

# BUCKINGHAM

## REPORT

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



### SYMPATHETIC APPLAUSE

Recently at our 10:30 a.m. service our dancers came to the platform during the time of worship. Twelve of them. Dressed in pure white. They moved in a beautifully rehearsed cadence to a sound track, ending on their knees. Then as the music faded they slipped prostrate to the floor—their faces down.

There was a moment of pure, sacred silence. Then someone began to applaud. Instantly a number of people picked it up. Clapping. And the spirit of worship was broken.

Interestingly, at the 8 a.m. service the dancers led in the same worship experience—closing on their faces before God. No one applauded. Instead, many people slipped out of their chairs, kneeling on the floor in silence.

Is it wrong to applaud in a worship service? Certainly not. Applause can be a form of praise and an expression of worship—as well as an indication of excited thanksgiving.

It is also OK to applaud in response to an excellent performance.

But our dancers that morning were not “performing.” They were leading us in worship—wanting the people to become involved in what they were doing.

Why, then, was the response different at the two services? Did it mean the 8 a.m. crowd was more spiritual? No. The difference was “sympathetic applause.”

We have a number of people attending our worship services who are not spiritually perceptive. When they see a dance routine or listen to a solo or

an instrumental presentation, they consider it a performance. They do not understand the “involvement” between leader and worshipper.

Seeing it with worldly eyes they

### Jamie Buckingham

respond as people would respond to a theatrical performance. They clap. Even though the Holy Spirit may be calling the majority of the people to kneel or sit silently, many others join in the clapping—rather than letting the person clap solo. That’s sympathetic applause.

Pastors need to teach their congregations when to clap—and when to be silent. Many simply don’t know. They do not know that clapping can, at times, grieve the Holy Spirit. At other times it is appropriate. And right.

Rather than grieve the Holy Spirit, it’s better to let the person who does not understand spiritual things clap solo—he’ll quickly stop when he realizes the rest of the congregation is silent. Dancers, soloists, ensembles, choirs and instrumentalists may at times perform. When they do, applause is OK. But when they are leading the church in worship the only proper response is to worship with them.

Often the highest compliment you can pay a soloist or worship team is silence.

Mature Christians know the difference between a performance and a

worship experience. It is up to the pastor to teach the others how to recognize each—and how to respond appropriately.

## TRANSFERRING THE FIRE

Roger Ailes is not necessarily a model for Christian leaders. Both the courts and his business associates have questioned his ethics and techniques. Ailes directed George Bush's media campaign last year and now heads his own communications company, coaching executives in public speaking.

Despite his reputation, Ailes is one of the nation's best communicators. He believes the reason Bush won the election was the force of his convictions—a "fire in his belly."

But to be a successful leader, having your own fire is not enough. You must start one in other people. You must transmit to them the power of your convictions and lead them to action. Commenting on this in *Success* magazine, Ailes listed several things that are necessary to transfer the fire in your belly to someone else.

**1. Stroke your desire to win.** Successful communicators know what they want and play to win. Ailes says they succeed more often than most because of the clarity of their vision. Know keenly what is at stake with every goal you pursue, stay hungry and focused, and settle for nothing less than the best.

**2. Listen.** I've learned a great deal about successful ministry by watching the way successful politicians work. Those politicians who really get the job done are constantly commissioning polls, talking to constituents, and hiring experts whose job it is to keep in touch with the electorate. As a pastor you need to know the heartbeat of your congrega-

tion before you speak to them. You need to know not only who is sitting in your congregation, but where they hurt, what grabs their attention and what they are looking for in life. Nothing could be worse than to prepare a sermon on rearing children only to find everyone in the congregation that morning was childless.

**3. Know your conviction.** I've heard too many preachers change their minds—in the middle of their sermons. People don't want—or need—to hear you argue both sides of a question with equal conviction. Take the time to think through and articulate the positions you're willing to fight for. And die for. You'll move your listener only if you've distilled your message to what matters most. They'll believe you when you entrust *your* deepest beliefs to them.

It's not enough to say "the Bible says." Your people have the right to know what *you* believe.

**4. Never, never give up.** Ailes has some profound comments to make on this subject: "You won't win elections or conquer markets without suffering criticism and setbacks. When the chips are down, you must reach for your optimism and the strength of your convictions. In business or politics this is done as you rally your staff, get your client back, convince your investors and get rolling again.

"George Bush was defeated in the first primary of the campaign in Iowa. His supporters were dejected, and many journalists predicted a quick political demise. Gearing up for the New Hampshire primary, Bush addressed his staff.

