

BUILT TO LAST

By
John R. Bisagno

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INTRODUCTION

America is at the peak of moral and spiritual battle for her very survival.

As Evangelical Christians, we hold the answer right here in our hands. The only way to change a nation is by changing the hearts of her people with the life-transforming power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sadly her largest, best organized, best equipped, best trained army is in retreat. For more than a decade and a half, conversions, attendance and giving have been declining in the majority of churches across America.

From 1978 to 2015, young American's respect for the church has dropped from 68 percent to 42 percent.

Last year more churches closed than any year in history. And while missiologists tell us we have only an eight year window before the door closes to fulfill the Great Commission, eight hundred missionaries await, unfunded, at the Southern Baptist International Mission Board alone, and two thousand more having been told not to apply due to lack of available funds.

Lose the base; lose the battle.

Perhaps most sadly of all, fifteen hundred pastors quit the ministry every month in all denominations and only one in five seminary graduates are still in ministry eight years after graduation.

In 1959, when God called me from music to preaching, my father-in-law, Pastor Paul Beck said, “Johnny, I’ll be praying for you. You’re entering the toughest profession in the world. I have observed that only one in ten men who begin in ministry at age 21 are still in it at 65.”

I wrote the names of twenty-five of my contemporaries in the back of my Bible. By the time I reached 65, only five names were still there.

Across the years I have been greatly burdened by this and spent countless hours mentoring young pastors and documenting the life practices, character and personality traits of older pastors who have “Finished Strong.”

The book you hold in your hand is the result of that ministry.

Each chapter documents one trait of “a finisher” and a person who greatly embodies it.

In 1962, Owner Branch Rickey brought up Jackie Robinson from the minors to the Brooklyn Dodgers, as the first African-American player in Major League Baseball. Both knew it would be rough.

“Jackie,” Mr. Rickey said, “Can you take it when they call you the ‘N-word’, spit on you and throw garbage at you?”

“Yes sir,” replied Jackie, “God built me to last.”

Dear pastor, God built you to last. Here are forty-eight chapters on what it takes.

SECTION ONE

Chapter 1

PRIORITIZER

David Platt

About the time your church reaches six or seven hundred in attendance, you are forced to become a prioritizer. Can't see every shut-in, visit every patient, return every call or attend every meeting. Tough call for a man with the heart of a shepherd.

But there are greater issues; daily prayer, sermon preparation, family time, unity in the church, doctrinal integrity and vitally important, your kingdom or His?

No man in our time has more incarnated God's answer to that question than David Platt. At age thirty-seven, he has risen to the pinnacle of his peers. He is not only the most influential leader among young pastors, with nearly 300,000 followers on Facebook, he is also the leading spokesman for sacrificial advancement of the Kingdom around the world.

As pastor of the Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, David wrote two best sellers, "Radical" and "Follow Me", while being the most

in-demand conference and convention speaker in ministry, receiving 150 invitations a week.

And all with a mild speech impediment long since overshadowed by an anointing and missionary heart as big as all the world. Somewhat like Moses as I recall.

He asks his people to “lay down a blank sheet of paper” with their lives, with no strings attached, in order to make God’s glory known among the nations. One priority – everything else can wait.

Hundreds of his families have sold their homes, moved to needy areas of Birmingham and around the world to do exactly that.

He is also founder of “Radical,” a ministry that exists to serve people in accomplishing the Great Commission. Radical provides resources that support disciple-making in local churches worldwide, organizing events and facilitating opportunities through multiple avenues, all aimed at encouraging followers of Christ in God’s global purpose.

During a trip to Nepal, David’s team trekked for five days before encountering a single follower of Christ. He witnessed Hindu families burning the bodies of newly deceased loved ones, then scattering their ashes over a sacred river in hopes that they would be reincarnated.

Most, if not all, presumably had died without ever hearing the name of Jesus.

“It just gripped me in a deeper way,” David said. “I came back with a desire to say, ‘How can my life more intentionally be used to get the Gospel to unreached peoples? Maybe I need to move overseas.’”

Appropriately, David Platt was recently named President of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Today I sent the following message to Search Committee Chairman David Uth.

David,

Would you please be so kind as to forward this to your committee, David Platt, Ronnie Floyd, and the Baptist Press.

America is a land devoid of moral and spiritual foundations. Government, home, school, even the church, is in decline. The result is a generation of young pastors on fire to change things but with little interest in tradition, bureaucracy, or establishment. They simply prefer to bypass the system and do missions "hands on."

But while that is to be commended and encouraged, they must understand it can't be done alone.

For years I have prayed for "a David Platt," one of their champions, to lead them to understand it's not an "either/or" issue. It must also be done "hands on" together, i.e. CP, SBC, IMB. God has answered our prayers and given us the perfect man.

The choice of David Platt as IMB President is not only a mighty gift from God, but a stroke of genius and the greatest decision by a committee in the history of the SBC. Congratulations!

Sincerely in Christ,

John Bisagno

Since about 2000, debate over God's election and man's free will has been center stage in Southern Baptist life. That God has chosen some to salvation should increase, not lessen our passion to find them.

If the house is on fire and my grandchildren are inside, I'm not going to stand on the porch and debate the theory of spontaneous combustion. I'm going to run into the house and save the grandkids.

Do we debate it or do we do it?

Prioritize or die.

Chapter 2

BALANCED

Adrian Rodgers

Just one chapter on any number of subjects could never begin to do justice to Adrian Rodgers.

I once preached at Bellevue, Memphis, TN for Dr. R.G. Lee to 2500 on a Sunday morning. Years later I would do so again under the ministry of Dr. Rodgers. This time to 9,500.

The vastness and quality of the Bellevue campus is surpassed only by its pastors' lives and their ministries, R. G. Lee, Adrian Rodgers and Steve Gaines.

Not only Bellevue Church and Mid-America Seminary, but the title, "The Man Who Saved The Largest Evangelical Body in the History of the Christian Faith," must be credited to Adrian Rodgers.

It was his leadership that turned the Southern Baptist Convention back to its conservative roots during the turbulent years of the battle for the inerrancy of Scripture.

But of all the subjects on which I could write about this great hero of the faith, that which lingers most in my heart is not what he accomplished, but the amazing balance of the man himself.

Adrian Rodgers had the tenacity of a bulldog. He'd take a bite and never let go. Bold as a lion, tough as nails and immovable as the Rock of Gibraltar.

But he was also just about the smilingest, lovingest, sweetest guy I ever met. I still listen to his sermons every day on the radio – and love it. He never preached without a smile on his face, a lilt in his voice, and love in his heart. And that, from the original Superman of steel.

Adrian Rodgers was balanced. Very well balanced. He was indeed, like Robert Jeffress, a velvet-covered brick.

In the '40's a popular magazine called "Modern Mechanix" regularly carried an ad about Hastings Steel Bent piston rings. Their slogan was, "Tough, but oh so gentle." I'm sure they made 'em somewhere in Tennessee.

Let's talk about balance.

- It's important in theology. Biblical counter-balance doctrines are unsolvable mysteries. Press either side to the limit without the other and end in heresy: the Deity of Jesus/the humanity of Jesus,

the wrath of God/the love of God, the sovereignty of God/the free will of man, faith/works.

One day in heaven we shall know in full. But for now, since God's God and we're us, we'll just have to give Him credit for knowing some things we don't know.

- On the Mount of Transfiguration Satan tempted Jesus to prove He was the Son of God. "Jump, it is written the angels will bear you up lest you dash your foot against a stone." Jesus said, "***It is also written***, 'Thou shall not tempt the Lord thy God.'" Balance.
- And it's important in ministry. One day Jesus would graciously cover an embarrassed woman taken in adultery; the next, He would patiently weave a whip and drive the moneychangers from the temple. Balance.
- Jesus told Peter to walk on water and rescued him when he began to sink. Balance.
- The Apostle Paul said seeker-friendly is cool; "I have become **all things** to all men that I might win some." He also said, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel." Balance.

- I know a precious pastor whose church of great potential went way down in attendance because he was a bit of a Johnny One Note.

Balance is important. Never forget “it is also written.”

Chapter 3

PRAYER WARRIOR

Jeff Wells

Pastor Jeff is shepherd of Woods Edge Community Church in The Woodlands, North Houston.

A year ago I invited Houston's thirty mega-church pastors to our home for monthly, early morning prayer meetings for spiritual awakening.

Seventeen have come at one time or another.

Jeff Wells has come every time, driven the farthest, arrived first, and left last. Every time. Jeff is truly a prayer warrior in every sense of the word.

He was kind enough to share these insights into his great praying heart:

"For me, it's the first thing every morning, generally a couple of hours though I don't time it rigidly. I begin by immersing myself in worship and the love of God. Maybe I will sing a song or two. A common prayer for me is, 'Papa, I love you. Jesus, I love you. Spirit, I love you.'"

I soak myself in Scriptures about the love, grace and forgiveness of God. There will be quiet times in which I ask God to speak to me about anything He wants me to know. All of this may last about an hour.

For another hour or so, I'm in the Scriptures slowly reading and praying my way through every word. Then there is an extended time of intercession for my family, church, closest friends and others.

I'm inspired by Mother Theresa's statement, 'Jesus is the deep well and every day I need to drop my bucket into the well.'

Additionally, I emphasize to our staff to take daily, unhurried time with God. Neglect other things, but don't neglect this. Our weekly staff meeting is a time of prayer and worship. Three times a year, we go off campus together and spend a day in prayer and worship. We also have a Wednesday night service which is a time of prayer and intercession, not preaching."

As I began to write this chapter, I was considering writing on the importance of early morning prayer. Priority prayer, long before other things in the day.

When I received Jeff's testimony of his personal prayer life and saw him emphasizing precisely that, I knew it was an affirmation from

God: “Encourage busy pastors to put early morning time with the Lord ahead of everything else in ministry.”

As I look back across sixty-three years of ministry, I see one common denominator in those seasons of exceptional blessing:
CONSISTENT EARLY MORNING PRAYER.

And it’s a very old and revered practice.

“The next morning Jacob got up very early. He took the stone he had rested his head against, and he set it upright as a memorial pillar. Then he poured olive oil over it.” (Genesis 28:18 NLT)

If I have a day too full for early morning prayer, it will take me 12–15 hours to get through it. If I give Him the first hour or two, He goes before me, smoothes the way, meets needs and solves problems before I get there. Then it takes only 6-8 hours to get through the *same* issues of the *same* day.

“But you will not even need to fight. Take your positions; then stand still and watch the LORD’s victory. He is with you, O people of Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid or discouraged. Go out against them tomorrow, for the LORD is with you!” (2 Chronicles 20:17 NLT).

Early prayer puts Him first; then He puts you first. You don't accomplish by doing, as much as by turning loose. There's that Cross principle again—living by dying, keeping by letting go, accomplishing by letting Him accomplish.

The Cross is the heart of the gospel. Matthew 6:33 is the heart of

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

Early morning prayer means solitude, silence, and peace. In the early hours my mind is clear, my thoughts uncluttered; complex pictures clarify, compound problems simplify. Peace in my heart means peace in my world.

Early-morning prayer means listening as much as speaking. *“Be still and know that I am God...”* (Psalm 46:10).

God speaks more clearly in the garden of silence than on the busy corner of Third and Main. Life can drown out His still small voice. It’s not a noisy, big voice; it’s a whisper, an impression, a thought. And it’s a game changer.

My favorite early prayer spot is our patio. Uldine has transformed it into a beautiful prayer garden. Two engraved stone plaques are placed among the flowers. One says, *“Be still and know that I am God.”* The other, *“Peace.”*

I come to the garden alone
While the dew is still on the roses.
And the voice I hear falling on my ear
The Son of God discloses.

And He walks with me

And He talks with me

And He tells me I am His own.

And the joy we share as we tarry there

None other has ever known.

Listen. Just listen. Can you hear Him?

Few have paralleled Jeff Wells' prayer life and few have paralleled

“And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.” (Mark 1:35)

I know successful pastors who are not men of great education and giftedness.

I know none who are not men of prayer.

Chapter 4

FAMILY MAN

Gregg Matte

How precious is Proverbs 22:6, *“Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he shall not depart from it.”*

Solomon doesn't say, “When he is young, he won't depart,” but when he's old. Is the promise that they won't go away or is it that they will come back? The truth is I've known few Christian parents who did their best, yet didn't have a child “depart from it” to some degree and then return.

My hero Billy Graham and I both have sons who one day strayed and are today passionate evangelists.

So even if you don't have a perfect family, this chapter is intended to encourage, not discourage your heart.

My pastor Gregg Matte has a great family. He and precious Kelly have two beautiful children, Grayson and Valerie Karis. They are clearly a family in love with each other and the Lord in a beautiful way.

I asked him to share some thoughts about family.

1. Start with “no”, move to “yes.” Most pastors with caring hearts start with “yes” through invitations, tasks, engagements, which creates a “no” for family activities.
2. Set a date night with your wife and keep it. If she knows she will have your attention later, she won’t resent when ministry calls.
3. Take the puppy in your pocket. It’s been said that to raise a good dog and kid, both require taking them everywhere you go. I take my kids to ministry functions. They’ve been to the homes of the grieving, hospitals, preaching engagements and galas. Instead of “Daddy’s leaving again,” it’s “We’re going again.” Ice cream on the way home helps solid discipleship conversations start after the experience.
4. Delegate responsibility and worry. Breaking free from the office starts with setting up the office well to begin with. Delegate to staff and volunteers. Don’t try to do it all.
5. Create a “no phone” zone. When you’re at home, be home. That means no texting, emailing, web browsing, etc. while the kids are awake and your wife wants to talk.
6. Decide how many nights a week you’re out. To *have* a home you must *be* at home. For me, nights away are Sunday, Wednesday and

one more, unless it's unusually important or family fun, or a night Kelly wants.

I have found the same to be true.

One Sunday morning I shared with our congregation the frustration of balancing family time and church responsibilities. I told our people I had made the decision to put my family first. "I may not be at every committee meeting or church function," I said, "I may not make every hospital call or keep every appointment, but I will be at every

little league game and school play and keep every date night with

Those are unbelievably wonderful blessings God gave you called kids—love 'em, hug 'em, spank 'em, talk to 'em, play with 'em, and brag on 'em. They'll be gone in the blink of an eye.

As they get older, it gets easier to spend time together. They'll come more and more into your world, enjoying what you enjoy. But while they're little, get into theirs: watch cartoons, cut out paper dolls, play games, climb trees, play hide and seek and throw the football. And above all, be at their games, school plays, recitals and everything else important to them.

Let nothing interfere with family time. *Everything else can wait.*

Chapter 5

KINGDOM MINDED

Curt Dodd

Dr. Curt is more than my son-in-law, he's my son-in-love. It would take several chapters to tell you about the many special qualities of this special guy.

He started in ministry as assistant to our worship pastor at Houston's First. Called to preach three years later, he pastored First Gonzales, and Fellowship Church Houston, changed its name to Metropolitan and relocated to North Houston.

Metropolitan would grow from 200 to 2,000 in attendance and twice that number today under the leadership of Sal Sberna.

Fast forward thirteen years. Here's a young man at age forty-four, at the height of ambition, pastoring what would become a mega-church with every reason to enjoy the ministry he built and stay put. Curt gets a special call from God.

Leaving it all with no financial support, he answers the call, pulls up stakes, moves his family to Pueblo, and plants a church where God needed it most, right in the heart of the occult capital of the world.

During his ministry in Colorado, he would plant six other churches which are today planting others. At this writing, the initial plant, Fellowship Of The Rockies, runs two thousand on Sunday mornings, is the largest Baptist church in Colorado and continues to plant even more churches.

But Curt planted more than a church. His “Your Kingdom, not my kingdom” heart planted deep seeds in the fertile souls of his children.

Just today Britni said, “Dad’s heart deeply impacted us with his ‘it’s never about you’ spirit. My life has always been centered on how things I say and do impact others, especially God’s people. At the center of my life is being an ‘OTHERS’ person.”

By the way, Britini is headed to Japan as a missionary.

And you probably wouldn’t be surprised to know that her brothers are Kingdom-hearted as well.

Jonathan is a missions pastor in Nebraska and annually leads three or four trips to Nicaragua to help farmers learn better food producing techniques as they hear the Gospel.

Zachery is a worship pastor in Tennessee and is headed to Mongolia to minister to an orphanage.

Don't know whether Curt got his passion for the Kingdom from his ol' pappy-in-law or I got it from him, but I gotta tell you, I'm a Kingdom man too!

In 1984, my heart was deeply stirred when the director of our Houston Association of Southern Baptist Churches told me of sixty-seven dying inner-city congregations whose doors would close within a year without help.

We began pouring money and people into them. Every Sunday I gave two invitations; *join* the church and *leave* the church. Go help those dying churches. Sixty-two of the sixty-seven survived and many are themselves planting churches. Today on any given Sunday, there are as many in all those churches and the missions they planted as in the mother church.

In so doing, we built a culture of "Kingdom-mindedness" and over 800 of our members heard God's call, went to seminary, and entered full-time Christian ministry. Today the number is 1,400 and growing.

We grew some during that time, but His Kingdom grew exponentially and that's what it's all about.

When I came to Houston the church was giving \$330,000 annually. Today it is more than one hundred times that amount.

Over the past two years they have given \$38 million annually, over half to missional causes.

In the 1940's and 50's, the People's Church of Toronto was THE missionary church in the world. Today, it may be Houston's First.

Our evangelist son Tim serves as an elder at Conduit Church in Franklin, TN. Four years ago, Pastor Darren Tyler planted the church with a vision of it becoming exactly that, "a conduit" to bless God's greater Kingdom more than their own.

Today Conduit's annual budget is approximately \$200,000. Over the past five years, they have *additionally* given \$1.3 million to missions. That's about fifty-five percent of their total income.

As the church was praying about God's will regarding a move from their temporary facilities, a man gave them – that's right GAVE THEM -- thirty-five beautiful acres on a major highway in Franklin with an empty church building. Value? \$1.3 million. 😊

Matthew 6:33 apparently applies to the church collectively as well as the believer individually.

“But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these

Every course you pursue, every decision you make, must be set against the backdrop of this question, “Does it expand God’s Kingdom, or mine?”

