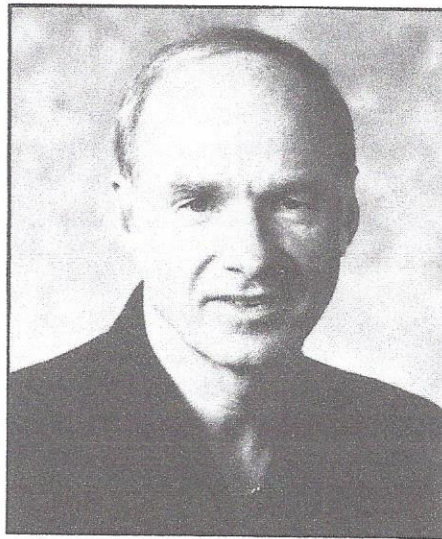


# Straight Answers to Specific Questions

By Jamie Buckingham



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**P**astors and others in local church leadership sometimes contact me with knotty problems. While I do not claim to have solutions for every complex situation, I do endeavor to respond in a straightforward manner when I can offer answers that emerge from my personal experiences and observations. If you ever happen to face any of the following questions, I hope you will benefit from the candid answers I have given.

**Q:** About 30 families in our church have recently withdrawn rather than cause dissension over the issue of tongues. We are meeting in a school each Sunday. For the time being we want to remain unattached to a denomination. What advice can you give?

**A:** Someday I want to write an article on "If I Were to Start Over." However, I'm afraid no publisher would print anything so long. If I were part of a beginning church, I would:

(1) Determine my leader and support him. For years we attempted to function with co-equal elders. Not only is it not scriptural—it won't work. Anything with more than one head is rightly described as grotesque.

(2) However, I want my pastor, while maintaining spiritual oversight of the body, to submit to an eldership—preferably one of his own appointing which has been confirmed by the body. His submission must be real and should cover all areas of church government.

(3) I strongly believe all Christians—where it is possible—should submit to a home group for guidance in their personal lives. This should be mandatory for leaders. The major mistakes I have made in governing my church can be traced to my unwillingness to submit major issues to elders. The major mistakes I have made in my personal life—including relationships with my wife, children and aging parents—can be traced to my unwillingness to heed the counsel of those friends with whom I am in a covenant relationship in a home group. I would have a hard time following a pastor who is not willing to open his personal and family life to group guidance.

(4) In these beginning years of the church you should major on rela-

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tionships rather than building programs, doctrinal correctness, or even church government. The group who majors in love, acceptance, mutual respect, forgiveness and the formation of a family will not have to worry about numerical growth. People are eager to be part of a group which exemplifies the Spirit of Christ.

(5) From a practical perspective you need to choose a name—one that will be as meaningful 30 years from now as today, incorporate with the state, and apply to the IRS as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

**Q:** I am the young pastor of a new, independent church in a medium-sized town. I want to work with other pastors for the purpose of winning the city to Christ. So far I've had little success. They are all too busy or too disinterested. What can I do to create harmony?

**A:** Not much if you're in a hurry. Instead, major on feeding and building your own flock and forget, for the time being, any kind of organized unity with other pastors. After you have proved that you are not a sheep-stealer, that you are not a fly-by-night butcher who has come to town to shear the sheep only later to leave them for the wolves, that you have a balanced ministry, that you speak well of other pastors (don't worry, they'll hear what you're saying about them), and most important, when it becomes evident to these other men of God that the anointing is on your work—then you will be accepted. But that will take time. As for now: Care for, love and lead your own sheep, and let God take care of the other shepherds.

**Q:** Recently I had to discipline a church staff member by curtailing some of his duties and denying him certain privileges. He is now going to some discontents in the church to complain and pass on his bitterness. What should I do?

**A:** Warn him once—in private. If his attitude does not change immediately, go to your leadership, explain in specific detail exactly what precipitated the problem and how the staff member has reacted in insubordination. Then fire him. If God does not tolerate a man who “devises wicked schemes, who has feet that are quick to rush into evil, who is a false witness who pours out lies, and who stirs up dissension among brothers” (cf Prov. 6:16-19)—neither should you.

**Q:** I am graduating from college this spring and feel God is calling me to some phase of ministry. My pastor says seminaries are really cemeteries. What do you think?

**A:** The Bible says the leader should study in order to handle correctly the word of truth (cf 2 Tim. 2:15). This does not take a seminary education. However, while a number of seminaries are, indeed, either pits of death or at best breeding places of unbelief, there

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are a number of fine theological seminaries where you can systematically discipline yourself in training. I am grateful for my seminary education at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas. While it is not classified as "Charismatic," it is open to the move of the Spirit and I do not hesitate to recommend it to young men and women willing to prepare their lives for service. The same is true of a number of other fine seminaries and graduate schools.

