

BUCKINGHAM

REPORT

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

BLESS YOU ALL!

The Sunday before my cancer surgery I preached at both morning services in my Florida church. At the end of each service, one of our elders, Don Lees, came to the platform. He told the congregation that the pastors and elders were calling the church into a two-day fast surrounding my Tuesday morning surgery. Don asked the church not only to fast and pray, but to study diligently God's Word in Isaiah 58.

Jackie and I, accompanied by our daughter Bonnie Ranzino, flew to Houston Monday morning. I checked into the M.D. Anderson Cancer Clinic that afternoon and was assigned a room. Jackie and Bonnie were going to stay in a nearby motel the first two nights. After that, Jackie would move into the room with me.

Monday night my surgeon, Dr. David Swanson, came into my room and briefed me on the procedures for the next morning. He warned me, once again, of the high risk of this particular operation. He hoped to remove my left kidney—which up until then had been declared “inoperable”—and as many of the cancerous lymph glands as possible. I asked him to be aggressive, regardless of the risk. We were on the offensive. Satan was not going to win this one.

“Tomorrow morning,” I told him, “you will be the most prayed-for doctor in the world.” I felt like Admiral Farragut at the Battle of Mobile Bay during the Civil War: “Damn the torpedos—full speed ahead!”

After the doctor and my wife and daughter had left, I lay quietly in bed. In all my life I had never spent a night in a hospital. Tomorrow, before dawn...Yet I had never felt such peace. I knew I was being “borne aloft” on the wings of prayer.

I picked up my Bible. It seemed right, since my flock back home was reading Isaiah 58, that I should join them. Each verse seemed to speak to me directly. Then, suddenly, as if a tiny laser light had illuminated the words, verse 8 seemed to leap off the page: “Your Righteous One will go

before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.”

At 5:30 the next morning—after my loved ones and a few special friends had circled my bed in prayer, stationing angels throughout the hospital—the orderly rolled me down

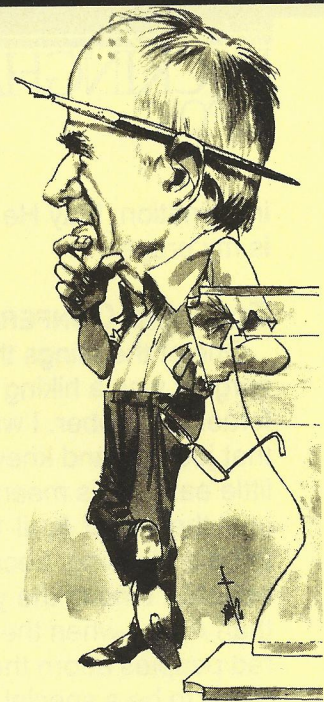
the hall. Then I was alone again, lying on the gurney outside the operating room. But I wasn't alone. The Righteous One was at one end of the gurney, and the glory of the Lord was at the other.

I stayed in that condition for the entire 17 days I was in the hospital. Dr. Swanson told me it was a tough battle. The kidney did not want to leave. But he had removed it and all the cancerous tissue around it. A week later he came back into my room, where I was lying on the bed hiccupping, and told me the pathology report showed none of the lymph glands were cancerous—despite the earlier diagnosis. “Congratulations,” he said, grinning, “you're healed. No further treatment is necessary.”

The hiccups disappeared!

I've written this as a matter of personal privilege. There is no way Jackie and I can thank you, our readers, for your part in this miracle. I know I have emerged from this experience not just a changed man, but a new man. The only plea I made to God during this entire process was to pray Psalm 118:17—that I might live to “declare the works of the Lord.” That is no longer my primary purpose for living—it is my sole purpose. But with it goes things like loving and thanking my friends—both those I know and those I've never met—for your powerful prayer support. I've *learned* things about prayer I had only preached about before. And there is a significant difference.

So to each of you, I say with deep gratitude: Thank you. You called on Him in our behalf—and the Lord has answered in ways beyond my



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imagination. May He bless and heal you also; that is my prayer.

TOUR AND CONFERENCE POSTPONED

One of the things that got postponed due to my surgery was a hiking trip I had planned to lead in Israel in October. I wanted to be at full throttle for that journey and knew that October was just a little early. This meant I had to postpone the trip until the last of April 1991. But that has turned out to be a blessing, because there is no more beautiful time of the year to visit the Holy Land than April—when the desert is blooming and the red poppies adorn the green fields of Galilee. It's going to be a special time. We'll be hiking and mountain climbing during the day, and I'll be sharing out of my experience at various places. We'll spend the nights in the best hotels in the land. If you are interested in joining me, write Jim Jackson at CBU Tours, P.O. Box 1000, Montreat, NC 28757 for full information.