Self-centered people seldom make it all the way to the tape. The “His Kingdom” man will finish the journey much more often than will the “My Kingdom” man. John the Baptist said it well: “He must increase but I must decrease.”

Today there is way too much emphasis on MY church, MY ministry. I even know a pastor who has fired several staffers for either drawing attention to, or ministering to some other church. Unbelievable? Believe it.

And I know two others who fired staffers because their ministry *within their church* was becoming larger than the church itself.

Perhaps it’s plain old selfishness and pride or simply the high-powered self-promotion of our culture, but the ol’ “Me Generation” mentality says, “Go ahead, you deserve it.”

But we don’t deserve first place. He does. His Kingdom does.

The happiest memories of my pastorate are not what we had, but what we gave away. I greatly rejoice in the ministries birthed out of our church, which grew to exponential proportions.

- Beth Moore, Internationally Known Bible Teaching Ministry
- Louie Giglio, Passion Ministry to University Students
- Arthur Craig, National Rehabilitation of Deaf Prisoners Ministry
- And many others

P.N. Kourien is the legendary founder of The All India Prayer Fellowship. It is a massive ministry touching uncounted lives for the Master. When he acquired Parkinson's disease and was no longer able to continue his ministry, his son Koshy Kourien, a renowned orthopedic surgeon in New Delhi, left his prosperous practice to continue the further expansion of his father's ministry.

Today, the ministry consists of The All India Prayer Fellowship Hospital, a Grade School, and The India Bible Institute, training and sending out thousands of evangelists across the continent. Koshy Kourien left *his* kingdom for *God's* Kingdom. We must do no less.

"...for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

Matthew 6:13 (NIV)

Chapter 6

CALLED

Harvey Kneisel

Harvey and Charlene Kneisel have been our friends for - well - guess you'd say for life. He served on my staff at Houston's First as Executive Pastor and later as Minister of Missions. Eight years after retirement, he continued to work part-time as Assistant to our new Minister of Missions. Think that's what you call humility.

Harvey was called. Harvey wouldn't quit. No more rock solid man ever went where God called him and did what God told him than he.

Ready for this?

Harvey was saved at thirteen years of age, called to preach, and delivered his first sermon at age fourteen. His Lutheran pastor was a great encouragement to him. He attended Southwestern Seminary and Oklahoma Baptist University and worked his way through both, preachin' revivals out'a Southwestern and draggin' feed sacks out'a boxcars at Shawnee Mills at OBU.

Each summer he worked at the milling company to earn his college tuition for the following two semesters. The summer before his

senior year, he asked for a week off to preach a revival at First Church Newkirk, Oklahoma. His boss said, "If you leave for a week, you can't come back."

Harvey said, "That's what I'm called to do." And left.

For the next sixty-five years, he never missed a day of full-time ministry.

God honors those who honor "the call."

His first pastorate was in Sumner, Oklahoma, a country church where he would lead his association in conversions. His salary was \$15.00 a week. Wouldn't matter to him if were \$5.00. Harvey Kneisel was "called."

He would go on to pastor First Billings, First Crescent and Sunset Ponca City, Oklahoma, as well as McArthur Boulevard Irving; Oak Ridge Houston; and Annville Corpus Christi, Texas, where he would become Associational Director of Missions.

Lots'a work. Lots'a smiles. Lots'a years.

No problem. Harvey Kneisel was called.

In 1958, Harvey and Charlene applied to the International Mission Board for appointment as missionaries. They asked, "Where do you want to go?" He said, "Anywhere. I'm called."

Because he was recovering from an illness, the board said, “You’ll have to wait three years.”

Days later, Harvey and Charlene sat on their living room couch and said, “We’re going to the mission field if we have to take a slow boat to China. God’s calling.”

Less than twenty-four hours later he received a call to come to the Cayman Islands where he would pastor four churches at once. He would later serve in India, where for two years he and Charlene often lived in a small room with no windows, no running water and slept on the floor.

Harvey Kneisel settled the call.

Serving in Guyana, South America in 1971, he invited me to preach a citywide crusade in Georgetown. Who would have dreamed that a little thirteen year-old girl named Lois Cannings would come to Jesus, and one day become the wife of Dr. Tony Evans.

- Today his son-in-law Robert Clark serves as missionary trainer for Southeast Asia. Like his father-in-law, Robert Clark was called.
- From 1981-1985, Stan and Karen Felder whom Harvey mentored, served as Royal Ambassador director and Girls

Auxiliary director at Houston's First. Stan would go on to plant several churches in Colorado, become an area director of missions and one day move into Mormon territory in Salt Lake City and plant a church. Today he serves in Canada as Church Planting Catalyst for the North American Mission Board for Alberta, Yukon, and the Northwest Territory. Like his mentor, Stan Felder settled the call.

- In 1955, I preached a revival at First Baptist Church, Madill, OK. I met a deacon, a full blood Cherokee, who taught a Sunday School class from which twenty-seven men would enter full-time ministry. A large oil company in Kansas City tried to hire him because he spoke six Indian dialects in areas in which they had leases. Because of his Sunday School class, he refused. They repeatedly raised their offer. Finally they said, "Name your price." He said, "Sorry, you're salary is big enough, but your job isn't." That great deacon settled the call.
- Years ago Vance Pittman was called from Alabama to plant a church in Las Vegas. Today they have 3000 on Sunday and have planted twenty churches.

Believe me, Vegas ain't the Bible Belt and folks don't speak Bible-eese. One day he was baptizing a seventy-year old woman who owned a bar. When he asked, "Have you received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?" She said, "Hell yes!"

Things are – well – different in Vegas. Vance Pittman settled the call. Vance/Vegas – kinda goes together, doesn't it?

- Adoniram Judson answered the call to Burma. Although he lost two wives and had no converts, he stayed for twenty years. Today there are four hundred thousand believers in Burma. And would you believe one of the great missionaries serving there is John Lewis, brother-in-law of Harvey Kneisel.

When you're called, settle in my brother. You were built to last.

"For the gifts of God are without calling or repentance." Romans

11:29

God doesn't change His mind. Don't change yours.

Chapter 7

PREPARED

Tony Evans

In my opinion, Tony Evans and Chuck Swindoll are the two best preachers on planet Earth.

Dr. Evans preached for me several times across the years. I always brought in someone better than myself. And that wasn't easy. 😊 Two things were consistent. One, we always packed the house. Two, we always went out to eat – and talked about preaching.

Tony Evans is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary and Tony Evans is prepared.

Consider this: today we go to seminary three years, preach thirty and change a few lives. Jesus prepared thirty years, preached three and changed the world.

Preparation and preaching must be our priority. Frankly I wonder if lots of us really don't get it here. Getting ready for Sunday morning is important and actually *being* there Sunday morning is everything. Are you gone too much?

I used to preach four sermons a week, Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night and Tuesday Businessmen's Bible study. With that many sermons, none were as prepared as I would have liked, but like Dr. Evans, preparing to preach was always my priority.

Here's what I hear when I hear Tony Evans preach:

- Deep exposition. Tony gets it. He digs it out from below the bottom: the gold in the gravel, the oil in the rocks. I've called him through the years around 2:00 to 3:00 in the afternoon. His secretary graciously puts me through to his study – where he's been since 8:00 a.m.
- Things no one else has thought of from books or sermon CDs of other preachers. Things that only came from deep, intense, creative thinking beyond what the text *says* to what it's *saying*.
- Application. He doesn't end his truckload of exposition with a grand, "Therefore, what?" He tells me how it applies to my life. Exposition pumps the oil out of the earth. Application tells me how to put it in my motor and drive away. Exposition means information. Application means transformation.

- He makes those life application principles the outline so I'll remember them. That's right -- remember. People remember points very little. They remember principles very well.
- Apologetics. Good preachers think like the detractor. They anticipate the argument of the skeptic. They argue their case and cut the ground out from under the doubters argument before he can blink an eye. For years Ralph Carrigan, President of the Houston Bar, attended my men's Bible study. One day he said, "Preacher, I love to hear you argue your case. You never lost a single case: you'd have made a heck of a lawyer." I said, "Bro. Carrigan, that's the nicest compliment I ever had." Exposition is an eyewitness recounting the facts. Apologetics is the attorney arguing the case. And winning.
- Illustrations. I never heard him use an illustration I've heard before. I'm sure he threw those sermon illustration books away long ago. His illustrations are original, creative and new.
- Passion. Tony Evans is a man on fire. His preaching burns up the rafters and brings down the stars. He birthed, not borrowed, every word. It's in his soul, and it shows.

Prepare. No coach allows his team to take the field until they first know the strengths and weaknesses of the other team. They study day and night to make sure they know the exact angles a team will take when they attack, and how they should attack the other team. You need a plan of attack. And that means you need to prioritize preparation for priority preaching.

It can take longer to draw the plans for a house than build the house. During the five years of relocating our church, the planning stage took three years; the construction only two.

Only 10 percent of an army actually fight the battle; 90 percent prepare and provide for them.

Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness before he led the children

•

Paul spent three years in Arabia before he preached a sermon or

-
- Jesus prepared thirty years for a three-year ministry.

The Pharisees repeatedly tried to trap Jesus with their questions. He repeatedly trumped theirs with His.

- “To whom do we pay tribute?”
- “Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?”
- “The baptism of John: Of God? Or of man?”
- “What is the greatest commandment of all?”
- “If David calls Him Lord how is He his son?”

And they walked away shaking their heads because Jesus was prepared. Jesus was ready.

Result? Gotcha.

Your ministry can be a mile wide and an inch deep. Make it a mile deep and it'll become ten miles wide. You take care of the depth of your ministry and God will take care of the breadth of your ministry.

Every discussion, every lesson, every meeting, every business presentation, and every family issue deserves thorough preparation. Be fully prepared, thoroughly furnished for every good work, every issue,

every challenge and every sermon. Our Lord and those whose lives we touch deserve no less.

The Texas A&M Fightin' Aggie Marching Band is the largest and best military marching band in the world.

During football season they practice from 5:30 to 7:30 a.m. four days a week – and more.

Rome wasn't built in a day and neither are great lives or great ministries. *“What man planning to build a house does not first sit down and consider the cost”* (Luke 14:28).

Are you ready to “bring it” next Sunday? Well get ready.

Chapter 8

PREACHER

Chuck Swindoll

I'm putting chapters on my two favorites back to back, because as I said, I believe Tony Evans and Chuck Swindoll stand side by side as the top preachers on planet Earth.

Does it surprise you that I list as one of the qualities of a great preacher is that he is “a preacher?” Well surprisingly, many pastors seem to feel they are first of all leaders, visionaries, shepherds, organizers, administrators, fund raisers – everything but preachers.

Manual Scott was an amazing preacher. At 5' 1” he stood well above most of us. Dr. Scott would start low, go slow: take fire, go higher and say more in a sentence than I could say in a sermon.

At a pastor's conference, he recounted telling a story in a sermon about an automobile accident. After the service, a man asked him about the insurance settlement, “How much did you make?”

“Make?” asked Dr. Scott. “I didn't know you were supposed to make anything.”

“You didn’t make anything?” The man said. “Bro. Scott, you ain’t no business man. You can’t do *nothin’* but preach.”

Dr. Scott said, “That’s the best compliment I ever got. Most preachers can do everything **BUT** preach.”

When I think “preacher,” I think “Chuck Swindoll.” I have it on good authority that next to his family time, someone else in the church or on the staff does virtually everything for him except prepare to preach.

Honestly now, would your people say, “Pastor Joe is a fine man, a good counselor, a great administrator. He can do everything but preach?” Isn’t that like a pilot who can do everything but fly the plane or a surgeon who can do everything but perform the surgery?

And by the way, a couple indications that you get it, that preaching is the main thing:

- Never be out of the pulpit on special Sundays; New Year’s Sunday, Easter, Mother’s Day, Back to School, Time Change Sunday, Christmas, etc.
- Never have anything but homerun hitters as supplies when you’re away. Don’t use the staff just because you think you owe it to them. Get someone who can “knock it out of the park,” and do it

better than you. Be secure enough to do that. Make your church the Sunday morning “place to be” in your town. And that means prioritized, prepared *and present*.

- Let’s face it, the guys who build really good churches are really good preachers. Doesn’t matter how many degrees hang on your wall, it’s how much good preaching hangs behind your pulpit.

Chuck Swindoll is tops. Here’s a bit of what makes him precisely that:

- People person
- Belly laughs
- Biblical
- Deep
- Conversational
- Application
- Apologetic
- Short
- Bold
- Fresh illustrations
- Eye contact

- Passion
- Non-Compromising
- Doctrine
- Evangelistic
- Love. Lots and lots of love.

And remember *preacher*, that's what you do. That's who you are.

A preacher – hello.

SECTION TWO

Chapter 9

ANOINTED

W. A. Criswell

Today the most impactful preachers on my life are Chuck Swindoll and Tony Evans. During the formative years of my ministry, they were W. A. Criswell and Billy Graham. Close behind were R.G. Lee and Angel Martinez.

For over half a century, Dr. Criswell was pastor of First Dallas and would one day build Criswell College.

And he was more than somewhat impactful on the great city of Dallas. Each year during Holy Week, over four thousand Dallas businessmen and women and government leaders packed the old Palace Theater for noon-day services to hear him preach.

City Hall closed the great Dallas North Tollway for his funeral procession: Dallas police officers stood at attention as the hearse passed by.

Gotta tell you two fun stories about my hero.

Story number one.

On his 25th anniversary as pastor, some businessmen presented him with a new car with something that had not been seen before – a sunroof. One rainy Tuesday afternoon, Dr. Criswell walked into staff meeting soakin’ wet and said, “I love that new car, but the crazy thing’s got the biggest hole in the roof.”

Story number two.

In 1985, I preached a week-long evangelistic crusade at First Dallas. Sunday morning through Sunday night, the worship center was packed to the rafters and the altar was packed with converts. Two hundred eighty persons accepted Christ including thirty adult men one night.

Dr. Criswell, never having been a part of anything like that before, requested an honorarium check for five hundred dollars. His executive pastor said, “Dr. Criswell, I think we should add one more zero.” And they did. 😊

The first time I heard Dr. Criswell was at the state Sunday School Convention at Immanuel Baptist Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma. He preached, “Why I Believe the Bible is the Word of God.” I was stunned. I didn’t know there was such a thing as preaching like that. Both content and delivery were dynamic and anointed straight from heaven. I sat there in

amazement for half an hour, overwhelmed with the power of the preacher and his message after everyone had left. You've heard the expression, "The hand of God is on that man." That night, I would have added, "Both hands."

I certainly don't know everything about "what is the anointing of God," but I know what it is not. You just know.

Recently Chuck Caldwell, Jr. son of legendary Bible teacher Marge Caldwell and his wife, Jane, came to our home to watch some football. During the conversation he said, "Bro. John, last week I heard a man preach and somehow – well – it was 'just words,' something was missing."

The world might call it charisma, charm or salesmanship, but God calls it ***anointing***. Call it what you will, you *know* when it's there and you *know* when it's not.

Ralph West has it as does Kirby John Caldwell, Hance Dilbeck, Tony Evans and others. It's just something special that makes you sense God's presence in the person and their message and makes you want to do what they're asking you to do.

I think it's closely connected to humility, Godliness, brokenness, selflessness, and perhaps mostly our prayer life.

And I believe that God has simply chosen, for no other reason than His own sovereign will, to give that extra measure of anointing to some. But the bottom line is this: when the hand of God is on a person, *you know it.*

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. ²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty.” I Corinthians 1:26-27

Clearly, like Billy Graham, the Apostle Paul who wrote these words, was himself a chosen vessel. And why? You’ll have to ask the One who chose them.

But this I do know. There is certainly much you can do to lose it if God chooses to give it. Samson lost it.

I know a great preacher who once preached to two and three hundred thousand in soccer stadiums around the world, but who now preaches to two to three hundred.

And I know a man who once preached to crowds of fifteen to twenty thousand in crusades across the South who now preaches to five to six hundred. Both lost their anointing.

I urge you to ask God for His double portion on your life and sermons. But let God be God. Treasure what He chooses to give you and whatever you do – don't lose it.

Chapter 10

PURE

John Cross

John Cross is a special man. He's the whole package: humble, gracious, shepherd-hearted, expositor, evangelistic.

For twenty-three years, he's pastored South Biscayne Church, Northport, Florida in an older community composed primarily of retirees. They've grown from two hundred to nearly two thousand in Sunday morning attendance. Not easy! And they do contemporary music and worship. No kidding! 😊

But here's what you probably don't know. John married, fairly recently, as a forty-six year old virgin. That's right: a forty-six year old virgin. You're probably thinking, "He's probably an ugly, clutzy, old dude." Well think again, John is a handsome, charming, very attractive man.

And are you ready for this? When he did marry, this forty-six year old pastor married just about the most drop-dead gorgeous gal you've ever seen.

Don't know if you caught this in Church History 101, but Dawn Pollock Cross and Uldine Beck Bisagno are probably the two most beautiful women since God created Eve. Seems logical. Both married a "First John." Go figure. 😊

Believe me, if Dawn chose him, any woman on earth would have done the same.

I can guarantee he's lived out his purity in the face of some pretty tempting situations. I'm sure he's had to pull off more than one Joseph/Potiphar's wife exit in his life.

John Cross stayed pure and so can you. You can. And you must.

The devil has you in his crosshairs and he hits his target about half the time. Fifty percent of pastors admit struggling with Internet pornography or having had affairs. You've got to do better.

I know many pastors who lost their church because they lost their marriage; I know none who lost their marriage because they lost their church.

- Never be alone with a member of the opposite sex. Period! Unless she's six months old or 100.
- Put a glass door in your office and study.

- Counsel with a woman only once and with the door open.
- Watch those eyes.

You can see a sexy image or attractive woman out of the corner of your eye a block away. You can see it coming. You can't avoid the first look; you can avoid the second. God gave us something special between the eyes and the heart. It's called "the neck." Use it.

You can't keep the birds from flying over your head; you can keep them from building nests in your hair. Get it?

