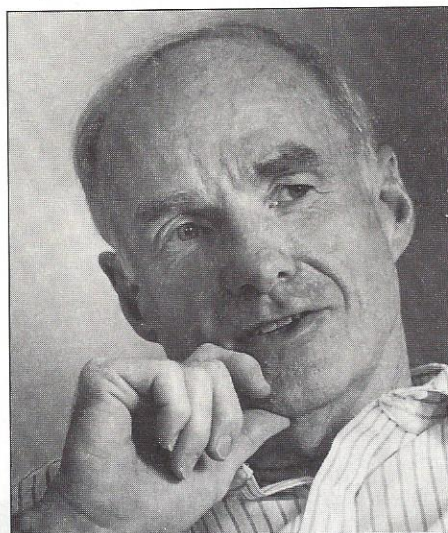


No Pouting

By Jamie Buckingham



After living with church people for more than half a century, including almost 35 years as a shepherd, I remain amazed over our inability to settle disputes.

In my early years as a pastor, I struggled with people who boycotted the church at the first sign of trouble. If some church member crossed another church member in a business deal or in city politics, invariably one or both persons would drop out of corporate worship.

If a man's wife had an affair with someone in the church, usually both innocent spouses would stop attending church services.

Leaving the church was incomprehensible to me. Straight out of seminary, I was an idealist. I could no more comprehend anyone leaving their church than I could comprehend Christians getting a divorce. Commitment, to me, meant just one thing: commitment.

Then I was introduced to the real world—filled with men and women who not only walk out on their families when things get tough, but also leave the family of God.

That's just plumb crazy. If ever men or women need the corporate body, it's when they are going through some kind of crisis. Yet across the years I've watched people leave their church in anger—blaming it for all kinds of things they brought on themselves.

When my children refused to come to the dinner table following some dispute with another family member, we had a word for it. We called it "pouting."

It's bad enough when it happens to a 5-year-old. When it happens to a 50-year-old it's either unbearable—or downright laughable.

Unfortunately, church members aren't the only ones who pout. So do pastors. And while the pastor may not leave the church, he often disassociates from those in the church.

Absence from one another in times of discord intensifies the discord. If someone says something that offends you, it is natural to withdraw. But that withdrawal always results in additional distrust. Now enter "vain imaginations." Quickly we begin believing the lies Satan whispers to us about the other person. The only way to overcome this kind of distrust is to force ourselves back into relationship.

That means, pastor, you need to take the lead and go to the offending person.

Unto whom much is given, much is required. As church leaders we're not allowed the privilege of withdrawing, holding grudges or pouting.

Jamie Buckingham

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