

BUCKINGHAM

REPORT

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

GOOD OLD GEORGE

Roger Tompkins, executive with State Farm Insurance and chairman of the recent Billy Graham crusade in Los Angeles, says the 10 most powerful two-letter words in the English language are: IF IT IS TO BE IT IS UP TO ME.

All that boils down to one 14-letter word: RESPONSIBILITY.

Recently the newspapers were full of stories of the mayor's race in Carmel, California. Popular movie actor Clint Eastwood, who lives in this small coastal community south of San Francisco, ran for mayor and was elected by a landslide. After the election a newspaper reporter asked a local pastor if he knew anyone in town who was more capable and more popular than Eastwood. The pastor responded, "Oh yes, we have a man in our church who can do everything. He is the most popular man in town. Everybody knows him by his first name and relies upon him for all important tasks."

"Really?" the reporter asked. "Who is this remarkable man?"

"His name is George. Everytime something comes up in our church he's always the man for the job. Every place I go someone is saying, 'Let George do it.' We expect George to turn out the lights, pick up the paper in the restrooms, mow the lawn, pay the bills, pray for the missionaries, visit the sick, win the lost and even go to the mission field. Yes, indeed, George is our man for all things. Everyone knows that sooner or later George will do it."

Transferring a Dream

I know a lot of people who are waiting for George to make their dream come true. These are the people in our churches who come up with various ministry ideas. Some of them are quite good. The problem is they present them to the pastor and expect him to bring them to pass. The spiritually mature person realizes he cannot count on anyone else to make his dream come true.

Moses really wanted to see his people set free from slavery in Egypt, but tried to weasel out of God's command that he was the man for

the job. He wanted to pass the responsibility over to George (Aaron). I am forever confronting people like this. God has told them to write a book—but they want me to write it for them. God has told them the church should be involved in a street mission or a drug rehab program, or should start a satellite church. My response: That's wonderful! You do it. When you're under way, come see me. At that time I'll determine if this fits in with what God has told me to do also. But don't look to me, or to the church, to make your dream true. If God wants you to write a book, He'll give you the ability—and furnish you with a publisher. If He wants you to start a mission church then it's up to you—not anyone else.

Responsibility means we'll not wait for George. It means we'll do it ourselves for IF IT IS TO BE IT IS UP TO ME.

KEEP IT PERSONAL

Last month my secretary fielded two calls from well-known evangelists wanting to speak in our church. One man had a "word from the Lord" that he was to speak in our church on a particular Sunday. The other, an old friend, simply said he was going to be in our area and would love to preach to our people.

I checked the calendar. Neither date fit our schedule. One Sunday—the day God had sovereignly assigned to the evangelist—was the Sunday following my three-week absence while ministering in Europe. I knew I should preach that morning and make a full report to the church. On the other Sunday a guest speaker was already scheduled.

I had my secretary return both calls, telling them we were sorry but this was not the right time.

A few weeks later I met both men—at different conferences. When I expressed my regrets that we were not able to have them speak, both men looked puzzled. They recovered quickly and covered themselves. However, it was apparent neither knew I had been contacted.

The second man, a long-time friend, gave me a sad smile and admitted that he no longer

handled his itinerary. He had a woman on his staff who took care of all bookings, airline and hotel accommodations, and contractual arrangements with the host church. She had standing orders to book all week-ends, and at least four days out of every week, including all Sundays.

"Do you pray about these engagements?" I asked him.

"I pray when I get on the plane," he said, again giving me his sad smile. "I don't even know where I'm going most of the time until my secretary hands me my itinerary for the week."

The other man, the one who had been "told by God" to speak in our church on a certain Sunday, simply shrugged when I asked him about his procedure. "I work with a booking agent," he said. "They are responsible for booking me in various churches. They get 10 percent off the top of all honorariums. It's worth it," he added. "This way I don't have to worry about engagements."

"But your man said God had spoken to you."

The fellow clapped me on the shoulder and laughed heartily. "Come on, don't be so serious. That's just 'preacher talk.'"

I really want to expose both men by calling their names. The first one is pathetic, simply caught in the trap of his own busyness. The second fellow is dangerous, and as far as I am concerned should not be preaching anywhere until he learns something about the ways of God. However, I am not called to confess other people's sins—I have enough of my own. I am called, however, to deal with principles. Each one of us needs to examine ourselves, and our own methods. We are also called to protect our people from the mercenaries who, masquerading as men of God, flit about the nation spouting cliches and collecting offerings.

I would rather hear from a humble, stuttering man full of God's Spirit of truth than a flamboyant, articulate dandy filled with sawdust. There may be exceptions, but I think I've booked my last preacher who works through an agent.

PUSHING ON

One of my most pleasant places is a high waterfall in the Negev Desert at the upper end of the Wadi Ein Gedi in Israel. I discovered it a number of years ago on my third research trip into the Sinai. Twice before I had spent two weeks in the Sinai—mountain climbing, camping, sleeping out under the stars, following the footsteps of Moses. On each of these earlier trips I had taken 10 men with me. Both times our Israeli guide had brought us to Wadi Ein Gedi as our final stop.