- Make a covenant. Job said, "*I made a covenant with mine eyes; why should they look upon a maid?*" (Job 31:1 KJV). There are looks and then there are looks. It's the second look that leads to second thoughts and they lead to trouble. Get on the offensive. Swing into action. You're in a battle for your life. A picture can be embedded in the subconscious mind forever.
- Be accountable. "Covenant Eyes" or "X3 Watch" are excellent programs for your computer. Both are for men *and* women. Potiphar's wife could have used the program. Choose one and start an accountability group. Help each other. Don't pretend

that pornography, lust, and adultery aren't issues we all deal with.

- Celebrate your relationship.
- Make time for your wife.
- Keep a picture of your wife and kids on your desk.
- Don't answer the phone at home at night. Give priority to your family. In sixty-three years of ministry, I've never had an emergency. It can wait.
- Help your wife around the house.
- Anticipate her needs and meet them.
- Notice the little things she does.
- Tell her how beautiful she is.
- Get to know her! "To know" is the Biblical expression for intimate union, and is used interchangeably for "marital sex" and "possessing knowledge." And it can't happen without talking. Do you speak her love language? Do you know the message in the silence? Can you read the meaning in the mood?
- Get off the Internet and just enjoy being together. That's a wonderful woman you're married to. Gotta be or she wouldn't have married you. ☺ Be there.

- Call if you're running late.
- Hang out.
- Run errands together.
- Talk a lot.
- Laugh a lot.
- Play with her.
- Pray with her.
- Regularly ask yourself how you would answer your kids,
"Daddy, why were you unfaithful to our mother?"
- And don't be a nitwit and get involved with another woman.
I've never known a man to have an affair, that the woman
wasn't less than the one he already had. ☹️
 - Lose your treasure
 - Lose your anointing
 - Lose your ministry
 - Lose your self-respect
 - Lose your family
 - Lose your income

A lifetime of misery for a five-minute roll in the hay?

You kiddin' me?

You're smarter than that.

A wounded brother wrote, "The height of my giftedness took me to peaks the depth of my godliness would not allow me to stay.

I would later go to the funeral of my ministry.

People say all the good things about you.

And then, they bury you."

Chapter 11

PATIENT

Rick Warren

Most well known pastors are “go-getters,” really driven, “gettin’ after it”, “right now” kind of guys.

But sensitivity to God’s timing, patiently waiting until you “just know it’s – right now”- is important to finishers. “Making it happen” is never as blessed as “letting it happen” and that’s essential in making it to the finish line. That’s hard in today’s culture. In the old days if we missed a stagecoach, we’d just wait five days for the next one. Today if we get stuck five seconds in a revolving door, we have a panic attack.

“When” God does something can be as important as “what” He does. It’s important to slow down. Don’t push it, you might break it. God specializes in timing. Don’t you just love --- “and it came to pass,” – it always “comes to pass.”

Rick Warren and I go a long way back together. We cut our teeth preaching in little country churches in Oklahoma.

Today there’s nothing little about this big-hearted man. When one of his books made him \$80 million in royalties, Rick became a reverse

tither. He keeps 10%, if that much, and gives the rest to the work of the Kingdom, primarily in international missions, ministering to AIDS victims across the world by the millions in the name of Christ.

His plan for his church is to get every one of its 30,000 members overseas for an international mission experience at least once in their life. And Rick Warren and Saddleback are just getting started.

But they may have never become the church they are today without their pastor's sensitivity to timing.

It all started in what may well be a long forgotten experience.

Like many churches, Saddleback started in a public school.

California Law requires a six-month limit for rentals. For fifteen years, they moved from school to school and other venues, patiently awaiting God's leadership as they considered purchasing many pieces of land.

Finally the Lord said, "Right now, Rick. This acreage, right here."

This world-impacting church is what it is today in part because of Pastor Warren's prayerful sensitivity to timing. Result: right church, right place, right time.

- Esther was God's woman, in God's place, in God's time. Haman plotted to annihilate the Jewish people. No Jewish people, meant

no Messiah. No Messiah, meant no Savior. She had indeed come to the kingdom for such a time as this.

- Abraham and Sarah waited decades for God's promised son. And he came.
- Noah waited six months for the waters to recede. And they did.
- The world waited 4,000 years for its Savior's birth. One starry night, He came.

God will not be bound by the limitations of time. He created time. It did not create Him. With God it's never yesterday or tomorrow, it's always just "right now". He's the Lord of time, and timing is His specialty.

Finishers understand that. They are neither impetuous, impatient or nervous. They are marked by a sense of God's perfect timing, and they never push. Sometimes you can go farther, faster, by going slower.

Early in the 1970's a popular movie about demon possession packed theaters across America. It was the talk of the Sociology and Psychology classes at Rice University and the University of Houston. The impact was powerful and the questions unending. The time was right.

We ran a full-page ad in the *Houston Chronicle*,

“THE EXORCIST:

WHAT IT SAYS THAT’S RIGHT.

WHAT IT SAYS THAT’S WRONG.

Sunday morning, the worship center was packed, plus three

Fifty-four University students accepted Christ as Savior.

As the second oldest Baptist church in Texas, Houston's First was very traditional. For six years I contemplated starting an additional contemporary service. Finally God said, "Now."

On that first Sunday we planned for 200. 900 came. By the time I retired, nearly 2,000 attended that service. Today two contemporary services have nearly 6,000, plus a third major traditional service, with 2,000. Not too slow, not too fast. Now.

"To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven..."

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Chapter 12

UNASSUMING

Junior Hill

Things change: telegraphs turn into computers, Packards to Toyotas, Plymouths to Acuras, landlines to iPhones, paper checks to electronic transfers.

Things change in church too. Some for “the good,” some for the “not so good.” Organs have turned into guitars. Choir robes to jeans. Sunday School to Life Groups. Hardback Bibles to iPad apps. Assistant Pastors to Executive Pastors. Song leaders to worship pastors.

All cool.

Here’s one of the “not so goods.” Revivals have turned into – well – thin air.

I love revivals, or maybe I should say, “loved.” I’ve preached over 700, from one-room schoolhouses and country churches to mega churches and city-wides in thirty-seven countries.

But let me tell you the king of “stick-to-it-ivity.” Down in Hartsville, Alabama is a very special man named Junior Hill.

Bro. Hill has probably stayed the course as an evangelist longer than just about any man alive and is still going strong. Nearly fifty years and counting, thirty to forty revivals a year, and in his seventies, booked way into the future.

Not to mention always powerful, always anointed, always blessed. But Junior Hill holds another title, perhaps the most important: King of Unassuming.

His country and city church ministry parallels Billy Graham's citywide and world wide in a very special way. Not only has neither man ever lifted a finger to promote themselves, both are still in shock that God chose to use them at all, let alone to such an amazing degree.

Deep in his heart he truly feels, "every person is more important than I." Junior Hill is an unassuming man who has never promoted himself, neither to book the meeting nor get the love offering for the meeting.

Once during a revival in Alabama, the guest worship leader's wife learned she was going to require experimental surgery which insurance would not cover.

Junior asked the church to take up a love offering for her and without anyone's knowledge gave his entire honorarium to the offering.

Junior Hill is a quiet, loving, giant of a man with the gift of harvest. He wakes up every morning full of wonder that God could use such a man as he.

Unassuming. Kind of a “stuffy” word, but with such a Jesus-like presence.

Never push. Just “let it happen.” Let God be God. He’s pretty good at being God.

I’ve known a lot of men, both evangelists and pastors, who have promoted themselves big time. Not to mention asking others to promote them, “Recommend me here, recommend me there.” And you know what? Most of them crashed and burned.

If you’re real, God will expand your ministry when, where and how He chooses. In His way, in His time, to His glory and in His will.

You don’t want to be anywhere else. Don’t push. Let it happen.

Feels real cool to be in good company. Billy Graham, Beth Moore, Junior Hill and this author never lifted a finger to promote themselves and are still in shock that God uses them at all.

Chapter 13

LEARNER

Walter August

I shall forever be impacted by Jesus' thirty years of learning before beginning His three year ministry, and Paul's exhortation to Timothy, "*study to show thyself approved unto God, a worker that shall not be ashamed of, making full proof of thy ministry.*"

Today I still have to work really hard to dig it out in tough theological issues.

When Jesus responded to Satan's temptation, "Turn these stones into bread," He did not say "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that ***proceeded*** out of the mouth of God," - ***Proceeded*** - past tense. But "every word that *proceeds* out of the mouth of God." ***Proceeds*** - *present tense* – happening now.

Every time we read the living Word of God, He continues to speak to us and we continue to learn. It's in the DNA of our life.

Still living? Still learning!

And I'm talking about more than being "teachable."

Being teachable is being *willing* to learn. Being a learner is being *hungry to learn*.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.”

And how more can we satisfy our hunger for “righteousness” than by absorbing Him who is “right.”

Just last week Walter August was in our home with some other pastors praying for spiritual awakening. I had completed forty-seven of these forty-eight chapters and needed one more. In what at the time seemed irrelevant to what we were praying about, he stopped and said, “Brothers, we need to pray that God will give us an appetite to never stop learning.”

I knew I had my chapter.

My brother Walter is pastor of Bethel’s Family, one of the largest African-American congregations in America. He is passionate about ministry, revival ***and learning***. I asked him to share a few thoughts.

“When I meditate on the issues that plague today’s society, I am astonished at the way society responds to certain situations. We live in a country that is rich in resources. We have some of the best schools in the world. We make huge strides in finding cures for incurable diseases. We

have the most advanced technology in the world. We have climbed the highest mountains and traveled to outer realms of the universe. But we remain flawed because we've lost our heart to learn."

"Now some of you may think that this statement is contradictory. While it appears to be, it is not. As a people we have lost our heart to learn. We've become complacent in our thinking and in what we receive into our hearts. We allow man to tell us what we need to know and accept it as fact. We no longer seek the answers to life's questions in the Word of God, we run to the Internet to extract the solutions to our problems and rest on whatever the Internet tells."

"Well, I stopped by to tell you today...that America is living on the edge. When we fail to turn to Him for answers, we not only fail ourselves but we fail God. Now you may ask, "How did we get to this point?" We've arrived at this point because we have closed our hearts to learning...And anything that does not remain green will die. Man cannot afford to live life as if he has already arrived...because he has not. Man cannot dig into his bag of tricks and remedy every problem that plagues our society. We must continually seek truth from Him who is truth."

Walter got it right.

Jesus had the heart of a learner. He lived his life with God's purpose at the forefront of all that He did and would study for thirty years.

There's no way to overstate the importance of what we are talking about. Since Charles G. Finney began mass evangelism over two centuries ago, there has always been a world-class evangelist with an heir apparent on the horizon. Until now. Where is the next Billy Graham? I believe somebody missed it. And I think I know who it was. Probably one of two men who had their day, but lost it for one reason; they were unteachable.

1. Ask God to give you the heart of a learner
2. Meet with God regularly...everyday...every hour...in every situation.
3. Die to self and acknowledge that something is lacking. Knock at God's door for answers.
4. You can learn when you don't expect to learn. Listen respectfully to those who disagree with you. They just could be right.

5. You can learn from your mistakes – and others. A wise man learns from his mistakes. A really wise man learns from the mistakes of others.

6. You can and must learn from the Word of God.

And never stop learning. Only this week I learned to never order two double cheeseburgers at once. Or did I? No comment. 😊

Chapter 14

DESERVING

Jimmy Draper

This one wasn't easy. Many names raced through my mind as candidates for "deserving." Ronnie Dunn, Jim Henry, Ronnie Floyd, Curt Dodd, Gregg Matte, and lots more.

But I owe Jimmy "big time," so here goes. ☺

In 1969, God called me to Houston's First from the pastorate of First Southern, Del City. The church elected my next door neighbor, Jess Easton as chairman of the pastor search committee and he immediately came to me and said, "Okay, Bro. John, tell me who we should get to be your successor?" I told him I could never do that, but after many attempts, bribes and threats to expose me, I finally said, "Okay, here are three good possibilities: Charlie Graves, Jerry Autrey and Jimmy Draper."

The day we were loading the moving van, he came over again and persisted, "You've got to tell me where to start." As we were literally backing out of the driveway, he banged on the window and yelled, "Where? Who?" I stopped, opened the window and relented, "Okay Jess.

There's a guy at Red Bridge Church up in Kansas City that's settin' the woods on fire. I'd start with Jimmy Draper."

Dr. Draper was the only person the search committee would ever consider. Six weeks later, First Southern called him as pastor.

The church grew exponentially under his leadership and to even greater heights under his successors, Bailey Smith and Tom Elliff, because of the foundation Jimmy laid.

Three SBC Presidents would come out of First Southern. They say great pastors build great churches. It's also true that great churches build great pastors.

Jimmy Draper. Who doesn't smile when they hear that name? Like the great evangelist, I've never heard them called Dr. Draper or Dr. Graham. Just Jimmy and Billy.

Mega-church pastor, SBC Pastor's Conference President, SBC Convention President, Lifeway President and interim President at Criswell College.

Jimmy Draper is a man you ask to lead and give lots of space. If you know him, you trust him. He deserves your trust. I've seen him up close. Jimmy and Carol Ann have spent many nights in our home, and Uldine and I, many in theirs.

The name Jimmy Draper shines among the brightest stars in the sky of Christian leaders.

If there's one truth that faithful finisher he exemplifies it's this; ***leadership is not demanded, it's deserved.*** When you have to start telling them, "I'm the pastor," you no longer are.

Ephesians 5 admonishes wives to submit, be subject to and honor their husbands, but adds, "*and you husbands do the same and love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave His life for it.*" This is a triune picture of deserved honor.

- The Savior to His bride.
- The husband to his wife.
- The pastor to his congregation.

The husband's honor and service to his wife is even greater than hers to him. Paul doesn't tell the wife to die for her husband, he tells the husband to lay down his life for his wife. Leadership is indeed deserved.

It's not easy to pick out the qualities that add up to deserving of one's leadership. Hopefully the forty-eight in the book you hold in your hand encapsulates them all.

Forty-eight's a lot to remember. Not to worry, you just have to remember two words: Jimmy Draper.

Chapter 15

TRUTHFUL

Johnny Teague

I asked Johnny, Pastor of Church at the Cross in Houston to write his inspiring story in his own words.

“Only after accepting the pastorate of the church did I learn that the leadership had withheld full information about our true financial condition.

After a few months they told me we were out of money, and they were going to the bank to borrow another \$1 million to keep the church operating. I was shocked. I didn't know we had borrowed any. I learned we were losing \$40,000 a month renting an eight story building -- and with only forty members at the time. The debt was \$3.5 million.

There was no way we could make it financially. I told them the only way out was to sell the building and get out. They strongly disagreed and added, ‘If you tell our financial condition to the church or suggest selling the building, we will fire you immediately.’”

Truth or Consequences?

I decided to preach the sermon I had prepared for the following Sunday, risk it all and be honest with the people. Sunday morning at the end of the sermon, I told the people the truth. Immediately, the leadership called together the deacon body to fire me.

The church however, not only gave me a standing ovation, but went directly to them and said, "You will not get rid of our pastor."

They left the church and the other deacons rallied around me, as did the congregation. That was a critical moment for me and for our people. We stood by the truth and the Lord has blessed us with a new location, a new building, strong financial footing, and almost no debt."

Like Johnny Teague, King David was a man of truth.

“You are the man.” With these words, the prophet Nathan confronted King David about his adultery with Bathsheba and the

With David's response, everything was on the line. He stood condemned before the bar of truth.

How would David respond? Heaven held its breath. Angels strained to hear David's response. He could say anything. He could do anything. He was supreme potentate of the kingdom.

He could have simply abrogated the law. Lesser men would have declared themselves above the law. David could have said, "I therefore decree that adultery is no longer a sin—taking a man's life, no longer a crime." He could have ordered the execution of the prophet. He could simply have fired him and hired a new court chaplain.

Admitting the truth would cost David dearly – four fold.

But there was one thing more important to David than David, and that was TRUTH. Let David pay. Let God's truth stand.

"So David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD...' 2 Samuel 12:13. (NKJV) God's forgiveness was automatic upon David's repentance.

Do you realize how important truth is to God?

Pilate questioned Jesus, and philosophically asked, "What is truth?" (John 18:38).

Jesus answered not a word: by His silence, He spoke volumes.

“You have examined Me and you, Pilate, trained in the finest disciplines of the Roman judiciary, are asking Me, ‘What is truth?’

“Man, for the last two hours you’ve been looking at the truth and if you don’t know it when you see it, you wouldn’t understand it if I tried to explain it to you.” So He said nothing.

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” John 14:6

Jesus said He was *the* truth. That little three-letter word speaks of exclusivity, the *only* truth, and specificity, *precisely* the truth.

Satan is THE LIE. Jesus is THE TRUTH. If you would follow Him who is “The Truth,” you must live the truth and preach the truth.

If you aren’t walking in truth, do something about it now. If you can’t be that kind of person; game over.

And about those “little white lies” and half-truths. Remember there are no degrees of truth.

Jesus is the truth. Johnny Teague honors Jesus and people hear truth in his message and see it in his life.

Last year, twelve Muslim men came to Christ at Church at the
Cross.

*"I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the
truth." (3 John 4)*

Chapter 16

WISE

Jake Self

Ever wonder why we hate a wise guy but love a wise man? That's probably because you've never met Jake Self. Pastor Jake is "wisdom personified."

Wisdom will take you farther than a PhD, good looks, charming personality, and a Harvard vocabulary. It may be your most valuable asset.

"Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7)

Knowledge exceeds education, common sense surpasses knowledge and wisdom goes far beyond common sense.

It is often said, "Wisdom comes from experience," The Bible says, *"For the Lord gives wisdom."* (Proverbs 2:6). If wisdom came only from experience, every old person would be wise. And they're not. ☹

Jake Self was my associate pastor at First Southern, Del City. At age thirty-eight he had been converted and called to the ministry. A graduate of the eighth grade, he discovered that God promises wisdom

to the person who reads Proverbs and practices it. Jake said, "I may not be educated, but I can be wise."

Over the decades of his life, he meticulously studied and prayed over every word in Proverbs hundreds of times. Jake Self was the wisest man I ever knew and I regularly called him for advice.