"We won't waste time pointing fingers at each other," he said. "I'm as much to blame for this loss as anyone. We're going to win this. I have the best group of people in the world, and if we can't do it, nobody can." A dispirited team was transformed into a charged-up army that won New Hampshire against all odds."

When pastors begin to talk to them-

selves and to their leaders that way things happen in a church.

Calvin Coolidge put it well: "Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men of talent. Genius will not...the world is full of educated derelicts. *Persistence* and *determination* alone are omnipotent. The slogan 'Press on' has solved and will always solve the problems of the human race."

Pastors whose churches are going through crisis—either of the pastor's making or for some other reason—have learned to grab hold of the helm and call for full speed ahead. Churches (and ships) that slow down in rough water know the danger of slewing, getting broadside to the waves, and capsizing. With Coolidge and the apostle Paul let your watchword be "Press On!"

**5. Give yourself to your congregation.** The real secret of all communication is the ability to "drop the mask" and share your deeply felt emotions. You need to be open enough with your listeners that they don't just hear your words—but catch your spirit. That is not always best done by yelling at them. In fact, that is seldom the best way. Instead, bring them close enough to catch the fire of your ideas so they will burn also.

**EVEN THOUGH YOU MAY BE SMALL,  
THINK BIG**

Most of the readers of *Ministries Today* are in small situations. Less than 200 in attendance. In fact, our most enduring complaint from our readers is that we write as though they pastor large churches.

We take this criticism seriously. Yet today's leaders need to be reminded that one of the most powerful antidotes to failure is size and growth.

Professor Jeffrey A. Timmons, author of *The Entrepreneurial Mind*, says that "thinking small stacks the deck

against entrepreneurs." That same principle applies to every pastor—regardless of the scope of his or her present ministry. Timmons gives interesting statistics on the failure of small businesses in America. As you read them, translate them into the life of your church or ministry.

1 Virtually all businesses filing for bankruptcy employ fewer than 100 persons.

1 Survival rates double for firms that grow. For the firms that grow most aggressively, survival rates jump to 78 percent.

1 At somewhere between 10 to 20 employees (members), survival odds start to improve dramatically.

1 A firm needs about \$500,000 in sales to get out of the zone where it is highly vulnerable.

1 Chances of survival and prosperity soar when annual sales reach \$1 million.

1 Yet, of the 18 million existing businesses, only one in 30 had sales of more than \$1 million.

Here are some quotes from Timmons' book that every pastor/leader needs to take to heart when thinking of why you remain small while others are growing.

1 "The personal price you must pay to realize your ambitions and achieve exceptional goals is high, regardless of career choice."

Pastor John Hagee tells other pastors that until they are willing to work the hours he works they will never have a church the size of his. (Cornerstone Church in San Antonio is 13 years old and has 10,000 active members.) Hagee says: "God told us to work six days and take one day off to rest. A day is sunup to sundown. That means pastors, in particular, ought to work no less than 72 hours a week."

1 You must give your all; even if it means sacrifices. Loren Cunningham, founder and president of Youth With a Mission (YWAM), has said: "If I am not willing to sacrifice everything in order to take the next step of obedience, then I am no longer living by

faith."

1 Successful entrepreneurs (pastors) "burn with the competitive desire to excel and win." Psychologist William James once wrote that "the difference between a good man and a bad man is the choice of cause."

## THE CASE FOR YOUNGER LEADERS

There is a tendency as we grow older to slow down. Not only physically, but mentally and emotionally. We tend to be more cautious. We don't take as many risks. We leave the adventure to the young folks.

My concern is that as I grow older I have begun to draw around me people of my own age. Most of my friends are my age. My elders are my age. The people in my home group are my age. Despite some close and very meaningful relationships with several outstanding young leaders around the nation, most of my peers in national ministry are my age. That is not good.

Nothing makes a person feel—and act—old more than being with old people. The wise leader, as he grows older, surrounds himself with youth. Not only does this keep him from becoming "old," it satisfies the inner need to disciple the next generation. It also helps the younger generation by flavoring their lives with the assets of maturity—wisdom, good judgment, and yes, caution.

**Personal Relationships.** I am taking those steps personally. At home I am surrounded by my five married children. All live within sight of our house, which is located on semirural property. They, and the 12 grandchildren, are a vital part of our everyday lives. I play basketball with the boys on the half-court behind our house. We have regular family meetings. It keeps me young as I grow older.

