect it this soon.

I have now completed five weeks of radiation treatment for a tumor on the left side of my lower spine. About halfway through the treatment, the pain in my leg abated greatly, and I was able to walk without the limp that had bothered me for weeks. I asked my Spirit-filled doctor what was the best scenario I could expect from the treatment. He smiled and said, "The blessing of God."

There are no medical guarantees. All I have to stand upon are the promises in the Word of God. As I have looked at my future, I have realized that's exactly where God has wanted me all along. If I could count on medical treatment—I would. If I could count on long life—I would. God does not want me to count on any of these things. He wants me to count on Him—and His Word. Alone.

These have been special times. Each morning I have awakened knowing that He has spared me through the night and is calling me even closer into His presence for the new day. My only regret is that it has taken the cancer to bring me to this place. My only joy is that this is where I want to stay the rest of my life.

While seeking God's plan and purpose for my life, I read an impressive couple of pages from Dean Sherman's new book, *Spiritual Warfare for Every Christian*, published by Frontline Communications, a division of YWAM. In his chapter "Why Does a Loving God Allow Evil?" he includes a brief passage on why so many leaders