When our son Tim was a freshman, he played on a national small college championship football team, but wasn't really happy at the school. The coach promised him increased playing time if he would stay.

Tim was never a quitter at anything. He's a sticker and a stayer. He also

“To stay in a school I really don’t like just because I’m not a quitter, isn’t a good decision,” he reasoned, and changed schools. That was wisdom.

We had a vacation home in the country where we planned to retire. One day Uldine said, "You know the anticipation of going up there

nd we're glad.

We once considered buying a home we weren't really crazy about because the price was so good. One day Uldine said, "You know Honey, long after we've forgotten the price, we'll remember we really don't like

it.” We didn’t buy it and have never regretted our decision. And that was

Instead of erecting more buildings, churches are learning to use the ones they already have twice or even three times on Sunday

Our old downtown church was twelve stories high. Packed out and growing, we owned a twelve story building on one-quarter of a block and parked courtesy of several downtown parking garages. One day other garage Pharaohs could arise who “knew not” Johnny and no longer allow us to use their parking garages. We couldn’t ensure our

own future. “Pastor,” the people said, “Let’s buy land and relocate.”

Here's how to get your PhD from the University of Wisdom:

- Read Proverbs every day.
- Ask God to reveal things you've never seen.
- Get good counsel.
- Take your time: better right tomorrow than wrong today.
- Pray a lot.
- Live real close to Jesus.
- Wait for His still small voice.
- Act in Faith.

"God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin." I Corinthians 1:30 (NLT)

God made Jesus to be wisdom itself. What a statement.

Wisdom is your necessity. Wisdom is your heritage. Wisdom is

SECTION 3

Chapter 17

LIKEABLE

Jess Moody

In 1971, something big happened called the “Jesus Movement.” No man organized it, no denomination planned it. The “Jesus Movement” was a God-orchestrated spiritual awakening, and was as often happens, birthed in the hearts of praying high school and college students. To my knowledge, we were one of only three churches that did the “Henry Blackaby shuffle” and jumped in with both feet. Five of our businessmen gave \$75,000 to underwrite our “Jesus Movement” ministry called SPIRENO, **SPI**ritual **RE**volution **NO**w.

We brought in evangelist Richard Hogue and his praise band and booked assemblies to speak on drugs and alcohol in forty-five of Houston’s forty-seven middle schools and high schools. After each assembly we said, “If you want to hear more, come back tonight.” Each night about two to three hundred came back: each night about three fourths of them came to Jesus.

We followed with a three-week crusade, packing ol' First Baptist to the rafters. Over 11,000 decisions were made: 4,110 of them professions of faith and 1,700 were baptized. Following the crusade, we booked the Galvez Hotel in Galveston for a weekend and for three days and nights poured our lives into 1,400 SPIRENO converts, discipling and anchoring them in the Christian faith.

Many would become pastors and missionaries. One would become Archbishop of the San Antonio Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church.

Another church that jumped in was Calvary Chapel, La Mesa, California. The third was First Baptist, West Palm Beach, Florida.

When he heard about SPIRENO, Pastor Jess Moody invited me down to preach SPIRENO Crusade II. For eight nights, kids hung from the rafters and poured down the aisles.

The "Jesus Movement" was real. It was featured on the cover of Time, Newsweek and Readers Digest. Number one on the pop charts was Judy Collins "Amazing Grace." Number two was "Put Your Hand in the Hand of the Man who Ruled the Water." Number three, "The Great Spirit in the Sky."

No one cranked up the pipe organ and sang “Just as I Am.” In each invitation the band rocked the house with “Put Your Hand in the Hand of the Man” – and they ran over us coming to Jesus.

But my most vivid memory is the loving heart and open arms of Pastor Jess Moody. The kids literally jumped into his arms and knocked him over during almost every invitation.

And Jess Moody was precisely that man in his office, in the lobby, at the restaurant, everywhere.

I’ve never known a man beyond just likable to downright lovable more than Jess.

As I write these words, Jess is in his nineties. Haven’t seen him for a while, but I’m sure they’re still knocking him down, hearing aids, implants, wheelchair and all.

Even if I hadn’t known who he was, I would have reached out and hugged him. Jess Moody exudes love. The biggest and most sincere smile I’ve ever seen. I really liked him and still do and so does everyone else. No phony here, no rock star, no Dr. Somebody, just a real huggable, likeable Bro. Jess.

I can’t overstate the importance of the likeability factor in a preacher. Never forget, if they can’t “get past you,” they’ll never get to

your message. But when people like what they *see*, they like what they *hear*.

God made you like you are and put you where He put you, when He put you there, probably because there are more people who can relate to you at that time and in that place than anywhere else in all the world. Try to be who you're not and you mess up everything. And never forget, people can spot a phony in a heartbeat and you're dead meat.

Genuineness in ministry has never been more important than today. There was a time when people used to go to church assuming the pastor was a man of God. A thousand scandals later, they go to church assuming he's not.

Unreal people are weak people. Pretenders don't know who they are because they don't know who they are *in Christ*. Authentic people do.

Be real. People like that. Jesus was real. People loved to be near Him. Little children crawled on His lap. Men climbed trees and cut holes in roofs to be near Him. Women crawled on the ground to touch the hem of His garment.

For the first several years of my ministry, I was not sure who I really was as a preacher. In the pulpit, I was mostly the last guy I heard. I can still bring down the house at a Pastor's Conference with my

impersonation of all the preachers I *used to be*. My preaching was oratorical and it was an affected style. When I discovered the more Conversational Style of preaching, I discovered the real me and became more comfortable and more effective. You can't be someone else and make it.

If you're out of your naturalness, you're out of character and out of your giftedness. Lose your uniqueness and lose your effectiveness. Be authentic. Be yourself. Be real. It's a really big deal. Really.

Conferred titles give glory to men. Dr. Horsefeathers and Rev. Whistlebritches are okay, but your uniqueness gives glory to God.

The religious establishment despised Jesus and crucified Him. Little wonder, they were a bunch of phonies. Playing the part was what being a Pharisee was all about.

But the COMMON PEOPLE heard Him gladly. The high and mighty hated Him. The sick and sinful loved Him. "*...and the common people heard him gladly.*" Mark 12:37

Had lunch with Chuck Swindoll not long ago at my favorite barbeque stand. He fell off the bench, and hit the ground belly laughin' more than once.

So live that no one will suspect you're a preacher, but if they find out you are, they won't be surprised. Likeability and believability walk hand in hand in the lives of successful leaders, be they preacher, politician or pontiff.

The likeability factor is huge in the success of Joel Osteen's "Ministry of Encouragement."

And how 'bout President Obama and Pope Frances.

May not agree with their policies or pontificating, but it's hard not to like the man. Think you get the point.

Whatever you're preaching, they gotta hear you. And that means they gotta like you. And that means you gotta be you.

Chapter 18

COMPOSED

Bill Eustis

Remember that's Eustis, not useless. Sometimes Bill used to call himself that, but he was extremely useful to the Kingdom. Never heard of Bill Eustis? Well boy did you miss out on a blessing! Bill was a humdinger!

I knew Bill as my pastor in my only staff position other than Del City and Houston. Just out of college, I spent a year with him at First Sallisaw, Oklahoma as Associate Pastor in charge of education, music, youth, and just about everything else Bill could think of.

I loved this man. A powerhouse in the pulpit and a mighty lover of people.

But here's what I didn't know until I spoke at his memorial service years ago and read his obituary. Bill Eustis pastored twenty-five churches in fifty years.

Bill's "move every twenty-four months" ministry was not because his people didn't love him, but because he led them from backslidden

squabblers to red-hot followers, then announced, “It’s time for me to go somewhere else and do it again.”

Here was Bill’s most unusual ministry of resurrection and revival: he would intentionally accept the pastorate of a dead or difficult church, preach the stars down, strengthen and unify the people, move on to another needy church and do it again.

That’s right. Once they were on fire and going to town, Bill looked for another dead one, stayed two years, same song, second verse – twenty-five times.

Problems? Gripers? Bad news folks? You bet your life! But that was Bill Eustis’ specialty. He didn’t run from them, he ran to them. Nothing rattled him. No matter what the deal, he was always, “Calm, Cool and Collected.” Think that’s Latin for “composed.”

Can’t imagine the pressure he lived under. But in all those years, I never saw him anything but loving, open-hearted, giving and welcoming. God gave him eyes to see people as Jesus sees them. It was never what they were, always what they could become. Mr. Cool In The Furnace, “Mr. Composed” – that was Bill.

NFL Hall of Famer Roger Staubach is legendary for his composure under pressure. One Sunday afternoon just before a “make or break” play, it is said that his pulse rate “in the pocket” measured a calm 48.

Composure. We hear it in the pilot’s voice in the turbulence, and we sense it in the spirit of God’s choicest servants. Never panicky, never rattled. You can’t make good decisions any other way.

In The Shepherd’s Psalm, David writes of “walking, not running, struggling or hurrying, through the valley of the shadow of death.”

“The valley of the shadow of death” is a real valley a few miles outside Jerusalem in the wilderness of Judea. The only green pastures and fresh water are at the bottom of the valley. The sides of the valley are crisscrossed with dozens of narrow, precarious sheep trails, and some fall to their death.

Through the years, the shepherds became fatalistic, reasoning, “The less time we’re in the valley, the less sheep we’ll lose,” and *ran* the sheep over the trails, as quickly as possible.

David says, “Time out! The Lord is my Shepherd. He holds my hand. I don’t have to play games, psych myself out or run through any valleys to get it over with as soon as possible. With dignity, peace, and composure, I can *walk* through the valley because I walk with the Shepherd.”

Peace under pressure, composure in a crisis is not something you grip your knuckles, twist your face and work up. It's easy, and it's real when you hold the Shepherd's hand.

Psalm 51 probes the depth of David's stress. Unimaginable! Don't know if somebody reversed the order along the way, but I think David learned the calm of the 23rd Psalm after the turbulence of the 51st.

Walking calmly through the valley or on the mountaintop is a non-negotiable for those who want to finish the race. Lose your calm spirit and lose respect. Lose respect and lose your influence. Lose your influence and lose it all.

The truth is, we can't control ourselves; we can only yield ourselves to the One who gives self-control. Coolness under pressure is a gift of God and the fruit of His indwelling Spirit.

- Daniel was calm in the lion's den.
- The Hebrew children were cool in the furnace.
- Jesus was calm in the storm.
- Stephen was calm in his death.

Your attitude under pressure is more important than *whatever is causing the pressure*. Long after they forget the issue, people will remember your calm, sweet spirit, or lack thereof. One short sentence, spoken in anger

with one small bodily instrument, called the tongue, can translate to one invalidated testimony. You can indeed catch more flies with honey.

Rudyard Kipling's immortal *Invictus* sums it up:

“If you can keep your head when all about you

Are losing theirs and blaming it on you...

Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,

And which is more; you'll be a Man, my son!”

*“Rewards & Fairies” Kipling's 1910 Collection of Short Stories and Poems, MacMillan Publishers, London, 1910.

Chapter 19

GIVING

John Morgan

Been thinking I should have featured my good friend John in a chapter on faithfulness. For fifty years, he has selflessly, graciously, and generously pastored the church he planted as a mission of his father's church in Pasadena, Texas.

Today Sagemont Houston is a true mega-church, not only in members and money, but mega-hearted in spirit, in heart, in love, and in giving.

And why? Because after a few years churches begin to look like their pastor. We are indeed under-shepherds to His flock and under-grooms of His bride. Spiritually wed to the congregation, the two reflect each other; pastor to people even more than people to pastor.

The generosity of John Morgan is clearly seen in his church: staff, deacons, budget, ministries, decisions – everything. In the presence of “all things Sagemont,” you just sense open arms and a giving heart. No pastor has selflessly done more for the Kingdom, the Association, the Convention or its pastors than John. He's the “go-to guy” in Texas whatever the need.

Only last week I mentioned a fallen brother just beginning recovery counseling: John said, “Tell him I’ll pay for it.”

Oh yes, he’s also one of the most financially prosperous and savviest preacher about finances around, when it comes to investing he’s the guy I call for advice. Not just in church budgeting, but personal finances as well.

Being a giver like our Lord is a really, really big deal. And I love it. When it comes to giving, John Morgan and John Bisagno are joined at the hip. Brothers – real close. I’m always saying, “You’re First John and I’m Second John,” to which he replies, “No, You’re First John and I’m Second John.”

Philosophically, conceptually, all things money, John has the gift. I could not begin to name the programs he has established to help his people and the Kingdom financially, both personally and corporately and in so doing, First John is “Right On.”

Did you know that stewardship is the number two theme of the New Testament next to salvation, and your relationship to your possessions is the number one theme of the parables? Your relationship to your physical possessions may be the most tangible indicator of your relationship to your Lord.

Our giving is a true measure of who and what we really are: it's our time and talents, our blood and sweat, our food, our home, our retirement, everything.

Remember John 3:16? I think there's something really big about giving in there. And it's not just the heart of the Gospel, it *is* the Gospel.

Luke 6:38 is one of my favorite verses but not for the reason you might think.

"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."

Remember these words: we never give, as the prosperity preachers suggest, in order to receive. No way. Never. Wrong motive. We give from hearts of love for our Lord and His Kingdom.

But it is also true that while we do not give *in order* to receive, incidental to the giving, *we do* receive. Giving is one of the really happy gifts of the believer, and it's something the two "Bro. Johns" love to do. Big time.

Remember, we receive when we give but our motive is always and only love. Couple o' quick stories.

A seminary student from our church asked to borrow \$2800 for three months. Three years later, he had neither repaid nor mentioned it. I wrote him a loving note and told him I was forgiving the debt. Three days later my bank called to tell me of a \$4000 error to the good in my checking account overlooked for three years.

Professor Bob Overton asked me to help the little church he was serving as interim pastor with a capital campaign to keep the bank from foreclosing on their building. I gladly did so at no cost.

During the following three days, unexpected gifts came to me, two from people I didn't even know existed. The total exceeded by more than two times what the normal fee would have been for such a campaign.

The Bill Gaither singers have a great song, "Give it Away, Give it Away." My favorite line goes like this:

"There are two kinds of people, Takers and Givers

Grippers, complainers and big-hearted Livers

Take whatever you have and give, give, give it away."

If you've been to Calvary, you gotta be a giver.

Chapter 20

PASSIONATE

Hyman Appleman

Between the legendary ministries of Billy Sunday and Billy Graham, America's leading evangelist was Hyman Appleman.

Dr. Appleman was born a full-blood Jewish boy in a little village in Russia.

At age nine, his parents sent him to America for his aunt and uncle to raise because of the educational opportunities here.

He rode a train alone from New York City to Chicago where he was met by his new family. On the train someone gave him a banana. He had never seen fresh fruit in the frozen tundra of his native land and began to eat it, skin and all. The porter came over, peeled it and said, "Here son, you've got to eat it like this."

He spent his first day in an American classroom as a first grader unable to speak a word of English.

By age twenty, he had graduated from DePau University Law School in Chicago and passed his law exams. The Illinois legislature had to pass a special dispensation to allow him to be admitted to the bar to

practice law before age 21. At age twenty-five he received Christ, enrolled in Southwestern Seminary, and began to preach.

When Hyman became a Christian, his Jewish parents said, “We have no son,” disowned him, and had a funeral for him.

His mother came to see him only once at his home in Chicago, and brought her own cooking utensils lest she defile herself eating from Gentile vessels.

Hyman Appleman soon became America’s evangelist, preaching mighty crusades in great stadiums in major cities. With the rise of Billy Graham, his popularity began to wane.

Uldine and I and our little daughter traveled with him “leading the singing” from 1956 to 1959 doing small citywide crusades in towns of 20,000 to 100,000.

An orthodox Jew met his Messiah at the foot of an old rugged cross, sacrificed everything to follow Him and never got over it.

Everywhere, in everything, in the pulpit and out, Dr. Appleman was a man on fire for Christ. In his words, his heart, his spirit and his eyes, the flame was always there.

Every afternoon we met for prayer in his hotel room as he prayed and wept over souls for an hour or more. My own passion for Christ still burns today very much because of the fire he lit in my soul.

He didn't double his fists and pound the pulpit, or march up and down the aisles like a street preacher. He preached with such a depth of spirit and intensity of soul that you felt in every fiber of his being that he would just die if you didn't come to Jesus. And by the hundreds and thousands they came – and came.

A layman recently asked me why there was so little passion in preachers today. When I asked him what he meant, he said, "You know Bro. John, you just want to feel that the preacher really believes what he's asking you to believe."

When it's there, it's fervent, exciting, enthusiastic and inspiring. And you can just feel it in a man's heart, soul, body and words.

Preaching with passion is not loud, boisterous and obnoxious. Yelling is out; conversational is in. But conversational can explode with passion and vibrate from the heart.

Never forget the word "enthusiasm" comes from two Greek words, "En Theos," meaning "In God."

The word picture is the lesser containing the greater. You know, like two wildcats in a gunny sack.

Andre Crouch said it well, "Get all excited, Go tell everybody, That Jesus Christ is King. "

Chapter 21

HUMBLE

Billy Graham

No man among men has more reason to be proud than Billy Graham.

None are more humble than he.

Humanly speaking, there's no way to explain Billy Graham. No college scholar, no seminary degree, just an unbelievable anointing of an extraordinarily powerful but humble man. I adore him. It breaks my heart that there is no "Billy Graham" today. No prophet in the land. It is unquestionably a significant factor in modern America's moral and spiritual bankruptcy.

The thing that absolutely astounds me the most about the number one evangelist in history is his humility. No phony here. No game playing. Billy acts humbly because he is humble.

I twice spent forty-five minute sessions alone with him with a long list of questions. I could not get him to talk about himself, he only wanted to talk about me. And I said, "I think I know the secret of Billy Graham."

Half a century later, I am still in awe that Billy Graham wanted to ask questions of me. Can we be less? The servant is not greater than His Lord.

Jesus didn't ride triumphantly into Jerusalem on a white horse. He came, meek and lowly riding on a donkey. He humbled Himself before His accusers. He was completely submissive to the Father. He gave every last drop of His blood for lost sinners and was crucified on the city garbage dump. "Him who had known no sin literally *became* sin for us."