I've also worked at building personal relationships with the youth in our growing church. Two years ago I joined the church basketball team and played in all but two of the league games. It had been more than 30 years since I played. The church team, however, has helped me develop personal relationships with a splendid group of young men who enrich my life.

**Void in Leadership.** Despite my determination to keep youth around me on a personal basis, I have failed to do this when it comes to church leadership. I've limited our eldership, for instance, to men my age. I've justified this by stating that the term "elder" means literally "graybeard." Elders are the "fathers" of the body. But the primary task of fathers is to raise up sons who will eventually take their place.

Now I've started to do that.

Part of my motivation has come from an extensive study of the life of Jesus. Not only was Jesus young, so were his disciples. Most were in their late 20s or early 30s.

In Jesus' day a man could not be called "rabbi" until he reached age 30—which was undoubtedly the reason He waited until that age to begin His public ministry. But as I look at a 30-year-old man, from my mid-50s perspective, I see him as a mere child. Even though life expectancy in the first century was less than 50 years, it is a mistake to limit church leadership to old guys.

**Assets of Youth.** I've been reading the lives of some of history's most successful military leaders. Starting with Alexander the Great, who ruled most of the known world at age 30, nearly all were youthful.

Youth provides the boldness, bravery and aggressiveness.

Maturity provides the timing.

General William T. Sherman, whom we Southerners would prefer to forget because of his vengeful march through Georgia during the Civil War, defined courage as "a mental willingness to

incur danger." Forty years earlier, Napoleon said that "hesitation and half measure lose all in war."

Aging church leaders need that kind of courage—and boldness.

Napoleon Bonaparte was named emperor of France and king of Italy at age 33. The following year, 1805, during the battle of Austerlitz, he found himself deep in enemy territory, his lines of communication threatened by the powerful Austro-Russian army, which was out to avenge his previous victories. Instead of retreating, as his two older generals urged him to do, he mounted an attack on the enemy's strongest point at Olmutz and made use of elaborate deceptions to blind the foe to his true plans.

Napoleon, who first became a general in the French army at age 24, said a great leader is one who "displays the utmost determination and advances to meet the enemy."

**The Risk-it-all Factor.** Jesus had youthful determination and risk-it-all advance as He assaulted the enemies of God.

I am not saying that boldness, in and of itself, is the stuff of leadership. Decisive action does make things happen. But wisdom is needed too.

During the Civil War, May 2-4, 1863, Generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson led their Confederate troops in an attack on Major General Joseph Hooker's Federals entrenched near Chancellorsville, Virginia. Jackson, who epitomized boldness and decisiveness, was only 39 at the time. Lee, the strategist, was 57. The South was outnumbered 200,000 to 60,000, yet they routed the bluecoats in Lee's last great victory of the war. Even though Jackson lost his life in the battle, historians still refer to it as one of the greatest victories in military history. The deciding factor was Lee's willingness to take chances—chances he would have never taken had he not had a youthful Jackson to lead his troops.

General Hooker, on the other hand,

lacked a leader's most potent weapon—the confidence and loyalty of his men. Hooker's soldiers knew him as a drinker and whoremonger. They dubbed the prostitutes that followed his army "hookers," a tag that remains.

"You cannot attain great success without taking great risks," General Sherman wrote. Here age is a great factor. The young are always bolder than their parents. Machiavelli advised Frederick the Great to select young leaders because they are less cautious, fiercer and more audacious. Only two of Napoleon's marshals were over 40. The great conqueror believed that younger leaders would be more daring in battle.

Older leaders tend to protect their successful careers from blemish by choosing the safer course. I remember, sadly, talking with my former pastor, a leader in the Southern Baptist Convention. Approaching 60, he had tasted of the Holy Spirit and found Him good. He had visited, undercover, a number of churches involved in renewal. He had been deeply moved and was impressed by what he had seen and heard. "But," he told me, "I have only five years until retirement and I want to stay right here in this church. I'm afraid to rock the boat." As a result of his caution, his unwillingness to venture and risk in the things of the Spirit, he missed the joy of tasting the new wine, and his church missed the excitement of becoming a new wine-skin. Not only that, he was unable to enjoy his planned retirement. He died of a sudden heart attack less than a year after our conversation.

Leadership in any church should exhibit two things: the wisdom and caution of age combined with the boldness and aggressiveness of youth.

Add younger men to your leadership. Start training young men to be elders. You, and your church, will be blessed because of them.