Likewise, we've postponed the previously announced conference on "Restoration" scheduled for Austin, Texas, in December with Don Crossland. This same conference, sponsored by *Ministries Today*, is being rescheduled for Austin in early June 1991. Read your January issue for full details.

CANCER IN THE CHURCH

After my original diagnosis—but prior to the surgery—our church went into a period of intense prayer, including early morning prayer meetings for the men. During that time a member of the church, Cliff Lethbridge, a radio announcer for a local Christian station, wrote powerfully about a special revelation he had received from God. I'm copying it here because I believe it contains a prophetic word to the entire body.

In June my pastor delivered a sobering revelation at one of our services. He had been diagnosed with lymphoma—cancer of the lymph glands. Sitting in the congregation, listening to his announcement, I became concerned. Although I trusted God for a complete healing, my prayers were casually delivered, at best.

A week later I was shocked to learn that further tests yielded much more serious information. The

disease was extensive. In fact, the doctors had found primary cancer in the kidney and diagnosed his case as inoperable and incurable. The medical community had given our church leader a death sentence.

I still felt God would bring a complete healing. But I also knew this was a time for me to get serious about prayer. Upon the Lord's leading, I began a fast—something I had never attempted before. I would eat nothing until God told me otherwise, and I would pray for my pastor diligently. As I began to pray seriously, the Holy Spirit led me in other prayer directions, and in other areas of fasting besides food. Although the medical reports concerning our pastor got worse and worse, I was feeling closer and closer to God.

A few days into the fast, while I was adjusting to hunger, I had a brief but potentially fatal thought. I imagined how wonderful it was going to be once our pastor was healed and everything was rosy again. I savored the notion of resuming eating, watching television and being "normal" again. I no sooner developed the thought than God let me have it with both barrels in an explosion that has changed my life.

Questions that change a life. He was not happy with me at all. He asked me a heart-rending question: *Why has it taken your pastor's cancer to get you on your knees before Me? Why has a tragedy been necessary for you to spend intimate time with Me? Is this what it will take for you to maintain and continue to develop the relationship with Me that I have desired from the beginning?*

To my own shame I admitted I didn't have any answers to His piercing questions.

God's message continued to ring clearly: *If this is what it takes to get you close to Me and then you go back to your own ways, the next thing it will take to return you to Me you will not like. In fact, it will be a cup that you will beg Me not to have to drink.*

"You are a cancer." I listened intently as God reinforced His word for me: *You are praying that I will heal your pastor's cancer. I will. But there is a far greater cancer at work. You are a cancer. You are a cancer in the body of Christ.*

That was not as difficult to swallow as it might appear. Yes, I had been a born-again, Spirit-filled Christian for some time. I always enjoyed attending church services and playing my

instruments in the church orchestra. Unfortunately, the only thing missing was Christ. Our relationship was becoming more distant each day. What God said was plainly true: I was a cancer.

I had become a cancer by refusing to yield my life fully, totally and completely to God. I'd lived my life in my own strength, making decisions without consulting Him. I had been so weighed down by the many cares of my life that I almost neglected praying altogether. My quiet times with God were hurried or non-existent. My Christian witness was not a priority. I played church games very well but inside was quite miserable. It was easy to deny these facts and tuck them away somewhere. But God told me they were true. I knew He was right. How could I serve Him when I was really only a "whitewashed wall"?

So I was a cancer. I had become a rebellious cell in the body of Christ. Now it was time for me to become a healthy one. It was time for me to live out Galatians 2:20—die to self and become alive in Christ. Indeed, the cancer cell had to die in order for me to live. Like my pastor, I too had received a death sentence. But through God's healing power, I knew I could have life—as I had faith to believe my pastor would live also.

As I continued to fast and take inventory of my lifestyle in order to make meaningful and lasting changes, God began to reveal something much deeper. He showed me a vision of our church during a regular Sunday worship service—only this one was different. We were all excited because our pastor was about to reveal he had been completely healed. I felt a surge of joy as what would surely become an especially wonderful time of praise erupted. As I felt my body suddenly leap for joy, God dramatically called everything to a screeching halt.

You can't go back. He said plainly that the church was to examine itself in relationship to our pastor's healing. Indeed, if we celebrated the victory, then went about our merry ways as usual, there would be severe consequences. In fact, I believe God actually threatened to "pull the plug" on our church if we got all fired up about the healing and did not change our lives as a result.