Those who would preach the Gospel of the humble carpenter of Nazareth must embody His character. Those who do so have greatly blessed my life.

Another is Dr. Bob Overton.

For several years it has been my privilege to serve on the adjunct faculty at Southwestern Seminary, Houston. I have no formal seminary education and teach with and under the authority of Dr. Overton, who has been an accredited professor for over thirty years. He says, "I'll do the play-by-play, John; you do the color commentary."

Imagine this: Sitting side by side, he lets me – urges me – to interrupt his lecture at will, embellishing his teaching with my comments. Amazing!

Humility is Dr. Bob's middle name. Quite unlike the rock star preacher to whom I once introduced myself, who simply said, "I know who you are," and walked away.

Not unlike Diotrephes of 3 John 9, "*I wrote something to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have first place among them, does not receive us.*"

Humility never takes the credit, seeks the spotlight or wants the glory. Humility means, "I never forget where I came from," which is nowhere at all.

Humility knows what I can do apart from Him, which is nothing at all.

Jesus never did anything without the Father and said, "*Without Me you can do nothing.*" NOTHING. A compound word. NO THING; A THING THAT DOES NOT EXIST. That's who I am and what I can do without Him. He didn't say "not much." He said, "NOTHING."

Jesus, Crown of Heaven, Adoration of Angels, Darling of the Trinity, came to earth and made himself of no reputation. We who follow in His steps would do well to do the same.

*"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to **walk humbly** with thy God?" (Micah 6:8)*

Get off the white horse and onto the donkey.

Get off the throne and into the trenches.

Gettin' muddy's a good thing.

Chapter 22

ACCEPTING

Robert Jeffress

Robert Jeffress is the longest tenured pastor after the legendary ministries of George W. Truett and W. A. Criswell at First Church Dallas.

Dr. Jeffress is a well-prepared pulpiteer with a great balance of “sharp as a tack,” “bold as a lion,” and a “heart of grace.”

On everything from Mormonism to homosexuality, this man of God has done what pastors must do, spoken openly and unapologetically on the important issues of the day. And he’s done so in a spirit of hating the sin while loving the sinner. Truth is non-negotiable and God’s preachers are called, entrusted and required to deliver it at any cost, but always in a spirit that is at once committed to truth and accepting of the sinner who is aborting it.

Few are more family-centered and good-hearted than Mormons. None are more misguided in the touchstone doctrine of “The Faith,” the watershed of Christian orthodoxy; the Deity of Jesus. The centerpiece of Mormon theology is its denial. Good people. Bad theology.

Balancing “accepting the sinner” with “rejecting the sin” can be a bit more difficult with the issue of homosexuality.

The marriage of a man and woman is the ultimate, visible expression of the union of Christ and His bride, the Church. To celebrate homosexuality is to go into Rembrandt’s gallery and fling paint on his finest work of art.

I recently received the following email from Dr. Jeffress:

“One Sunday I was planning to preach an advertised message, ‘Why Gay Is Not O.K.’ In the message I planned to explore in a compassionate, but bold way, what the Bible truly says about homosexuality. When the media discovered what I was planning to preach on, they devoted their Saturday evening newscast to the subject. Consequently, on Sunday morning we had about 200 protestors picketing outside our Sanctuary. Our members were very courteous to them, bringing them coffee and donuts and interacting in a positive way.

I went ahead and preached my message as scheduled. A few days later I received a letter from one of the protestors who said he and several friends had decided to actually come in and listen to what I had to say.

This is what he wrote in the letter: ‘I never expected to hear from

you what I heard. Instead of being judgmental and hateful, you shared some hard things in a loving and compassionate way.'

Others who stood outside in protest commented how surprised they were by the loving treatment of our members.

I often tell our members that as Christians we need to be velvet-covered bricks: remaining hard in our biblical convictions but compassionate with people."

Dr. Jeffress got it right. Accepting the sinner while rejecting the sin, and all in love. That is a velvet covered brick and a love covered Savior.

Chapter 23

MEEK

Kevin Ezell

“Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.” Matthew
5:5

This beatitude may be easily misunderstood. One popular translation says, “Blessed are the gentle.” Sorry, doesn’t quite nail it.

Meekness is not wimpiness or weakness. **Meekness is strength under control.**

We too seldom see a gentle and sweet spirit in the life of a person who is also strong as an ox and solid as a rock.

Some things are rare mixes. Strong preachers are seldom gentle pastors. But when the mix is there, it makes for a rare but very special person. Kevin Ezell is such a rarity and special man.

As President of the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention this man’s passion to change America’s great influence centers by planting fifteen thousand churches across the North, is the Herculean task of a giant. But this mighty Goliath projects

the soft and almost shy spirit of meekness of the young boy that slew him.

Meekness always has more in the pantry than on the table. More gas in the tank than in the motor. Gentle but oh, so strong.

Long suffering, forbearance, gentleness, love, peace, truth—these are not weak words, they are strong words. Remember well these words: **meekness is not weakness. Meekness is strength under control.**

James said, “*Behold we put bits in horses mouths that they may obey us and we turn about their whole body.*”

If Hedonism would unbridle the wild horses of human nature, Hyper-fundamentalism would beat them half to death until they’re nothing but an ol’ plug horse, pulling a milk cart down the back alleys of life. Very much like the mother who heard her little boy playing in the garage and hollered, “Tommy, I don’t care what you’re doing, whatever it is *stop it.*”

Jesus is not *at war* with human nature. He would not berate our every trait ’til at last we whimper in the corner like a scolded puppy. Jesus is in the business of *fulfilling* human nature: bridle the wild horses,

put bits in their mouths and *ride them*. You will go just as fast and just as far, but when you harness the wild horses for the Kingdom, you'll be going somewhere worth the trip.

Some may say, "My problem is my temper." But more of us need to get angry at things worth getting mad about; the liquor traffic, the drug traffic, pornographers, human trafficking, child abuse, prejudice, injustice, and more.

Jesus had a temper, but it was a temper under control. He didn't
lose His temper; He *used* His temper. He harnessed it. It was *strength in*

The moneychangers in the temple were short-changing people, good people, devout people, who had come to Jerusalem at great cost from across the Roman Empire.

The temple tax had to be paid in Roman money and they had no idea how that translated into *their* money. They were being short-

The problem was not selling CDs in the lobby of the church, it was ripping off the people in the process. And He sat there, under control, slowly, patiently weaving a whip. Then he used it. He was never stronger, more dynamic, than in this hour. Weakness? Hardly. But *strength under control!* His anger was not *out of control* it was fully *under control*.

Meekness means you:

- Keep your cool.
- Hold your tongue.
- Bide your time.
- Control your emotions.
- Wait your turn.
- Act forcefully, but gently.
- Speak softly, but authoritatively.
- Use everything you are, in the way God intends, to do what's important. And right.

Harness those wild horses and don't ride 'em 'til He says, "Giddy up. Go!"

Chapter 24

ENCOURAGING

Michael Catt

I recently learned that seven of the top ten box office draws that week were moral and family values-based movies. A thousand hallelujahs – it's about time.

Clearly the man who laid the foundation and lit the spark was the pastor who first started producing that kind of movie out of his church. His vision brought about the box office hits *Flywheel*, *Facing the Giants*, *Fireproof*, and *Courageous* to the silver screen.

Michael Catt, Sherwood Church, Albany, Georgia was God's man to part the waters, start the parade of new movies and do so first class, not only in content, but quality of production.

But what you probably don't know about this special producer and promoter, is that he's also a promoter of nearly every guy on earth that needs a little boost.

The Biblical gift of exhortation is not the gift of exhorting from the pulpit, it is the gift of encouragement. Michael Catt, like lots of people

who “make it to the finish line,” is a one-to-one encourager of folks who really need to get there. I think that would be us all.

I didn't know this about Michael Catt, let alone expect it, when I received this “out of the blue” letter from this very busy man at a very needed time:

“Dear John,

Just thinking about you a lot since we saw each other in Dallas at the Pastor's Prayer Gathering. It was so good to see you and be able to fellowship for a few moments with you.

I am forever indebted to you for your investment in my life and ministry. Preaching for me at both Ada and Sherwood is something I will never forget. Your preaching, encouragement, writing, and leadership through the years have been a constant inspiration to me.

I count you head and shoulders above many others because you were willing and open to embrace young people in the days of the “Jesus Movement.” That example has always been in the back of my mind when I tell people that Sherwood exists to reach the next generation. When I see our sign that says, “Whoever wants the Next Generation the most will get them”, I think of you.

May God bless these days in your life with His abiding love.

Give our love to Uldine.

Blessings,

Michael

And would you believe a second email just came from him as I am writing these words:

“Brother John,

I thought you would enjoy this note that I just received.

‘My wife and I had the pleasure of visiting Sherwood last Sunday.

You mentioned John Bisagno. When I was nine I accepted Jesus as my Savior when he preached a revival at my church. At thirteen we joined Bisagno’s church, First Southern Baptist in Del City, Oklahoma. It was there my spiritual growth really began. I was fortunate to be there through his entire ministry as well as that of Jimmy Draper whom you also referenced in your sermon.”

More blessing,

Michael

I once preached a week for a pastor who never once smiled at me, nodded approval, said, “Good job” or any encouraging word at all. I

really didn't need it, but he really did need to say it. It was a very long week.

Great counselors encourage their clients to believe they actually *can* do what *average* counselors tell them they *should* do.

Encouragers are secure enough to say, "I want you to be secure, too." "I want you to be a winner." "You can do it!" They give away the confidence they themselves possess, and in the process become stronger as they make you stronger. There's that cross principle again!

You may have no idea whether a person is in a time of need, but your encouraging word makes a deposit in their life that will be there when they need it. "*A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!*" Proverbs 15:23.

One of my deacons is prominent in the Houston judiciary. He greatly has the gift of encouragement. Both my heart and my scrapbooks are filled with handwritten notes he sent through the years. All totally unexpected, all just at the right time. They are one of the great treasures of my ministry.

Encouragement doesn't have to be profound or even spoken. It can be an affirming nod or firm handshake. A smile or pat on the back of

someone who looks up to you can make their day—and change their life.

And there's more than one way to encourage.

In times of bereavement, the greatest encouragement we can offer is not *what* we say, but that *we were there*.

Bud Wilkinson, Oklahoma University football coach, was famous for never trash-talking his players. His half-time pep talks were classics.

Once upon a not so happy half-time during a forty-seven game winning streak, the Sooners found themselves trailing by twenty-four points.

Coach Wilkinson didn't even go into the locker room. Fifteen minutes of silence. Just before time to return to the field, he popped his head in the door and said, "Alright girls, let's go."

They won the game!

Negative people are little people and don't make it to the finish line. Positive people are big people and do. And they make sure someone else makes it, too.

Mike Johnson was coach of the Katy High School football team. Under his leadership, the Tigers won more 5A championships than any school in Texas history.

Each year he played a recording of my Philippians 4:13 sermon to the team. *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

The simple outline was:

- I. I can
- II. I can, therefore, I must.
- III. I must, therefore, I will.

In each game, the team wore a t-shirt under their jerseys with six words:

I can

I must

I will

Today, they still play the message, still wear the t-shirts and still win the championships.

SECTION 4

Chapter 25

SERVANT

Denny Autrey

Jesus said, “*He that would be greatest among you must be servant of all.*”

Got to admit I’ve probably seen a bit less servant-heartedness among strong leaders than I would expect in light of Jesus’ words. One shining exception is Denny Autrey.

Dr. Autrey is the grandson of legendary evangelism professor C.E. Autrey of Southwestern Seminary, and son of the late Jerry Autrey, Pastor of Cherokee Church, Memphis and Woodridge Houston.

Dr. Denny is Dean of the Houston campus of Southwestern and has been considered for President of some other great seminaries.

One day he will be precisely that.

With a servant's heart like his, he will indeed be among the "greatest of all."

As always, Jesus is the model. He lay aside His robes of royalty and took the cloak of a servant as does my friend Dr. Denny every single day.

Dr. Autrey's heart and door are open wide. It's always, "Come on in Bro. John, how can I serve you?"

Denny Autrey is a giver not a taker. A great leader because he is a great servant. He is the best combination of scholarship, knowledge, information, and a helping hand I have ever known. His response is always, "The answer's Yes, What's the question?"

Too often leaders have a leader's heart and servants have a servant's heart. When you find a leader with a servant's heart, that's special!

Well into my fifteenth year of so-called retirement, I continue to write, preach, counsel and travel. I'm way too busy – not much spare time on my hands. Four or five times a year, I need some information that's hard to come by. I could spend three or four hours researching it, or simply call Denny Autrey and get the answer in three or four minutes.

He's never failed to answer the call and never failed to have the information.

He's always there, always got the answer – right now. And happy to do it.

Servanthood is a special gift and more. It's the heart of Jesus, and the soul of those who follow in His footsteps. Where should it more abound than in the ministry of those who would lead others to “the greatest of all.”

“For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.” Matthew 20:28

How 'bout His followers?

I recently attended a worship service at a Lutheran church in our neighborhood. I arrived early at the second morning service as folks were just leaving the first. I asked someone in the lobby if the pastor were preaching today. They said, “Yes, that's Pastor Joe over in the corner by the coat rack.”

That's right, not Dr. Whistlebritches on center stage, Pastor Joe in the corner. He was helping people put on their overcoats.

Oh yes, and the name of his church is “Christ the Servant Lutheran Church.”

Don’t know whether the church “got it” from the pastor or the pastor “got it” from the church: but they both “get it.”

Chapter 26

LABORER

Johnny Teague

I Thessalonians 2:9, *“For you remember brothers our labor and travail, laboring night and day because we would not be chargeable unto any of you as we preached unto you the Gospel.”*

This is my second chapter about Johnny. I could have written a dozen more.

Every semester that I teach on the adjunct faculty at Southwestern Seminary in Houston, I pick out a young student or two I feel have exceptional potential and do some personal mentoring. One very special guy is Johnny Teague, Pastor of Church at the Cross in Houston.

Likeable, embracing, really prepared are at the top of his list. But way above the top is an amazing quality. Johnny Teague works like the dickens!

- He studies 15-20 hours a week and his sermons are as good as it gets.
- He drives a school bus to know the kids in his church field.

- He stays after church every Sunday (two services) and counsels one or two hours.
- He drives 140 miles roundtrip every Thursday, works 12 hours on the farm his father-in-law left him and grows the vegetables his church gives to the poor.
- AND DOOR KNOCKS and witnesses at about 80 homes every Saturday.

Oh yes. His church was recently written up in both Texas state papers as the fastest growing Baptist church in Texas.

And Johnny Teague is not a workaholic. He's a "Jesus-holic" who is passionate about working for his Master who still sends "laborers into the harvest."

Burn out? Not that boy. Johnny's 52 years old, but trust me, he's built to last.

My dad was an humble man, the owner of a small poultry business. He taught me the value of hard work, a legacy for which I shall be forever grateful. Five months of the year were peak business times for our hatchery. Much like the department stores at Christmas, we made it then or not at all.

Every Monday morning, from March 1 through August 1, three hundred farmers came in to get their baby chicks—10,000 of them—and we had to be ready. Incubators emptied, trays cleaned, boxes built, compartments strawed, boxes labeled, and baby chicks categorized.

That meant all hands on deck at 4:00 every Sunday morning until 5:00 that evening. I was playing in a high school jazz band and got home late on Saturday nights or early Sunday mornings, at 2:00 or 3:00 o'clock. It made no difference. I was at work, and I was there *on time* beginning at 4:00 a.m. every Sunday for five months.

He also expected me at work after school on Tuesdays and Fridays from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. helping unload an eighteen-wheeler full of 100-pound Purina feed sacks.

On Saturday I'd have to help clean the farmers' hen houses with just enough time to clean myself up and play for a Saturday night dance. I was also rehearsing early Tuesdays and Thursdays with the high school marching band, not to mention a 50-cent-an-hour part-time job at the Sure Way grocery store. It's right across the street from Safeway. No kiddin. ☺

In grade school, I lived in the country, three miles from my school and rode a school bus five days a week. If I missed it, I walked. I knew the meaning of hard work and still do. And I love it.

My last two and half years in college I drove an average of 200 miles roundtrip, five nights a week conducting youth revivals, fourteen weeks out of each eighteen-week semester. Uldine worked at a bank, and I had a part-time job driving a delivery truck for a florist. I carried twenty hours my final semester and graduated from college at age twenty.

I still average eight to ten hours of work a day and more, and I'm retired. Or so I've been told.

In sixty-three years of ministry, I only fired three staffers. All on the same day and all for the same reason: they were lazy.

There are plenty of go-getters in the Bible. Solomon labored exponentially to build the temple, as did Nehemiah to build the walls. And would you believe the three best-known, Biblical examples of hard workers are women.

- Ruth in Boaz' field.
- The Proverbs 31 woman.
- Martha endlessly cooking and cleaning away.

We don't work because we have to; we work because we want to.
We work because we love Him. We are *co-laborers* in the Kingdom.
Oops, sorry. I think that's "we're co-laborers in the **work** of the
Kingdom."

Work is God's gift to us. How we work is our gift to God and His
people.

Chapter 27

RIGHTEOUS

Jim Henry

Righteous. Not sure I know all that means. I'm no Greek scholar but it sounds a lot like "doing what's right" because God has made me right. Things like treating people right – and more.

Gotta tell you a quick story. In 1982, Uldine and I went to Germany for a month with Jim & Jeanette Henry to preach four Sundays in a couple of churches while their missionary pastors were home on furlough.

On one of our fun Fridays, Jim said, "Let's drive and go see the Black Forest." What I thought would be a two-day roundtrip consisted of eleven hours of driving, twenty minutes of looking and eleven driving back as Jim said, "Well that's it, let's go home."

Not sure that was fair. But let me tell you what I do know. We've been friends more than forty years and outside of the Black Forest ☺, I've never seen Jim Henry fail to be fair. ☺

Jim writes, "I was in my first pastorate while a student in New Orleans Seminary. We had business meetings on Sunday nights.

One warm Sunday night I asked, "Any new business?" A member stood and called for me to be fired because I was, in his words, "a N___ lover."