A final word. You don't have to attend seminary to fulfill God's call. There are a number of valid calls apart from "church ministry." Among these are mission calls. I work closely with Wycliffe Bible Translators, and a number of fine young people—some with college educations, some without—are fulfilling God's call in their life by using their gifts and skills in some of the world's most remote areas—without the benefit of seminary or Bible school.

**Q:** I'm a pastor who is considering a call to a new church and the finance committee has asked if I will be willing to come for *less* than I'm being paid in my present position. How should I respond?

**A:** When I "interviewed" for my first pastorate the finance committee chairman said, "We're paying off a big debt and don't have any money. How *little* can we pay you and you'll still come?"

I went back and talked to my wise pastor at the seminary. He challenged me: "Tell them you'll come for nothing if they'll help you find a job in the community and allow you to set your own hours. If they refuse that, tell them you'll come for anything they pay you, and you'll live at that economic level. If they want you to mow your own grass rather than visit the hospital, you'll do that. If they want you to wear shabby clothes and walk to work because you can't afford a car, you'll do that."

It was wise advice. They paid me \$130 per week. I mowed my own grass and wore the same suit each Sunday until a deacon gave me a new one. What they didn't know was I would have paid them for the privilege of being their shepherd, so strong was my call. We never lacked anything—especially satisfaction and contentment.

**Q:** Recently a small but vocal group in my church told me they needed a new pastor. They want me to retire, although the vast majority seem to like me. Should I leave?

**A:** The only time you should be concerned is when all speak well of you. If God put you there, don't run just because a group of dogs are baying up your tree. If these folks want a new pastor, call them in and tell them to go find one—and join his church.

**Q:** I'm a newly appointed elder in our church, and I see some things about my pastor which I think hinder his effectiveness.

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These are personal things, like his dirty fingernails and unpolished shoes. He's a warm, personable man but seems oblivious to these things. Should I tell him?

**A:** By all means. That's what love is all about. But use a lot of grace and pray for a lot of wisdom. Outwardly he may seem warm and personable, but inside he may be insecure. Many men do not know how to receive correction. They equate it with rejection. Why not prove your love to him first—by getting to know him and being his friend. Take him out to dinner. Buy him a new suit—and perhaps a manicure set. Maybe he'd like one of those electric shoeshine machines. Then, after you've earned the right through love, speak the truth.

**Q:** I've been pastor of this church six months. My wife and I are the only Spirit-baptized people in the membership. The people knew we had been fired from our last church for our Charismatic stance, but they were as desperate for a pastor as I was for a place to serve. Now the honeymoon is over. We could stay here indefinitely, but no one is responding. What should we do?

**A:** It sounds as if God has answered your prayer. You wanted a place to serve, and He gave you a needy flock who need a servant.

I suggest you start where Paul did with the church at Corinth—not with scholarly sermons but demonstrations of power. It's one thing to preach about the power of the Holy Spirit—another thing to demonstrate it.

Call for the sick. Then gather your elders and anoint with oil. Take authority over demons. Not in a Wednesday night prayer meeting, but on Sunday morning. Call for those to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Lay on hands and pray in tongues. I guarantee your church will come alive. Like Paul, you'll have a riot or revival on your hands. But it will not remain lukewarm.

If you are dissatisfied with your lot in life, build a filling station on it—and fill your people with the Holy Spirit. He'll do the rest.

**Q:** Our minister insists on calling himself "pastor," but he never visits the congregation members' homes or the hospital. He sends an assistant to do the job. Do you think he's a real pastor?

**A:** Every Christian is a minister. Out of these ministers, the Holy Spirit selects some to be apostles, others to be prophets, some to be evangelists, pastors and teachers. These specialized ministers are commissioned to prepare God's people to be better ministers. They are to the body of Christ what a coach is to a football team. They are not the players—even though they may be better at the task than the actual players. Their job is to enable others to be better players.

You are right in stating there is a difference between pastor and

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minister. I, for instance, am not a pastor. I am, however, the “senior minister” in our church. We have others, some on staff and some with responsibilities in home groups, who are true pastors. While I have some problems with a man calling himself a pastor if he is really a prophet or a teacher, you have to call the chief overseer something—and our generation understands the term “pastor.”