But that was the same thing God had told me! Could it be possible that the revelation He gave me about my own life applied to our entire congregation? The thought was mind-boggling, so

I shared the vision with a trusted prayer partner. Not only had she been given a similar vision, but she said that several of her friends had told her that while they were praying for our pastor, God was clearly calling them into a time of repentance and spiritual inventory like that I was going through. This was evidently going on throughout the church. I was not the only cancer. There was a deadly cancer at work in most if not all of the cells of the body.

For some time our church had been on a roller-coaster ride. We would have times of great breakthrough, getting close to God and experiencing His presence in new and glorious ways. But these were, inevitably, followed by dry spells. In fact, we were in such a dry spell when our pastor revealed his illness. Several areas of the church ministry were disorganized, and certain church leaders were suffering from varying stages of discouragement. We were on the low end of the roller-coaster when this hit.

Clearly, God wanted us back on top. To stay. He is very serious about not letting our collective cancer cells slide us downward ever again. Our church is going through a cleansing process and a time of deep, intimate prayer to hear God's will for individuals and for the church as a whole. Only God knows how long the process will take.

The larger picture. In one of our early morning prayer meetings, I realized there were at least 20 pastors from other churches attending—praying for my pastor. The picture broadened tremendously when one of those pastors mentioned a serious cancer that was spreading in his church. He cried out, asking God to heal the whole church as He healed our pastor.

The cancer was present in other churches in our community, and word has come that it is widespread across the entire body of Christ. It is not benign, nor is it in remission. It is spreading. Like cancer in the body, it has a mind of its own and intends to eat up every congregation in its path.

It is God's will to kill this cancer. We know He has the power to accomplish this work—after all, the church is *His* body on earth. But just as God showed me the importance of Galatians 2:20 in my own life, so death to self applies to the entire church as well, so we may be resurrected with Him in unity of body and purpose—pure and without spot or blemish to await His coming.

But will we cooperate? Will we yield to His will for our lives and our churches? Will we be crucified with Christ in order to let Christ truly live in us?

God is waking His church from a deadly slumber. It is time to act—or we die. We—individually and corporately—have been doing things our own way, rebelling against God as our head. It is time to change. It is time to respond and start afresh. It may take radical surgery to get rid of the evil in us. But whatever it takes, it is worth it for life. The time for church games is over. Plainly and simply stated, we are running out of time. He will only kill the cancer if we stand ready to obey Him regardless of the cost.

STATISTICS YOU CAN USE

The U.S. Department of Commerce has recently released statistics on American churches, clergy and church schools. Last month's *Church Law & Tax Report* gives some interesting figures:

- Number of U.S. congregations294,271
- Churches with fewer than 100 members.....60,300
- Churches with fewer than 500 members.....205,556
- Churches with 1,000-1,999 members.....21,691
- Churches with 2,000 or more members.....13,958

Last year churches received \$49 billion in revenues, of which \$40 billion came from contributions, \$1.4 billion from wills and estates, and \$2.5 billion from fees or charges for services.

There are a total of 348,000 clergy employed in the United States, and they have served an average of 15.8 years in each position.

Of special interest are the statistics on who is supporting these churches. Persons 65-74 years of age donated the largest percentage of their income (3.1 percent) and those 18-24 the least (0.6 percent). Interestingly, those with lower incomes gave a higher proportion of their income to charity than higher income individuals. Persons with household incomes of under \$10,000 gave 2.8 percent of their total incomes, while those with

incomes over \$100,000 gave only 2.1 percent. The average annual contribution to the church was \$715 per household.

Church school statistics. The Statistical Abstract also indicated there are 20,682 private church schools in the United States—nearly evenly divided between Catholic and Protestant. Only 1.7 percent of Catholic schools have been in operation for 10 years or less, while 45 percent of the Protestant schools have started up in the last 10 years.

Annual tuition figures for these schools are interesting.

• Less than \$500 annually	Catholic.....25%
	Protestant.....6%
• \$500-\$1,000 annually	Catholic.....37%
	Protestant...31%
• \$1,001-\$1,500 annually	Catholic.....26%
	Protestant...31%
• \$1,501-\$2,500 annually	Catholic.....7%
	Protestant...20%
• More than \$2,500 annually	Catholic.....4%
	Protestant...12%

The average number of students attending a school is 363 for Catholic schools and 142 for Protestant schools. The average annual teacher's salary is about \$15,000 for both Catholic and Protestant schools.