The wadi is a deep valley which comes down from the high mountains and empties into the Aravah, the geological rift which contains the Dead Sea. After two weeks in the scorching desert of the Sinai, the sight of fresh water pouring out of this delightful valley was unbelievably refreshing. Our guide told us if we climbed up the steep canyon we would eventually come to a magnificent waterfall and deep pools. But on those first two trips I was too exhausted to push on. I found the first pools available, about half a mile up the wadi, pulled off my clothes and plunged in. What could be more wonderful than that?

On my third trip I determined not to stop at these earlier pools. I pushed on, up the hot steep canyon to find the promised waterfalls. Four miles up the wadi, I turned a corner and there it was—a beautiful waterfall pouring out of the side of the desert mountain into a pool of sparkling water in a solid rock basin.

It was worth every effort.

Across the years I made three more trips. Each time I brought my little group of pilgrims to Wadi Ein Gedi. Each time I was faced with the temptation to stop at the earlier pools. But having experienced the best I was never again satisfied to stop at the lower levels. My companions were harder to persuade, though. Once they saw the lower pools they lost the desire to press on. But those of us who had been to the top would never be satisfied with anything but the best.

Leadership Characteristics

One of the distinguishing characteristics of a true leader is his drive to push on. He never stops at the comfortable place. He is satisfied with nothing but the best.

This is true, first of all, in his personal relationship with God. He remains dissatisfied. He knows he is unfinished and is constantly striving for completion. He "presses on" toward the mark of his high calling in Christ.

How is this done? Through personal time alone with God in quiet places—praying with a notebook in hand and jotting down, in intimate detail, the Holy Spirit's agenda for change. The wise leader factors in these planned quiet times. Not only does he need them on a daily basis, but in special retreats. One pastor I know takes off every Thursday and goes to a small cottage on a river for a day of fasting and prayer in solitude. My pastor requires all senior staff members to retreat five days a year in solitude.

Pressing on is also done by submitting your personal life and ministry to others who will honestly critique and harshly confront every issue. Many leaders, while daring to take time in

personal retreat, are afraid to open their lives to critics. They disguise their insecurity by calling criticism a "negative report." But no one changes unless he is willing to face reality, especially perceived reality in the eyes of others.

Leading Others

The true leader also pushes on in his organizational life. He is never content to allow his church to stop and bathe at the lower pools. The true leader is never a "maintenance man." He is a challenger. A motivator. A "follow-me-boys" type. Wisdom, of course, dictates the speed at which he moves. I discovered in Wadi Ein Gedi that the fact I had been to the waterfall was not motive enough for my desert-weary fellow-travelers. It is almost impossible to transfer a vision—especially to men who can barely see beyond their blistered feet. If I got too far ahead of them, they would begin to drop off and luxuriate in the lower pools. The only way I could convince them to press on was to slow down and stay with them, kidding them, encouraging them, challenging them with "you can make it." I had to recall constantly how I, too, had found the climb too tough on my earlier journeys. On those trips the guide, from the shade of our truck, had simply pointed up the wadi and said, "If you want it, it's yours." But I didn't want it bad enough to go on. I needed a leader who would take me by the hand and lead me to the top.

I've watched many churches which started well—excited about moving on with God—but stopped before they reached the top. Across the years they hit plateaus and stopped. They were unwilling to press on to the supernatural. They stopped short of miracles, of true body ministry, of forming community—and settled for preaching, the glitter of musical entertainment and stale membership. Now they talk about miracles but never see them. Or, worse, they try to convince people to follow a God who **used** to do mighty signs and wonders.

The true leader pushes on; then, having discovered the waterfall and high pools, returns to lead his followers patiently to the top.

IN THIS ISSUE I AM SPOTLIGHTING...

RESPONDING TO CRITICISM

How should a pastor react to another pastor in the community whom he dislikes, fears, disrespects or believes is "preaching another gospel."

I recently received a copy of a letter sent to Glen Roachelle, pastor of the Metroplex Covenant Church in the Dallas area. Glen and his church are part of the "discipleship movement." He is

—also a man of God, a brother in Christ and an effective pastor.

The letter—renouncing Glen and declaring his ministry anathema—was from the pastor of a small church in the Dallas area. Glen's church is about 10 times the size of the other church. Copies were sent to me, to Charles Simpson and to Don George, pastor of Calvary Temple in Dallas. I assume George received his copy because he is chairman of the Metroplex Charismatic Leadership Council—a group of 12 Dallas pastors to whom Roachelle is submitted on a local basis. That group, which has been meeting for several years, is a solid, interdenominational ministerial fraternity. Besides George and Roachelle it is composed of Bob Cavnar, Des Evans, Everitt Fjordbak, Jim Hodges, A.T. Il-seng, Paul Mills, Ted Nelson, Bob Nichols, David Smith, John Wilkerson. The accusing pastor does not fellowship with any of these men.