It seems to me that you want special attention from the chief shepherd, and you are offended that God may be treating you as He had Elisha treat Naaman by sending out his assistant rather than coming out himself. I suggest you listen to the Word of God and get your heart right—regardless of who visits you.

**Q:** In our small congregation we have sincere people who talk too long and too often (including tongues and interpretation). This not only tends to stagnate the service, but sometimes does not leave time for the pastor’s message. How can these “bubbling babblers” be countered?

**A:** This same thing used to happen in our services, too. It happened because I was too “spiritual” to take authority. We proudly proclaimed that we were a “Spirit-led” church. By that we meant no one watched the clock and no one was in charge. It soon became apparent, however, that when the MAN God had appointed to lead the service sat down—the devil often stood up...and had a good bit to say.

Decency and order demands someone be in charge.

It’s a matter of authority. And honesty. If there are those who are sincere but long-winded the leader should say—before they speak—“We’re going to allocate 15 minutes for spontaneous utterances this morning. Brother Jones, why don’t you watch the clock and call time if someone gets carried away.”

Or, what if you stood some Sunday and said, “This morning God has given me a special word. Rather than wait until later in the service I’m going to deliver it now.”

The best way to confront a problem is head-on. That means you may have to pull the culprit aside (if possible, try not to embarrass him in front of the congregation) and say, “We need to be sensitive to the time. Your interpretation this morning ran 22 minutes. You could have said the same thing in 60 seconds. Let’s allow time for others.”

If he refuses to cooperate, you may be dealing with a rebellious spirit. That may demand public correction. But that’s also one of the obligations of leadership.

**Q:** For the last three Sundays, every time we’ve entered into high worship, a certain woman begins to scream. It sounds demonic. What should I do?

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**A:** High worship often irritates demons—who will do anything possible to interrupt what the Holy Spirit is doing. When this happened in our church last year I came down off the platform and went straight to the woman, who was literally screaming as loud as she could. I got right down in her face and looking her straight in the eye I said, “Shut up right now.”

I wasn’t sure whether I was talking to a demon—or to her flesh—but it sure got her attention. She stopped screaming in the middle of a scream—and just sat there staring at me.

I then motioned for a couple of folks who are strong in the deliverance ministry. They took her outside and ministered to her. I returned to the platform and realized about half the church had overheard what I had said. Instead of trying to re-start the worship, I seized the time for a teaching opportunity. I explained in detail what had happened, outlined the spiritual principles which were at play, and wound up asking if there were any others who had felt demon activity churning in them as we entered into worship. I saw several nodding. I gave an altar call and we had a wonderful deliverance service. The devil always overplays his hand.

**Q:** Recently a woman joined our church who comes from another tradition. Every time I call the body to prayer she begins to wail. She sounds like a bobcat in mating season. It’s pretty distracting. Should I call her down?

**A:** Different people pray in different ways. I remember the first time my Baptist daddy was called on to pray in a Pentecostal church up in the mountains of North Carolina where he was the Gideon Speaker of the morning. I was there as a teen-age observer. The minute he started to pray, the entire church erupted in prayer. Loud prayer! My Dad later told us the only way he was able to make it through was because the old mountaineer behind him, who was shouting along with everyone else, kept pounding him on the back hollering at the top of his lungs, “O Lord, help him!”

To some of us it was a terrifying experience—but to the folks in that little church, it was normal.

Several years ago we had a precious woman who did a lot of “wailing” during our corporate prayer times. She called it “travailing.” It was a normal experience in her former church, and would have been “in order” in the privacy of her own prayer closet. But all it did in our situation was call attention to herself.

My wife and another woman took her out to lunch one day and talked frankly. The woman, a precious godly woman, was unaware she was distracting others. She had been taught that in order to pray you had to wail. She eagerly received their correction. She later moved out of state, but when she visits she still thanks my wife for her loving

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Authority should be coated with gentleness and mercy. The shepherd may have a few mangy rams in his flock which need to be hit with a stick, but most sheep are looking for someone to lead them. They'll follow a sugar cube much better than a hand holding a bitter root.

**Q:** What do you think of the new expression of worship surging through the Charismatic movement called dancing before the Lord? Mainline Pentecostals have long "danced in the Spirit" but now people are simply stepping out into the aisle and beginning to dance with their eyes open.

**A:** While "dancing in the Spirit" is not a scriptural phrase, "dancing before the Lord" is biblical. The first recorded incident was the older sister of Moses, Miriam, who took a tambourine and danced along the Sinai beach.

David, leading the procession from the house of Obed-Edom as the Ark of the Covenant was carried up to Mt. Zion, "danced before the Lord."