After a lengthy tirade he called for a second and there was a muffled second. I was shocked. The only thing I could quickly think to do was ask the people not to vote that night, to table it for a week and give me opportunity to visit every home and ask the question, 'Do you think I should continue as pastor?' If the majority said, 'No,' I would resign immediately. I did this because it seemed to be fair. I didn't want these good people who were lifetime neighbors to get into a debate that could rupture friendships within the church for years to come. The people agreed. "

"The following Wednesday night two Godly deacons arose and read a statement about the historic Baptist position of a free church and a free pulpit and that the church should remain in the position for which our forefathers had suffered and died. The church agreed to drop the threatened vote on the pastor."

"On its 150th anniversary, they invited me back to preach and welcomed us with open arms."

Mark 5:23-24 are two of my favorites.

"So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

Notice Jesus didn't say, "If you have something against your brother." In that case it would indeed be logical to initiate the process of reconciliation.

Instead, Jesus exhorts, "Be a second miler." Even if your brother has something against you and you have nothing against him, harmony among brothers is so important that *you* initiate the process.

Jim Henry was in the right. Yet, though wronged, resolved to reconcile brother with brother and friend with friend.

Think that's not important? Five times in John 17 Jesus emphasized the importance of unity between brothers within the fellowship. And why?

"May My people be one, **in order that** the world may believe I came from You."

The world doesn't read the Bible: it reads us. A beautifully functioning body of Christ, in honor preferring one another and in harmony with itself, draws life from the Head in Heaven, recreates the body of Christ on earth and attracts people to Him.

An ugly, divided, dysfunctional body creates a caricature of Christ and repels people.

Our disunity invalidates our witness to the world. Dare we attempt to remove a speck from their eye with a great big beam in our own?

Righteous men are initiators. Initiators are reconcilers. Reconcilers are unifiers. And unity is a great big MUST!

Pour out a box full of ants on the ground and it won't take 'em long to turn confusion into union.

Kinda think we oughta be as smart as little red bugs, don't you?

Chapter 28

GIFTED

Tim Bisagno

You know what you're supposed to do by what God has gifted you to do. You know your giftedness by what comes naturally and what God blesses. Nobody fits the bill more than our son Tim.

Though we did our best with Tim, he went into the far country ☹ and came back. ☺

He was saved at a revival in our church, attended Christian Grade Schools, High Schools, and Baylor University, yet somehow strayed into drugs and drinking. At age 27, he returned to the Lord and found both his Heavenly and Earthly Fathers' arms open wide.

Tim felt God's call to ministry early on. He spent a year at Southwestern Seminary, served as youth minister at Canyon Creek Church in Temple, Texas and youth intern at Prestonwood, Dallas, but never really found himself: he was ministering outside his giftedness.

In 2003, he went to pastor Ecclesia Church in Franklin, Tennessee. Four years later, he remained settled in his call to ministry, but unsure of the "where and how."

Though his church grew from a Sunday morning attendance of 40 to 400, he was uncomfortable as pastor. One day he said, “Dad, I’m walking in Saul’s armor, pastoring is not my gift.”

I said, “Let’s talk.”

Fast forward ten years. Today, he’s the most comfortable and blessed, “right-fit” young man I know. His passion and giftedness, with God’s mighty anointing, add up to a worldwide TV ministry, called MXTV, targeting lost teens and young adults. His edgy program is on late at night, in several languages, on twenty worldwide networks, reaching a potential audience of 3.4 billion people a week. They see thousands come to Christ each year. And man, it really rocks. But then so does Tim when he’s really being Tim.

A spiritual gift is a God-given, sovereignly chosen, Holy Spirit empowered ability to do something Jesus did.

The fruit of the Spirit creates the character of Jesus; *what He was like*.

There are three categories of spiritual gifts:

1. The gift of the GIFTED PERSON. The sense in which, while the individual *has* the gift, they themselves *are* the gift. Billy Graham has

the gift of evangelism: Billy Graham is himself God's gift to the church.

2. Sign GIFTS to UNBELIEVERS to validate the message where there is no written Word, or the Word is not believed: healing, speaking in languages you don't know, casting out demons, and performing miracles.
3. Gifts to EDIFY the BODY of Christ: Preaching, Teaching, Mercy, Faith, Giving, Encouragement, Leadership, Administration, Service, Hospitality, Discernment and Evangelism.

If you are not ministering in your giftedness, you'll never be comfortable, let alone productive. You can't walk in Saul's armor if you aren't Saul.

And there's nothing to be embarrassed about in making a change. Some of God's most effective servants reappraised their gifts and changed ministries.

During my ministry, I have made four major shifts, all in God's time:

- Worship leader to preacher
- Evangelist to pastor
- One pastorate to another
- The local pastorate to Kingdom-wide ministry.

Through the years, my passions were pastoring and preaching evangelistic crusades. Today, they are mentoring young pastors, spiritual awakening, and world missions. The obvious question then is, “How do I know my spiritual gift?”

Remember two things identify giftedness.

The first is what comes naturally.

Who are you? How has God made you? What do you really like to do when you're just being you?

Our grandson Jonathan graduated from Regents Seminary in Vancouver. Only after God ignited a passion for farming and he became an agricultural

missionary to Nicaragua could he say, "I've found my calling." I think he

I know another man who has fabulous teaching skills but little else. The church he pastors is in a booming area, yet in the past ten years they've dropped in attendance from 1,200 to 400. I wish he were teaching in a seminary. He has great teaching skills, but few people skills.

What is your passion? Fill in the blank. "If I could do anything in the

Whoever you are, whatever you really enjoy doing, somewhere in the world the need for you exists in Christian ministry.

You can't imagine the opportunities in the Kingdom: film making, sports ministries, biker ministries, cowboy churches, you name it, somewhere,

somebody's doing it—for Christ—with success. Do what you like; that's what

If you think you are called to be an architect and every building you design implodes, think again.

If you're trying to decide between being a brain surgeon or a truck driver and all your patients die, better go check out them 18-wheelers, Bubba.

If you're operating in your giftedness, your comfort level will be high as will be God's level of affirmation.

God's special finishers know who they are, what they are and are comfortable with both.

Chapter 29

MENTOR

Johnny Hunt

For more than thirty years Pastor Hunt has shepherded Woodstock Church in Atlanta.

He has authored many books, preached innumerable conferences and served as President of the Southern Baptist Convention.

But though Johnny Hunt preaches to large numbers at his church and beyond, his passion, like mine, is mentoring young pastors.

His annual school of ministry sees hundreds of young “up and comers” learn the hands-on realities of life in the real world of ministry, all from the warm and loving heart of a shepherd.

The Apostle Paul was a master discipler. Young Timothy was never the same because he was mentored by Paul. And how many thousands and millions of us have been mentored by Timothy?

Perhaps as significant was the impact of two very special women:
“...when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.” (II Timothy 1:5 (NKJV))

Whatever you do in life, someone who does the same thing is praying

Keep your eyes open for those people. Find them. Seek them out. The Holy Spirit will easily develop your friendship into an opportunity to pour your life into them.

In the early '70s, Pastors Ed Young, Richard Jackson and I each identified ten sharp, young pastors whom we believed had the potential to build great churches. We invited those thirty to spend three days with us as we poured our lives in them about the work of the Lord and the building of Kingdom churches.

Twenty-seven came. Twenty-three would one day pastor mega-churches. One would become an agency head, one a seminary president.

Even today, in each of my seminary classes I identify a student or two who “really have it” and intentionally meet with them. We start with a casual lunch to get acquainted, then proceed to a monthly mentoring session with three or four others for about a year in our home. I am blessed by what these men became and are becoming. They still call me from time to time for counsel, and I love it.

Jesus poured Himself into twelve men who changed the world. Why not ask God to give you twelve, perhaps one or two at a time. It will be a source of great satisfaction to know you left a legacy of tomorrow's leaders.

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” II

Being an example and a mentor are closely connected. The greatest compliment you may ever receive is to find that someone wants to be just like you.

Intentional mentoring, however; goes farther, lasts longer, and accomplishes even more. If a young follower of Christ seeks you out and asks for your time, give it to them. But let it originate with you as well. That special

person may be only phone call away. One day you'll look back and say, "I had a

“The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.” Titus 2:3-5

Chapter 30

CAUTIOUS

O. S. Hawkins

Uldine has the name “Lady” in her email address. If anyone else on earth should have it in theirs, it’s Susie Hawkins.

Uldine and I adore O.S. and Susie. In the best sense of the word, they are pure class.

Susie has a great ministry to pastor’s wives and a really good B&H book to go with it entitled, “From One Pastor’s Wife to Another.”

I knew O.S. in Oklahoma where he served with great success in both rural and city churches. Who would have imagined he would one day pastor First Fort Lauderdale, First Dallas, and become President and CEO of Guidestone, a \$14 billion mutual fund, managing the financial security of over 220,000 retired pastors, missionaries, staffers, denominational employees, and their families.

Every Guidestone employee, five hundred of them, has a plaque on their desk that says, “Do well and do right,” with the words, “*So he led them by the integrity of his heart and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.*” Psalm 78:72.

God has entrusted O.S. with the financial security of more Christian people than any person in history. Guidestone has been named number one among all such financial entities in America, and remains the largest.

And little wonder. In O. S. God found a man He could trust. For many years O.S proved himself to be cautious – very cautious about money: everything about his relationship to finances as in “all things Butch” is “squeaky clean.”

God likes “squeaky clean” real good. Remember, “Not just the eye but the heart. Not just the words but the spirit.” And if there’s one place you really want to get it right, it’s money.

As seminary students and part-time staffers, O.S. and Jack Graham were personally mentored by Dr. Fred Swank at Sagamore Hills Church, Fort Worth.

Dr. Swank taught them, “Never use your people to build your ministry. Use your ministry to build your people.”

- O.S. Hawkins seldom accepted gifts from individuals. Too many strings attached.
- No business deals on the side with church members. Four of the ten best preachers I’ve known through the years are out of the ministry because of a passion shift from ministry to money.
- Never discuss salary before accepting a pastorate.

- Jack Graham never did
- O.S. never did.
- I never did.

None of us ever knew the salary from our churches until we opened our first paycheck.

1965: Del City, \$14,000. 1970: Houston, \$26,000. That's a year, not a month.

Many men are out of the pastorate because of bad choices with church finances. Achan polluted the entire army at Jericho with one moment of theft, then went to battle against a little fourth-rate power called Ai where one small theft resulted in one large defeat.

Judas betrayed Jesus for a measly thirty pieces of silver. And they crucified the Son of God.

The fewer people handling the finances the better, and there's no reason whatsoever for the pastor to be directly involved with the church's money and every reason not to.

- Don't handle the offering.
- Don't count the collection.
- Don't know the combination to the church safe.
- Don't sign the checks.

- Don't negotiate your salary.
- Don't ask for a raise.
- Don't abuse the church credit card.
- Don't have a fee.

Across sixty-three years of ministry, I have repeatedly been asked, "What is your fee?" For sixty-three years my answer has been the same, "I don't have a fee."

When I retired, a *Houston Chronicle* reporter asked me what I had learned was important in life.

I said, "If you have the Lord, your family, your health and your friends, everything else is just stuff." And "stuff" doesn't matter. Big house, little house. New car, old car. It's just a pile of steel and a stack of wood.

Joy is in Jesus. Loving Him. Following Him. Honoring Him. And that would include how we view our "stuff." The Son of God left a palace for what mattered.

I once flew from Texas to Ohio to preach at a large church. They offered me neither honorarium nor expenses, and never even mentioned it. Nor did I. Felt good. Still does.

The four reasons pastors quit the ministry are discouragement, leadership conflict, money and affairs.

Don't know which is number one, but ol' Judas might have a clue.

Chapter 31

EVANGELISTIC

Write Your Name Here

So tell me. How long since you've heard a sermon on The New Birth, Hell, Judgment, The Wages of Sin is Death, Except Ye Repent Ye Shall All Likewise Perish, or The Unpardonable Sin?

WELL THAT'S TOO LONG!

Not seeker-friendly? Is a doctor "patient-friendly" who won't tell him he has cancer?

The decline of nations has historically paralleled the decline of pulpits on fire with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Remember the old TV game show "Twenty Questions?" Probably not.

So let's just play "Six Questions."

- You're called to preach, right? Right.
- About what? The Gospel.
- Which is? Good News.
- About what? Salvation.
- From what? The power and penalty of sin.

- So how can they understand how good the Good News is unless they understand how bad the Bad News is? Hello!

The number one theme of the New Testament is salvation.

If it's not number one with you, you're not a New Testament preacher.

The ministry of Jesus begins and ends with evangelistic warning and a demand for a decision to do something about it.

The first word John the Baptist's would ever preach was "Repent."

Matthew 3:1

The first word Jesus ever preached was "Repent." Matthew 4:17

And listen to the closing messages of Revelation.

"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is [the book] of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man

according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” Revelation 20:11-15

*“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”
Revelation 21:7-8*

“And the Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let him that heareth say, ‘Come.’ And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Revelation 22:17

The most powerful appeal in the New Testament came from its **most seeker-friendly** preacher at the conclusion of his most **seeker-friendly** sermon.

The Sermon on the Mount is the constitution of the Kingdom of God. The preamble is the Beatitudes. Nine times Jesus said, “**Blessed** are you.” **Happy** are you.

Publicize a nine-week series on how to be happy and you'll pack 'em in.
Now that's seeker-friendly.

And at the end of His message does Jesus simply close His bible and invite people to the lobby for coffee? No.

He becomes a hot-hearted street preacher, gives a blistering invitation and demands a response. NOW!

SERMON

SERMON ON THE MOUNT, MATTHEW 5, 6, 7

INVITATION

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Matthew 7:13-14

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I

will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" Matthew 7:21-23

- Not everyone is going to be saved. Two roads. Two ways. The narrow and the broad. You are either on the road to heaven or on the road to hell.
- More will be lost than will be saved. **Many** will be on the broad way that leads to death. **Few** will be on the narrow way that leads to life.
- Many expecting to be saved will be lost. The religious even called Him LORD. "Have we not done many mighty works in thy name?" And went to hell.
- No one will be saved after death. They wanted to do business with God in *that* day, the *judgment* day. The "*too late*" day. Jesus went back to this life, this day.
- This could be your last chance to be saved. "Depart from Me." Not sooner, not later, right now. Game over.

Then He sums it up and demands a response.

*"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, **and doeth them**, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the*

rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.” Matthew 7:24-25

OR

*“And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and **doeth them not**, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:*

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.” Matthew 7:26-27

I rest my case.

Chapter 32

EXEMPLARY

Ronnie Floyd

Who was it that said, “I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day.” Don’t know, but if I did I’d tell ‘em to move to Springdale, Arkansas and buy a house right next door to Ronnie Floyd.

The recently elected President of the SBC is the whole package. No president has been more deserving of the office than he.

It’s one thing to preach to people what they should do, it’s quite another to do it.

Ronnie is passionate about fasting, spiritual awakening, unity in the body, orthodoxy, mentoring, and church planting.

And has he actually done anything about it? I’d say so! Here’s what he’s done just across the past decade:

- Written a wonderful book on fasting, “The Power of Prayer and Fasting,” by B& H Publishing and led his church in a major fast for a thousand souls to be saved in a week-long evangelistic crusade that resulted in 2,740 conversions. He has also experienced a forty-day fast multiple

times for personal growth in his own heart and spiritual awakening in America's.

- Initiated, organized, underwritten and personally led Pastors' conferences on spiritual awakening in several cities across America.
- Served on the Calvinism Advisory Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention to reconcile theological division and preserve unity.
- Championed the cause of Biblical orthodoxy as one of the leaders God raised up in the inerrancy debate of the 70's and 80's.
- Established a school in his church to personally oversee and train "boots on the ground;" young "up and coming" preachers in the real life world of pastorate.
- President Kevin Ezell has led the great North American Mission Board in a vision to plant fifteen thousand churches across North America, outside the Bible Belt. And to whom did he turn to rally the troops in conference after conference in the great Send North America Program? You guessed it -- none other than Ronnie Floyd. "Church Planting" and a lot of other words are Ronnie's middle name.

Never has it been more important to exemplify what we preach than now. In 1955, the Pastor was by survey, the most respected man in the community. Today he's number twelve.

He didn't say what you *do* is the salt or what you *preach* is the salt, He said, "*You* are the salt." Who you *are* makes the difference.

You will impact your world one way or another by your salt or lack thereof. It matters in society.

And it matters in the workplace. Ever notice how some people can enter a room and be a brightener or a downer? Your presence makes a difference.

It matters at church. The kids in your Sunday School probably learn more about the Lord from being around you a week at camp than from a year of your sermons.

And it matters at home. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. I've never known a boy who didn't have much of his father in him, or a girl, much of her mother.

Having "it" is important.

Elisha saw "it" in Elijah.

Timothy saw "it" in Paul.

The disciples saw "it" in Jesus.

People should see "it" in us.

Couldn't count the times I've preached in the church of a pastor I didn't know. But what I did know was that if he'd been there five years or more, his church would be just like him. If he was tough, I could expect no joy in the congregation; if he was gracious and loving, I could expect smiles and hugs, great singing, a happy spirit and lots of guests.

Green Bay Packer's Hall of Famer Bart Starr regularly sent encouraging notes to his son in middle school. Each note ended with the words: "I really believe in you. Love, Dad," with a dime taped to the note.

One Sunday afternoon Quarterback Starr had the worst game of his career. He threw three interceptions and almost single-handedly lost the game. He arrived home late that night and found a note on his dresser.

"Dad, I watched you play today. Wanted you to know, I really believe in you. Love, Bart, Jr." Taped to the bottom of the note was a dime.

Be exemplary. It's more important than may you realize.

Your life may be the only sermon some people will ever hear and the only Jesus they will ever see.

Somebody's watching.

"For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you." (John 13:15 NKJV)

SECTION FIVE

Chapter 33

FRIEND

Frank Minton

I know lots of people who have friends closer than their own family. Like Jesus, Frank Minton is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Jack Graham and O.S. Hawkins are widely known as “joined at the hip” and are an inspiration. That’s how I feel about my friend Frank Minton. Always there for me and taking the initiative to do so. He doesn’t wait for a call: he calls.