I am a bit mystified why I received a copy. Last year I wrote an analysis in this report of the discipleship movement which was objective, but basically positive. At that time this same pastor wrote me a hot letter, stating I had done poor research and if I knew the damage still being done by the discipleship movement in Dallas I would join him in calling down fire on the Simpsonites, Mumfordites, Bashamites and Baxterites. I chose not to answer the letter and heard nothing until this latest barrage was fired.

I quote portions of the letter sent to Roachelle so you can catch the spirit.

"I have counseled many people who have been under your ministry, both those who have joined the church I pastor, and those who have never attended it. I am weekly in contact with the sheep who were under your care. I have yet to meet a single person coming out of MCC (Metroplex Covenant Church) who has not been wounded. Everything within my own pastor's heart rises up to declare Jeremiah 23, because of the destroyed and scattered sheep of God's pasture."

He then accused Roachelle of "oppressive pastoral authority, rejection of those who do not meet or conform to external standards, harsh financial requirement of the people while leadership lives high, destruction of self-esteem and self-worth, quashing of the gifts and callings in the lives of believers, arrogant superior attitudes towards those outside MCC, the instilling of fear of failure, deception, and man-pleasing....

"I will not remain silent," the pastor wrote, "concerning the cultic authority, abuse and manipulation which I see every time your ministry raises its head. I oppose it, and I oppose you, so long as you continue in this course. I

will not remain idle while you court ministries in this area, continuing our deception in the body of Christ. As God is my witness, I will bear the burden of God's flock. 'Here I stand, I can do no other.' "

He concludes, "Unless, and until you publicly repent and renounce the structure and work which you have led, I cannot stand alongside you as a brother in Christ...I call on you to turn back to the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. If not, I know and will declare publicly that you are preaching another gospel."

I talked with Roachelle in May. We both serve on the steering committee of the North American Renewal Service Committee planning the New Orleans conferences. Glen said he wanted to hear God in all criticism. He confessed he had made a lot of mistakes, had acted immaturely in some instances, had used poor judgment in some of his methods of discipline and was prepared to go to any extreme to build bridges and heal wounds. He described how he and Charles had met earlier with this pastor and how he had reached out to some of those who had left MCC in an effort to bring healing. He asked for my advice.

I told him there was a difference between positive criticism and condemnation. I felt he did not even owe the letter writer the courtesy of a response; that no matter how he responded, even if he just wrote, "I received your letter," it would be misinterpreted. I quoted Bruce Morgan who used to say, "In a spaghetti fight all you have to keep is that which sticks to you." All the letter writer had done was display his own insecurity, sickness and messiah-complex.

Glen had wisely asked counsel from Don George. The men he is in fellowship with know him and know his ministry. His church is behind him. Why fear the rantings of a Sanballat or Tobias?

Glen is not the only one under such attack. This week I received a letter from a woman deeply concerned that I am on a committee with Bishop Earl Paulk. She was writing to tell me he has a "dangerous theology," is promoting "anti-Semitism in the church" and is also promoting the idea of a "non-literal interpretation of the Scriptures." She equates him with those in Germany who laid the foundation for extermination of the Jews prior to World War II. She closes: "I honestly feel that the Lord has put this burden on my heart to write this letter to you and others about this situation."

How should we respond to such an attack? If it is honest criticism, if it contains any element of truth, if the criticism is given for the purpose of edification and positive correction, if the critic has the spirit of correction without rejecting, if his desire is to restore—not destroy—then we are obligated to search our hearts for areas where repentance is necessary and respond in humble love. In these cases, however, the letter writers had only one agenda: to see their enemies changed into an image that would please the letter writer.

Glen's critic felt justified in destroying another man's ministry on the basis of doctrinal and governmental disagreement. His messiah-complex had led him to believe he was responsible for all the sheep in Dallas, including those who willingly submitted to Glen Roachelle, rather than just his own small flock. The fact he sent copies of his accusations to me and to Don George indicates he was already determined to destroy Glen's ministry.

So, what's the proper way to criticize? Ken Sumrall once told a person who seemed bent on minding Ken's business as well as his own: "When I get through minding my own business it's time to go home."

In short: "Who art thou," Paul asked, "who judgest another man's servant?"

How, then, should we approach a fellow pastor we dislike, fear or disrespect or have received special revelation about that he is deceiving his sheep? A letter from Vernon Stoop, director of the Fellowship of Charismatic Churches in the United Church of Christ, puts it in proper perspective. Stoop was replying to a fellow pastor who wrote saying the pastor of a local evangelical and reformed congregation was a phony. Stoop replied, "I am hopeful that if you have correctly discerned the circumstance that you are holding up this pastor in your daily prayer time in order that the Lord will quicken him in the Spirit...."

That seems to be a much better approach than to write a bunch of letters and declare a man is "preaching another gospel."

Correction

In the July 7 issue we printed the wrong phone number for Larry Nordlinger, Southeast representative for Alpha Base Church Management System. His number is (704) 685-3180.