The Hebrews—ancient and modern—loved to dance in honor of the Lord. In each case the dances were joyous expressions of praise—and I am assuming done with eyes open.

Paul says all Charismatic expressions should be "decent and in order." While most evangelicals have forbidden dancing as "worldly," many Pentecostals have equated trances, jerks and religious spasms with spirituality. Both have missed the Spirit.

There should be a place for dancing in the worship service. However, a long line of hip-swinging folks doing a "Jericho rumba" around the sanctuary, or a chorus line of overweight and clumsy women kicking their legs in a "Pentecostal cancan" is both carnal and offensive.

If you are going to dance I recommend lessons first. Anything worth doing before God is worthy of rehearsal. I love to dance the hora and occasionally do a little Irish jig to the tune of "This Is the Day," but I'll not do it if it offends the leadership of the church. During those times I stand quietly—and let my heart do the dancing.

**Q:** My family and I, along with 15 other people, have come together to form a church. One of the men is assuming pastoral function although he is not trained. What should we do about spiritual authority? We do not want to be "independent."

**A:** There is no set rule for establishing a church. Many New Testament churches were under the oversight of an apostle. That could be a man with strong pastoral influence in your city who has a proven apostolic ministry. Such authority does not have to be legalistic, but it should be the kind of authority a father has over the home of his married son or daughter.

If you do not want to affiliate with a denomination, I recommend

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you seek the Lord's guidance as to whom you should relate to for oversight. This apostle, working with the elders in your body, will give guidance about the appointment of a pastor—who could come from within the body or from the outside. Whoever the pastor is, he should command the respect and authority of the people.

Even if you choose not to submit your church to apostolic guidance, it is wise to seek counsel from others in your area who have walked the way before you.

**Q:** Our small church is looking for a pastor. Most of our people are Spirit-baptized and eager to “move on” with the Lord. How important is it that the pastor be Spirit-baptized?

**A:** It depends on your definition of “Spirit-baptized.” Are you equating this with speaking in tongues? Or do you mean a man who is led by the Spirit in every area of his life? Unfortunately, there is a difference.

This is certain: Sheep will never go beyond the spirituality of their shepherd. They will either stop short or drift away to some other pasture where they can be fed. The pastor does not need to be the best-educated man in the church, the best preacher, nor even the best Bible scholar. But he does need to be a man with a spiritual vision which extends beyond the commonplace to challenge the sheep to move to higher pastures.

This cannot be done, for long, on soul energy. If Jesus told His disciples not to attempt to witness until the Holy Spirit had filled them, how much more important that a man not attempt to pastor a church until he has had his own personal Pentecost.

**Q:** I feel called to be a pastor of a church someday. How can I tell when it is God's time to begin?

**A:** Solomon said, “whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might” (Eccl. 9:10 NIV). I suggest you submit yourself to the leadership of your present church and be willing to be a servant to all. One day you will turn around and there will be sheep following you. Then you will know you are a shepherd.

**Q:** We are in the process of forming a new church. How do we go about selecting a name?

**A:** Names are extremely important. The names of wells and villages in the Old Testament had spiritual significance. The people who lived in those places took on the characteristics of the name.

For instance, Rehoboth, where Isaac dug one of his final wells, means “room enough for all.” That place later became a place of acceptance and hospitality for many. Although the name Jerusalem is pre-Israelite, appearing as early as 2500 B.C. in the Elba archive, its meaning carries over today. The first part of the name means “foundation” and

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the second part is cognate with the Hebrew word for "peace."

In the New Testament churches were often named for locations, signifying there is but one church in a city. Thus the church at Antioch and the church at Corinth, although made up of many smaller house groups, was one unified body under one name.

Today, with a proliferation of churches, names are even more important. Churches called "tabernacle" tend to be open to movement and change. Churches called "temple" have a tendency to build large and ornate edifices.

Names also play an important role in evangelism. I hope you will not call your church something which will bring a reproach on sensible people who might be attracted to your fellowship but turned off by your name. For instance, the saints at the Fire Baptized Holy Ghost Filled Walking and Leaping Revival Center may love the Lord, but they will not attract too many just plain, normal folks.

How do you choose a name? There doesn't seem to be any Bible precedent. Sixteen years ago when we named our church in Florida, our elders allowed the people to make suggestions. These were then narrowed to three and presented back to the people for a vote.

**Q:** I'm a home group leader. Recently our church installed a glad-handing pastor who is more politician than shepherd. I want a spiritual leader who can teach me. What should I do?

**A:** God does not require that you learn from your pastor, only that you submit the governmental matters of the church to him. You may learn from many other sources.