Pastor Frank, his twin brother Christian counselor Fred and I go back a long way together to 1954.

Frank and Fred were all-staters in Kansas high school baseball, pitchers and outfielders on the Oklahoma University baseball team, and played in the Brooklyn Dodger farm system.

More than sixty years later, Frank still holds a record that can never be broken. In 1952, he was starting pitcher for Wichita North High School. He pitched all three regional play-off baseball games and all three state championship games. And won all six.

Frank pastored South Cliff-Fort Worth, First Anchorage, Far Hills Dayton, Ohio, Tower Grove, St. Louis, and Park Place, Houston. He also started a church in his home in Wichita, which is now one of the largest churches in the state of Kansas.

He served as minister of Senior Adults at Sugar Creek, Houston and in 1973, was elected Vice-President of the Southern Baptist Pastor's Conference and is my faithful and servant-hearted friend.

I've asked him to do more favors across the years than I could ever remember, let alone name. And he's always jumped up to do them before I could get the words out of my mouth.

One holiday with all the repair shops closed, he raced from Oklahoma City to Tulsa to drive me to preach because my car had broken down.

In 1971, as I was considering leaving Houston's First to go to the mission field in Nigeria, Frank flew from Dayton, Ohio to Houston to counsel and pray with me.

And the beat goes on.

Like Frank Minton, the exceptional athlete, King David was an exceptional king. Both were exceptional friends.

David to Jonathan; Frankie to Johnny.

Friend. What a special word.

Jesus was a friend of sinners and He is the best friend of this sinner.

My favorite hymn the old Broadman hymnal is:

*“What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear.
What a privilege to carry,
Everything to Him in prayer.”*

Shouldn't we, like Jesus, be a friend to saint and sinner alike?

How do you treat people? If your answer is not ALL ALIKE, your answer is ALL WRONG. Favoritism is the death knoll of Christian testimony. If you're not the genuine article, people will see right through you.

Love doesn't end with people you know and like. It extends even to the unlovely and unknown.

Jesus' exceptional servants follow closely in His footsteps. To be like Christ means never losing the common touch. Selective friendship and spiritual integrity are, by definition, mutually exclusive.

You can't be a friend of God and not be friend of all people. And that would include everyone, great and small and different than us.

Jackie "Built to Last" Robinson faced hostile crowds in virtually every stadium. While playing one day in his home stadium in Brooklyn, he

committed a really bad error. He stood humiliated at second base as the Dodger fans booed and jeered.

Shortstop PeeWee Reece came over and stood by his side, put his arm around him and faced the crowd. The crowd grew quiet. And then began to cheer.

Think Jackie probably started to sing "What a Friend we have in Pee Wee." Just kiddin'.

Chapter 34

FORGIVING

HAYES WICKER

I've never known a man more worthy of one hundred percent support of his leadership than Hayes Wicker.

Conservative, Biblical, passionate, humble, kind, gracious, not to mention a man of real class.

For over four years, he saddled up and pastored one of the great churches of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Opposition by a vocal minority of church leadership to his alignment with the Conservative Resurgence of the '80's, made it a bit of a rough ride.

And how did he respond? Angry? Bitter? Unforgiving? I'll get even? No. That's not who Hayes Wicker is. That's not who winners are. That's not who Jesus is.

With love in his heart and a smile as big as Texas on his face, he loved supporter and critic alike, stayed the course and proclaimed the Word.

God would take him to First Church Naples, Florida which he would lead to become one of America's mega churches.

Forgiving is huge with God and John 3:16 is still the heart of the Bible. Surely Pastor Wicker will one day hear a great big, "Well Done."

At the end of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus revisits and re-emphasizes only one thing, "For if you don't forgive others, God will not forgive you." Does this mean my forgiveness is conditional on some human work I do? No. It means if I do not have the humility to forgive others, I will never have the humility to acknowledge that I too am a sinner in need of forgiveness. Lose/Lose.

Whatever happened, whoever it was, whatever they said, you've got to let it go.

Letting it go is a choice you make: because it's right, not because it's easy. And it's necessary: unforgiveness is a killer.

In the May, 2004 edition of *Readers Digest*, Bruce McEwen, PhD, Director of the Neuroendocrinology Lab at Rockefeller University in New York City was quoted, "Carrying a load of bitterness and anger is very toxic. Tension releases the stress hormone Cortisol. Too much Cortisol leads to atrophy and memory loss. It also raises blood pressure and blood sugar, hardening arteries and leading to heart disease.

Enter forgiveness, which seems to stop the Cortisol from flowing."

Joseph had every reason to hold a grudge against the brothers who sold him into slavery. He didn't.

The prodigal son's father had every reason to make him just another hired hand. He didn't.

And remember, forgiveness is not partial, it's complete.

I know a pastor who had an affair, confessed it to his church and resigned. For ten years - that's right ten years - he willingly subjected himself to a weekly accountability group. Like King David, the depth of his brokenness and repentance made him usable again.

The church that called him couldn't harmonize their desire to have him as pastor with his long-forgiven past. So they called him as "permanent interim pastor." Not sure who needs to take Forgiveness 101 more, the pastor or the church, but I think the pastor's already passed his finals.

You're in a battle. You'll take shots, you'll get hit. Let it go.

Letting it go is a decision you make, not in the emotions but in the will. Forgiving is not something you do because it *feels* right, it's something you do because it *is* right. One of my favorite verses is "Just blow it off." I Bisagno 4:9



You'll never make it to the finish line with a hundred pound grudge on your back. Forget it. Get over it and move on.

Hayes Wicker unloaded a great grudge.

Hayes Wicker built a great church.

Chapter 35

GRACIOUS

Mike Huckabee

Pastor Huckabee graduated from Southwestern Baptist Seminary and pastored Beech Street Church in Texarkana before becoming Governor of Arkansas and candidate for President of the United States. Just between us, I wish he'd run again.

Let me tell you a couple o' stories about Pastor Huckabee.

Story number one:

A few years ago, our daughter-in-law Edye attended a book signing with Bro. Huckabee. When she told him her name, he looked up and said, "Bisagno? Are you any relation to John Bisagno?" He handed her his cell phone and said, "See if you can get him on the phone, I've always wanted to talk to him. He's my hero."

He called and said, "Bro. John, this is Mike Huckabee."

I said, "Yea, and I'm George Washington. Who is this?"

Story number two:

We attended a fundraiser in Houston where Governor Huckabee was speaking. When they called some of us together for a group photo at the reception he said, "Bro. John come over here. I want you to stand by me."

Story number three:

Comedian Dennis Swanberg and I co-authored a book to keep senior adults working for the Lord in retirement, not just taking cruises to the Bahamas or bus trips to Branson. We call it "Get Off Your Bus!"

When we asked Mike Huckabee to write the forward, he graciously said, "Yes." And I said, "You're kidding, right?"

And believe this. When after twelve days we had failed to send him the manuscript *he emailed us* and said, "Hey you guys, where's the book?" A week later we received the following:

"I really hate "Get Off Your Bus" by John Bisagno and Dennis Swanberg. I was looking forward to slowing down someday, trimming back on the 350,000 plus frequent flyer miles a year, start sleeping at home instead of hotel rooms, and waking up at the crack of noon. I imagined one day that the only reason I'd get up before daylight would be to duck hunt, deer hunt, turkey hunt, or fish, which I looked forward to doing pretty much all the time. Then I went and read THIS book.

With more wake up punch than 6 cups of Starbucks and a V-8 slap on the forehead, "Get Off Your Bus" challenged me to think of the coming years of my life to be the most important ones.

I've known Dennis Swanberg for a long time, and he is one of the funniest people I've ever met. His gut-busting sense of humor carries the serious message of why the battle of life is too important to become an observer from the sidelines.

And Dr. John Bisagno is simply one of the most dynamic men that ever walked into a pulpit. He has always been the kind of orator that I wanted to hear and wished I could have been.

Put the two of these guys together, and "Get Off Your Bus" becomes a lively, totally entertaining, but deeply spiritual challenges to all the people who thought that the goal of being a senior adult was to ride around the Ozarks, the Smokies, or Nova Scotia watching leaves turn colors and spending a few nights in Branson catching the Gatlin Brothers, Tony Orlando, and three all-you-can-eat buffets a day.

So saddle up, pilgrim, and know that you're in for the ride of your life. But you ain't going to do it sitting on no chartered bus!"

Gracious? I'd say so. Yea, I really do wish he'd run again. And win!

Gracious, of course, comes from the word *grace*: the heart of our Bible, and as in "all things Jesus" is at once our example and our source.

"...you have tasted that the Lord is gracious." (I Peter 4:3.)

Long after they've forgotten what you did, they'll remember what you were. You may not conform, but you can always be comfortable. No nicer

To experience His touch is to experience His grace. It softens the spirit and humbles the heart and makes tender the spirit of a child of the King.

I deserve nothing. I can do nothing. I am nothing apart from His amazing grace. Somehow that translates to an elevated opinion of others and greatly effects the way I treat them.

- Humbly
- Courteously
- Politely
- Gently
- Tactfully
- Thoughtfully
- Obligingly
- Always graciously

And you can disagree without being disagreeable. When someone disagrees, you don't have to be defensive. Listen politely, smile affirmatively and say, "Thanks, Joe, I certainly agree with a lot of what you say. But let me ask you, have you thought about this ---?"

When Jacob went to make peace with Esau, he gave him flocks of sheep and herds of cattle and said, *“Please take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and I have enough. So he urged him and he took it”* Genesis 33:11 (NKJV).

Being gracious throttles harshness and payback. A gracious spirit overlooks wrong, extends love and builds bridges between hearts.

Gracious people recognize God's graciousness to them and pass it

Joseph and Mary were well recognized in Nazareth as great parents:

“...and they wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth and said, ‘Is not this Joseph’s son?’” (Luke 4:22)

I couldn't begin to name the people I've met in my life—most only once,

Some were rich.

Some were influential.

Some were glamorous.

Some were powerful.

I remember most fondly those who were gracious.

Chapter 36

RESTRAINED

Paul Beck

Pastor Paul Beck was a treasure as is his daughter, Uldine, whom I married over sixty years ago.

Dr. Beck earned three seminary doctorates and was David Jeremiah's predecessor at Shadow Mountain, San Diego in the late 1940's when the church was named Scott Memorial.

He had three morning services and two Sunday evening services before anyone ever heard of multiple services. He was a mighty pulpiteer, personal soul winner and man of prayer. And he knew the meaning of work. With a church that size, he had only one full time staffer.

But I truly feel the greatest accomplishment of his life was the daughter he and Velma would raise. No one on earth loves church more than Uldine. I think this is the reason: I've often heard her say, "In all my eighteen years at home, I never once heard my mom or dad complain or criticize anything about the church or any member. Whatever the complaint, whatever the gripe, Dad left it on the front porch when he came home and never brought a hint of it through the door. To me church was heaven on earth and all the folks were angels."

And we all know there was plenty of stuff for Dr. Beck to gripe about and people who were not so nice.

In his earlier pastorates, Paul and Velma were not quite as cautious with their comments. Sensing it was negatively impacting their older children's love for God and His people, they made a vow to never again speak critically of the church in the presence of any. From that decision forward, three of their four children would enter ministry. Bill, as worship pastor; Bob, as executive pastor; Uldine, as pastor's wife.

Today, one of her children is a bible teacher, one an evangelist, and one a pastor's wife. Three of her grandchildren are passionately involved in missions in Nicaragua, Mongolia and Japan. Two others are praying about entering the ministry.

From one sweet fountain of words came one sweet river of blessing.

A dear pastor friend and his wife live with the heartache that none of their six grown children like church, and seldom ever go. Something must have hurt them deeply somewhere along the way. Always remember, we are called to preach, not pity ourselves. Love, not complain. Minister, not criticize.

As children, Kenny Rogers and his brother and sister were members of Houston's First. Still love his ol' country classic:

“You gotta know when to hold ‘em,

Know when to fold ‘em.

Know when to walk away,

And know when to run.”

Paul said it just a tad better.

*“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, **forgetting those things which are behind** and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* Philippians 3:13-14

Just because you *feel* it doesn't mean you have to *say* it. God set a double guard over the tongue; thirty-two teeth and two lips are there for more than eating pizza and kissing your wife. One of my favorite verses is “Zip it.”

Ephesians 4:29, Bisagno paraphrase 😊

Being restrained can keep you and your family from being strained. Not to mention losing your influence, blessing and ministry.

Chapter 37

MERCIFUL

You Rang?

Okay. You got me. I wasn't going to name myself in one of the chapter titles, but gotta 'fess up: If I had to name my three goodest gifts, guess they'd be eating, sleeping and mercy. ☺

For years my friend Ken Chamblin has been trying to get me to write my autobiography and call it, "Mercy Poured Out."

Never had the nerve to tell him I already wrote my autobiography at age twenty-six. Is that goofy or what?

Remember the old expression, "Well, mercy me?" I think somebody created it just for me.

I'm easy on everybody, unlike some people I know who would pour water on a drownin' man. And I even have a great-granddaughter: Mercy Magnolia, named after...guess who?

A politician got the proofs of his portrait, stormed into the photographer's office and said, "This picture does not do me justice!" The photographer replied, "Sir, with a face like yours, you don't need justice, you need mercy!"

I've often wondered why no one ever wrote a song called "Amazing Mercy." It could have easily become the second best loved hymn in the world.

In Luke 6:36 Jesus said, "*Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful*" (NKJV).

Mercy. This is one place *I get it*. It's never crossed my mind to kick a man when he's down. Rub it in. Give him what he deserves. Expose him. I'll carry things to the grave I know about people I would never dream of hurting.

I always tend to no penalty at all. Let 'em off the hook. Go easy. Let it go. Forgive and forget -- fold 'em and walk away. And you know what? I've experienced mercy like you wouldn't believe.

In Matthew 5:7, Jesus said, "*Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy,*" I've tried to practice that and my life has been characterized by people being really easy on me. The policeman on the corner. The teacher in the classroom. The judge in traffic court. My mom at home (unlike my dad who whipped the thunder out of me when I deserved it, which was often!)

Years ago I received a speeding ticket near Belville, Texas for going way over the speed limit. The bad news is the judge was not happy to say the least. The good news is he regularly watched me preach on television and gave me another chance. No ticket.

Six months later, it happened again. Same speed, same cop, same place, same judge. He was livid. Pounding his desk he said, “Preacher, I am going to let you off one more time. But if you ever come to my county speeding again, I will not put you *in the jail*, I will put you so far *under the jail*, your deacons will never find you.” What a deal! Just kiddin’ fellas. ☺

Let’s be clear about our definition of terms. *Grace* means getting what you **don’t** deserve; forgiveness, blessings, peace, all the good stuff. *Mercy*, means **not** getting what you **do** deserve; judgment, penalty, exposure —all the bad stuff.

A man once said, “I just want God’s justice.” I responded, “Friend, that’s the one thing you *don’t* want.”

Micah 6:8 tells us God requires us to “*love mercy.*” Not just tolerate or even practice it, but truly love it.

The Prodigal’s dad was “mercy poured out” of the very large pitcher of a father’s love, as is our Father’s on us.

Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery when he was just a young boy. When he came to power in Egypt, the tables were turned. Now their lives were in *his* hands. It was *his* chance to get even. But when the time came, Joseph welcomed his brothers and wept over them.

Joseph is the most complete picture of Jesus in the Old Testament, and should be of us.

We all “blow it” from time to time. When you have to forgive a co-worker, friend, relative or neighbor, do it conscious of your own failures.

When you release a staff member or employee, walk in their shoes. Allow for plenty of time, grace and mercy.

Mercy puts us in the other person’s shoes and more fully embodies the Golden Rule than anything we do.

And it’s important that mercy be balanced with wisdom. Ask God to help you understand when to show mercy. People with the gift can lack discernment. What kind of society would we have if no one ever paid for any wrong at all? Wisdom discerns when the depth of repentance and commitment to change is genuine to the point of receiving mercy.

Years ago one of my staffers was arrested for a terrible act. I sat in his home with him, his wife and two daughters for eight hours. He was the most broken, genuinely repentant man I’ve ever seen in my life. From that moment on he lived a pristine life until the day he died and was again used of the Lord.

Chapter 38

WELCOMING

Charlie Jones

Charlie Jones is a most exceptional man.

The call normally comes first, then the ministry. In Charlie's case it was just the opposite. Charlie's ministry to his church as a layman which would lead him to shepherd the flock was so blessed, I guess God said, "Hhhmmm, better call that boy to preach."

Here's the story.

When God called my son-in-law and his family from Metropolitan Church, Houston to plant a church way out of the Bible Belt in Pueblo, Colorado, two lay couples shared the vision and went with him.

Following Curt's call from Pueblo to First Merritt Island five years later, Charlie and Karen Jones would stay in Pueblo fifteen years and counting. As a layman, Charlie just kind of – well – evolved into being the pastor. And what a pastor he's been!

With more than 2,000 on Sunday morning, Fellowship of the Rockies, has become the largest Baptist church in Colorado and one of the largest outside the Bible Belt.

Charlie has no formal higher education in things religious but has everything it takes: preaching, teaching, ministry, vision, personality – the whole package.

Charlie Jones has a heaven-given PhD in people skills. People are drawn to him. People love him.

Charlie is a people person, the most embracing, welcoming pastor you will ever meet. *“And the common people heard him gladly”*: and even the “not so common.”

Among the very active membership of Fellowship of the Rockies, are many businessmen, political leaders and an exceptionally high percentage of doctors and other professionals. Think of that: people with great degrees drawn to a pastor with none at all and lots of just plain good ol’ boys.

Charlie Jones is embracing to say the least.

David was an exceptional king. A man after God’s own heart. One might easily overlook a quiet little key to his life buried in an obscure passage in II Samuel chapter 9.

One day King David was thinking of Jonathan, the great friend of his youth and thought, “I wonder if there are any living relatives of Jonathan that I might show some kindness to them.”

The report came back, “There is one; Jonathan’s little crippled son, Mephibosheth.” David brought him to his palace, honored him, and gave him a place at the table for life.

