

The Power of Encouragement

BY JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

This month marks the 200th anniversary of John Wesley's death. On February 24, 1791, six days before he died, the 88-year-old minister asked his helper to bring paper and quill to his bed.

For years Wesley had followed the attempts of William Wilberforce, a member of Parliament, to have slavery abolished in England. In 1774, Wesley had written *Thoughts on Slavery*, a book that had influenced Wilberforce to push for abolition. Sadly, all attempts had been unsuccessful.

Now, on his deathbed, Wesley heard that Wilberforce was about to give up the fight. The vested interests of slavery in Parliament were too powerful.

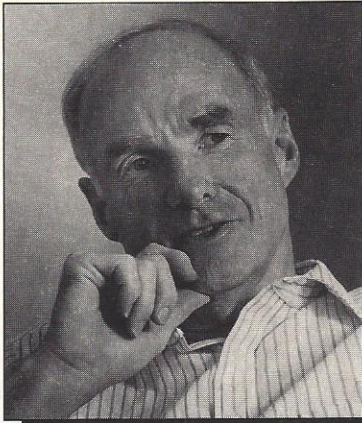
With faltering hand, Wesley wrote Wilberforce a powerful letter of encouragement.

"Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God?"

"O be not weary of well-doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.

"Reading this morning a tract wrote by a poor African, I was particularly struck by the circumstance that a man who has a black skin, being wronged or outraged by a white man, can have no redress; it being a law in all our Colonies that the oath of a black man against a white goes for nothing. What villainy is this!

"That He who has guided you from youth up may continue to strengthen you in this and all things is the prayer of, dear sir, your affectionate servant. John Wesley."



"Hold your ground. You are needed here."

Wilberforce received the letter after Wesley died. He vowed to once again take up the fight. It took 16 years, but in 1807 the British empire abolished slavery.

I'm writing this on January 16. Our

nation is just hours away from a horrible war. The phone rang as I was typing this column. It was one of our church members calling to say another pastor in town—a Southern Baptist—was under fire. Some of his members disagreed with his leadership style. They didn't like the way he shook hands at the door. He wasn't "evangelistic" enough. They wanted him out and were going to bring it up at the business meeting that night.

I could hardly believe it. Here our nation is on the eve of war, and church members have started their own war, pulling their pastor away from spiritual warfare for the nation to fight for his life!

I did what Wesley did. I stopped typing, picked up the phone and called my pastor friend across town. "Remember who put you here—not man, but God. Listen to their criticism and improve, but do not flee nor allow them to chase you off. Hold your ground. You are needed here...."

As I talked, I could tell from the tone of his voice that his drooping shoulders were coming up, his eyes were brightening. Fire was returning to his bones.

Brethren, these are critical times. There is much evidence that the return of the Lord is near. We must be diligent in encouraging one another. Don't point the accusing finger. Rather, use your hands to hold up the arms of those who are faltering.

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Ministries Today (ISSN #0891-5725) is published bimonthly by Strang Communications Co., 600 Rinehart Road, Lake Mary, FL 32746. Second-class postage paid at Lake Mary, FL 32746 and at additional entry offices. Subscription rate is \$30.00 for 6 issues, \$50.00 for 12 issues and \$60.00 for 18 issues. Canadian subscriptions add \$7 per year, other countries add \$10 per year. Foreign subscriptions payable in advance in U.S. currency or equivalent. Subscription questions? Call 1-800-227-7585. **Ministries Today** is available in microfilm from University Microfilms International, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to **Ministries Today**, P.O. Box 2111, Knoxville, IA 50197-2111. Copyright © 1991 by Strang Communications Company.

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