The same principle applies to a spiritual woman married to a carnal man. She may have to receive spiritual food from other sources, but she still submits to her husband—believing God will change him.

As long as you remain a member of that church—especially as you remain in leadership—you should submit and support the pastor, just as you obey the laws of the land even though you may disagree with them. In doing so you loose the Holy Spirit to touch your pastor as well.

Why not take him to lunch once a week (you pay) and express your heart's need. You might find beneath his egotistical exterior a lonely, shepherd's heart looking for a friend.

**Q:** I have recently moved to a new pastorate. The people want to call me by my title, as they did their former pastor, rather than by my first name which I prefer. What should I do?

**A:** You should call the shots here. After all, it's your name. Be kind and patient, however. Many people are afraid of intimacy.

Titles such as Pastor, Reverend, even Brother nearly always separate pastor and people. Many Christians, however, want it this way. They feel uncomfortable with close relationships. Like ancient Israel, they

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prefer a king.

Remember, however, kings often lose their heads while family members are treated with more kindness. Thus, stick to your insistence of being called by your first name.

On the other hand, many pastors enjoy being exalted. Others are afraid that familiarity breeds contempt. Thus each leader must make his own decision.

Spiritual authority, however, is best recognized by an anointing, rather than title. Only Jesus' enemies—and strangers—called him Rabbi or Teacher. His friends called him by his first name.

**Q:** My pastor preaches we should be debt free, but I notice he uses a credit card to pay for many things. Isn't that hypercritical?

**A:** Not necessarily. I use credit cards but only as a convenience—always paying my bill promptly at the end of the month. It keeps me from having to carry cash or write many checks.

Only if I start using time payments—at high interest rates—have I unequally yoked myself to the lending institution.

I recommend this rule of thumb for purchasing: Buy nothing on time which depreciates. That means you save first and pay cash for things like washing machines, clothing, even automobiles. The only time credit purchasing is valid is when the item purchased *appreciates* in value at a higher interest rate than the interest charged.

**Q:** How much should we pay a guest speaker who doesn't ask for a special amount?

**A:** First you get on your knees and thank God for such a rare man. Then go to your congregation, explain the man's situation, and receive a love offering.

I recommend you pay all his travel and lodging expenses from the church budget. The love offering—all of which should go to him—is honorarium. This way God can bless the speaker as he blesses you with his ministry. If he turns out to be a curse, God can use the meager love offering to squeeze him into the shape of Jesus.

**Q:** A recent guest speaker said some things from our pulpit which I disagree with. Should I have corrected him publicly, privately, or simply ignored it?

**A:** By all means you correct it publicly. That's what pastors are for. However, unless it is a gross error I recommend you wait until the next meeting. After all, he may be right and you need time to examine all he said in light of the Scriptures.

Therefore, before issuing a word of correction (or explanation) to your congregation, check it out with your elders. They may agree with the speaker which means you need to correct yourself before the con-

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gregation. If they agree with you, do not be afraid to go boldly yet with kindness (and perhaps humor to make the medicine go down easier), and set the matter straight. Then contact your guest speaker and let him know what you have done. It may save him additional embarrassment at his next watering hole.

I hope you are not so insecure you are threatened by interpretations of Scripture other than your own. None of us have a corner on the truth. Churches grow by hearing many different facets of truth and arriving at their own conclusion.

**Q:** The unwed daughter of one of our elders is pregnant. The family has made no plans for the girl to marry, nor are they hiding her pregnancy. In fact, I understand they intend to keep the baby and raise it. Should the man continue as an elder since his home is not in order?

**A:** Who says it is not in order? By what standard do you judge a man's reaction to personal heartache? The only way such a home could be out of order would be for the parents to refuse to admit their problem and to try to defend it.

If the child is rebellious and does not submit to her parents once the sin is discovered, it may be reason to question the parent's ability to oversee their family. But parents who love a wayward child enough to carry the cross for her and adopt her illegitimate child are not only in order, but have the heart of God.

I hope the rest of your people see what is happening in this home and learn from this wonderful example of love. Remember, "In that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

**Q:** My first reaction to crisis is often wrong. What can I do to change this pattern?

**A:** My flight instructor used to say the first thing a pilot should do in a crisis is "wind the clock." If you break out of the clouds in a dive, don't immediately pull back on the stick—you just might snap your wings off. Instead, wind the clock first. In other words, wait a minute, get your bearings, then act deliberately. Crisis management decisions often turn minor problems into major ones. Pray, seek counsel, then act.

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