David loved his friends. Not just kings and queens as do the self-serving, he loved the great and small. If you were a friend of David’s, you were a friend for life. Just a small story, only a few verses that barely made The Book, but it made a huge impression on God who said, **“Now there is a man after my own heart.”**

Jesus’ exceptional servants follow closely in His footsteps. Following Him means never losing the common touch. Never was it said better, “Jesus, what a friend of sinners.”

You can’t be a friend of God and not be a friend of people: all people.

The religious establishment would silence Him. The common people heard Him gladly.

My friend Buddy Griffin is just about the greatest banjo player in the world. He also has a world-sized passion to see evangelistic fire return to our churches.

Just this week he told me that in the past eighteen months he has visited fifty-three churches, filled out a card with name, email address and phone

number and checked the box that he wanted to be contacted with more information. Fifty-three churches, fifty-three cards.

He only heard from nineteen. Welcoming? Don't think so. Just talking a good game? Think so.

The "Jesus Movement" began on the California coast, moved east to the Gulf Coast and the Florida coast. Guess the Lord wanted lots of water handy to baptize all those kids. ☺

Chuck Smith at Calvary Chapel Costa La Mesa was in the middle of it, big time.

The entire church had just been re-carpeted.

One night an usher said, "Pastor, all those kids are coming in off the beaches with dirty feet and they're ruining our carpets. We've got to do something."

Pastor Smith said, "Okay, we'll rip up the carpets." ☺

Welcome to Calvary Chapel. Welcome to the heart of Jesus.

Chapter 39

HOSPITABLE

John Wood

I have a long-standing relationship with Baylor University. Of course I love the fact that the great RG III, quarterback of the Redskins played there and that only last night the Bears won the first game ever played in their new stadium. ☺

But even more, I love that two of the three men who started Baylor University were the first two pastors of Houston's First Baptist Church.

I have served on the Presidential Advisory Council, and preached in Baylor chapel. And both our sons are Baylor graduates.

Legendary football coach Grant Taft spoke in our church numerous times and we saw him lead the Bears in the battle for the Cotton Bowl championship against Penn State; in twenty-six degree weather as I recall. Think they lost. ☹

In the mid 1970's President Herb Reynolds invited me to preach the annual campus-wide revival under a great tent at the center of the campus. We saw many Baylor Bears become spiritual cubs, born into the Kingdom.

Pastor John Wood of Waco First attended several nights and invited me to conduct a revival for his church. It was awesome. Not only the spiritual food we enjoyed in the services, but the physical food afterward in the Woods' home.

For eight nights, John and Pat invited us to their home for "supper." That's what we call "dinner" in Texas. Every meal was an event. Not just ham and cheese sandwiches, but a seven course meal with tablecloth, flowers, silverware and china. No one ever had a greater variety of quality cuisine for a whole week. Uldine, who also has the gift of hospitality big time, was blessed and impressed to say the least. Actually, she was blown away.

But here's the John and Pat headline of the month: "All made from scratch, not the deep freeze and the microwave. It was from the refrigerator, the pantry, and the oven, and all in about twenty minutes."

No way?

Way!

And believe this; dripping with love, warmth and welcoming hospitality not only from their home and dinner table, but from John and Pat themselves. I have never been in a home as welcoming as our own except the Woods'.

Hospitality is a beautiful gift of the Holy Spirit. And it's not just about baking the cake, it's making the one for whom you bake it feel you made it "just for them."

Lydia had the gift of hospitality. She also believed in people.

You have to believe in people to trust them. You have to trust people to invite them into your home. Lydia not only invited Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke into her home, she *strongly urged* them to be her guests.

"If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us..." Acts 16:15 (NIV)

Tradition suggests that she may have opened the door of the Gospel to Europe. Could be, she was pretty good at opening doors.

Lydia was a "more than" woman: a real second-miler. Inviting people into your home, sharing the gift of hospitality may be the ultimate gesture of love and respect one can pay another. If it's real, it will drip from the ceiling, smile from the walls, and sing from the carpet.

Uldine has a double portion. People stop in the entryway of our home, look around and say, "It feels so warm here." Her gifts of interior design and hospitality unite in a décor that breathes the love of Jesus. I wish you could all visit our home, (two at a time please.) 😊

The women who ministered to Jesus had it, too; in His life, by the Cross, at the tomb.

And it's not just a woman's gift.

Paul writes, "*If **anyone** wants to provide leadership in the church, good! But there are preconditions: A leader must be well-thought-of, committed to his wife, cool and collected, accessible, and hospitable*" 1 Timothy 3:1 (MSG).

Being hospitable doesn't mean being the best party planner on the block. It does mean being so accepting in your heart that it shows. Hospitality doesn't require an elegant meal like the Woods. It's an attitude, an inner urge that compels selfless service to others, silently declaring, "Welcome to my world, I'm really glad you're here."

Jethro welcomed Moses into his tent with all his family.

Matthew welcomed his tax collector friends into his home for dinner with Jesus.

I can honestly say the highlight of our week is when we welcome friends into our home. In so doing, we may indeed "entertain angels unaware."

Whether it's a hurting pastor, a misguided teenager, a husband who's lost his way, a young pastor seeking direction, or friends to watch football, it always seems to be better received in the den, by the fireside, with popcorn.

Earlier I wrote about the importance of just *being you*. Never is that easier than in your own home. But the gift of hospitality, no matter where it happens, is a great big “come on in.”

Welcome to my office.

Welcome to our luncheon appointment.

Welcome to my home.

Welcome to my heart.

Welcome to the Kingdom.

Don't be in a hurry.

Be yourself.

Focus on the other person.

Laugh and relax.

Hospitality says, “Take off your coat and stay awhile.”

Somehow I know one day in heaven, the last thing on my mind will be to look at my watch and say, “I just remembered I have another appointment!”

It's a great life – enjoy!

Invite someone over for beans and cornbread.

How 'bout me?

Chapter 40

HONORING

John Meador

John Meador and his dear wife Kim have humbly served First Church, Euless, Texas since 2005. The church has a history of great pastors, Bill Anderson and Jimmy Draper to mention a few.

John Meador is a hunk. Tall, strong, good-looking and preaches the stars down with a heart as big as the sky.

As a small child things were quite different for John. He remembers feeling a bit inferior to other children. He couldn't speak clearly and felt uncertain about his future. Due to a severe fever and illness at age six, John was stricken with an irreversible hearing loss and remains totally deaf to this day. John preaches to thousands every week, even though he has a slight speech impediment because he can't hear his own voice.

Recently he said, "If given the opportunity to regain my hearing today, I would not do so. I have watched God turn disappointments into hope and purpose and know He makes no mistakes. By His grace I can indeed 'do all things through Christ who strengthens me.'"

When I needed to stay in the Dallas Metroplex for three months of special medical treatment, John offered us their beautifully furnished four-

bedroom mission house. It was wonderful. And free. We had John and Kim over for supper a whole bunch! 😊

But I was particularly blessed with something special that was happening in his church the first week we were there. Pastor John was having his annual Senior Adult Conference with the same guest preachers invited year. And guess who they were? Two former pastors. That's right, every year. And they both preached a Sunday morning service as well. Every year.

John Meador knows what it means to honor the mantle as does my successor Gregg Matte. Ten years later, I still can't get Pastor Gregg to stop recognizing me when we are at Houston's First. Couldn't count the times he's said, "I'm standing on Bro. John's shoulders."

Hats off to Pastor Meador and Pastor Matte. It takes lots of grace and humility to do that. And both are as sincere as the dickens.

Still worn in many traditions, the mantle is the earliest symbol of divine authority and spiritual leadership, and represents respect and honor.

It is highly unlikely that your service for Him is a first. Someone probably paved the way and laid the foundation on which you build. If Jesus tarries, someone else will just as likely carry it on.

Mantles have two sides. The front speaks of those who have gone before. The back, of those who follow after.

- Elisha wanted the anointing Elijah had. Two-fold.
- Solomon wanted to build the temple his father David planned.
- Joshua encouraged the people to follow Moses' example and obey his commandments.
- From Elijah to Elisha—a power to be experienced.
- From David to Solomon—a building to be completed.
- From Moses to Joshua—a land to be possessed.

Though King Saul once sought to slay David, upon Saul's death, David called him "the beauty of Israel" and praised him for his relationship with his

Like Paul before the high priest, the position transcends the person.

It takes a big person to honor those who have gone before, and to acknowledge that he is building on their foundation.

Upon completion of my year-long interim at Colonial Heights Church in Ridgeland, Mississippi, the new pastor insisted on overlapping my last Sunday with his first Sunday. In one of the most gracious gestures of respect I've ever seen, he sat in the congregation and listened to me preach rather than taking his pulpit. Pastor Jimmy Meek honored the mantle. Pastor Meek lived up to his name.

The mantle faces both directions. Sadly too many leaders criticize their predecessor, and too many criticize their successor. Not good!

Be a big person.

HONOR THE MANTLE.

SECTION SIX

Chapter 41

VISIONARY

Jerry Falwell

The most important ingredient in any ministry is not what it is but what it can become.

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Where there is, “look out!”

The unquestioned visionaries of my life were Campus Crusade founder Bill Bright and Pastor Jerry Falwell.

Dr. Falwell was the leading national voice for political, social and moral reform in the 1970's and 80's.

In 1956, Dr. Falwell planted Thomas Road Church in Lynchburg, Virginia with thirty-five members. Today the church has in excess of twenty thousand members and has sent out hundreds of missionaries, baptized untold thousands and given exponentially to the work of the Lord.

From that thirty-five member church plant would come Liberty University, the world's largest Christian university, and Liberty Baptist Theological, the world's largest seminary.

Both schools remain as Biblically conservative and passionately evangelistic as the day they were born.

Today Jerry's sons, Jerry, Jr. and Jonathan, continue to lead their ministries to even greater heights and are planting churches across North America and beyond.

Looking for a great personal testimony? It doesn't get any better than

“Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19).

Paul’s vision was likely a bit more spectacular than yours and mine. His experience doesn’t have to translate into our seeing blinding lights and hearing loud voices.

Our vision is God’s dream in our heart—His goal in our soul. Where He wants you to go. What He wants you to become. All that was in what Paul saw in a blinding light. Ours is what we see in our heart.

Do you really know where you are going? Do you struggle with what you are, or celebrate what you can become?

Houston’s First had many great years and then some that were not so great. By 1969, they were considering a vote to disband. Things were tough.

Many men had been interviewed for consideration as new pastor. With 2,000 Sunday morning empty seats in a 2,300-seat worship center, other potential pastors asked, “Can the balcony be closed?” I asked, “Can it be enlarged?”

Houston—the space capital, the oil capital, the medical capital, the jobs capital. By my own logic I saw what it was. By God’s vision I saw what it could become.

Archimedes said, “Give me a place to stand and I can move the world.”

John F. Kennedy said, "Some men see things as they are and ask, 'Why?' I

When I once considered leaving Houston's First to go to Nigeria, missionary Josephine Skaggs advised me, "Bro. John you can do more by building a missionary church than by going as a missionary yourself."

Four and one-half decades, one hundred ten church plants and fourteen

Two shoe salesmen went to Africa and ordered 3,000 pairs of shoes. After a week one sent home a text message, "Cancel my order, these people don't wear shoes." The other, "Triple my order. Everybody in Africa needs shoes."

Is your cup half-empty or half-full? Same cup. Your call.

In 1972, I landed at the airport in Lagos, Nigeria, to preach a citywide crusade. A little nine-year-old boy carried my bags to the car. I tipped him generously and invited him to come hear me preach that week in a great soccer stadium near the airport. He came.

Who could have imagined that Israel Akanji would one day be president of the Nigerian Baptist Pastor's Conference!

The world's most productive oil well in West Texas twice went dry and closed down. Both times someone said, "Let's open 'er up and keep drillin'."

Ten spies saw what the Promised Land was. Joshua and Caleb saw what it could be.

God gave the wise men a vision to follow the star, and they did.

God gave William Carey a vision to open India to the gospel. And he did.

God gave Thomas Edison a vision to invent a new light source. 1,120 attempts later, he did.

God gave Abraham Lincoln a vision to free the slaves. And he did.

God gave Dawson Trotman a vision to disciple the worldwide body of Christ. And he did.

God gave Martin Luther King a vision to integrate the South. And he did.

God gave Bill Bright a vision to put trained witnesses on every college campus in America. And he did.

God gave Paul Crouch a vision to televise the Gospel to the whole world. And he did.

God gave James Dobson a vision to create a worldwide radio ministry on the family. And he did.

God gave Anthony Jordan a vision to build a \$37 million tabernacle for Falls Creek, the world's largest youth assembly in Oklahoma. And he did.

Make no little plans, but never forget that God's plan, even though

Seek His heart and receive His vision. It's probably much greater than

A blind man once asked St. Anthony, "Can there be anything worse than losing eyesight?" "Yes," he replied, "Losing your vision."

Chapter 42

SECOND MILER

David Fleming

Under Roman law, citizens of occupied countries were required to carry the backpack of Roman soldiers passing through their land for one mile. Jesus said, "Carry it two."

You know the name Kerry Shook. Probably the youngest man ever to build a really super mega-church: Fellowship of The Woodlands in North Houston. His brother Mark is building one in Northwest Houston. Their dad, Damon, did the same in Champion Forest.

One family – three men.

One city – three mega-churches.

Amazing!

When Damon retired from Champion Forest, he left the church in great shape. Wonderful buildings, great unity, excellent staff, debt-free, and ready to roll.

I wasn't officially the interim pastor, but did most of the preaching during the interim that followed. I could tell they really liked me. So what's not to like? ☺

Enter new pastor, world's greatest second-miler, David Fleming.

About six months after he came, David called and said, "Bro. John I want you to lead us in a \$39 million capital campaign. If I tell the people we're doing another campaign, they'll holler, 'Stone him! Stone him!' But if I tell them you're going to lead it, they'll stand up and cheer; they really love you here."

The people had been dreaming of building a new \$13 million education building. Second-miler David Fleming said, "Don't think so. Let's build three. A children's building, youth building and adult building. Price tag: \$39 million."

I gulped real hard. I'd led about a hundred capital campaigns, all with goals met, pledges received, people happy. Most were in the \$1 to \$4 million range. Only a handful were \$8 million to \$12 million. But \$39 million?

Building three education buildings was walking the second mile. Asking me to raise the money was jumping over the moon.

Throughout the campaign, I saw the heart of a true second-miler.

- I'd say, "David, let's do a brochure." He'd say, "Let's do a brochure and a video."

- I'd say, "Let's have a children's party during the pledge banquet." He'd say, "Let's bring in two professional clowns and a truckload of inflatables."
- I'd say, "Let's have some special music for the pledge banquets." He'd say, "Let's bring in a famous gospel artist."
- I'd say, "Let's have coffee and doughnuts for the Sunday School rally." He'd say, "Let's have ham and eggs. And grits." 😊
- I'd say, "Let's have an all-church prayer gathering at the altar on Pledge Sunday morning." He'd say, "Let's pray all night!"

Needless to say, we met the goal. Pledges paid. Buildings built.

Contractors paid. Church saying, "Thanks Pastor, what's next?"

Because of my relationship with the church during the interim, I couldn't find it in my heart to charge them a fee. They gave me a very nice honorarium. You guessed it: a second-mile honorarium.

Akron, Ohio letter carrier Keith McVey is hero to a lot of people. Over the years, he's helped save the lives of three people while on his mail route, earning the reputation as a super hero in his small neighborhood near a lake. In 1990, a teenager tried to take his life by jumping off a bridge on a snowy winter day. Unable to stop him from jumping, he rescued the boy and helped

keep him alive until an ambulance arrived. In 2008, he pulled a drowning girl from the lake. In 2010, he threw aside his bundle of mail to perform CPR on an unconscious man on the side of the road.

B.C.: We asked “Why?”

A.D.: “Why not?”

B.C.: We asked, “How much do I *have* to give?”

A.D.: “How much *can* I give?”

B.C.: A whole mile?

A.D.: Only a mile?

Be a second-miler. Jesus said it – and did it.

Everything He ever said, taught or did exceeded the law.

Not one mile – two.

Not one cheek – two.

Not one coat – two.

Not one forgiveness – 245.

I think 70 times 7 equals 490 and translates to about 245 second miles of forgiveness.

The heart of the Sermon on the Mount is Matthew 5:47, “...what do ye more than others?” Be a “more-than” pastor.

Jesus’ Cross was many second miles beyond His throne. Do it because you’re His. But get out that umbrella—there will be showers of blessings.

Here’s one of our many downpours:

Uldine and I were blessed by two second milers in one week.

The transmission went out in her car and mine—both on the same day, both out of warranty. The service managers at both dealerships went the second mile—and replaced them anyway.

Pastor Walter August asked if I would like a copy of his new book. I excitedly said, “Yes!” He sent me five.

Scotty Sanders runs our benevolence ministry and encounters numbers of homeless girls. And takes them home to live with her.

We have a precious Hispanic housekeeper who is just learning to read and write English. When we came home a few days ago, we found a picture that had fallen to the floor of the guest bath with a note attached:

“Sorry Mrs Bissagun I was vecum te restroom and I toch piksur with me harm and faio down. Sorry. Is an aksidunt.”

She didn’t have to write that sweet note. Catalina went the second mile.

Not sure if she knows Jesus yet, but when she does I'm sure she'll go the third.

In 1984, our church bought land and a building and began to convert it into Louetta Road Baptist Church. The remodeling was eagerly begun by a team of twelve volunteers. Predictably, the project cost more and took longer than anticipated.

Night after night, weekend after weekend, the team labored, wearied, and dropped out until only one faithful worker remained. Night after night, week after week, David Hill went the second mile and finished the job -- alone! Something like another carpenter as I recall.

First-milers make the trip because it's right. Second-milers make it because it's love.

First-milers follow the rules. Second-milers follow the Savior.

And those 490-milers?

Chapter 43

OVERCOMER

John Lapos

On April 15, 2013, Bill Iffrig, retired mill worker from Lake Stevens, Washington, was competing in his third Boston Marathon. A few yards from the finish line, a terrorist's bomb exploded, knocking him off his feet. No one expected what happened next: Iffrig stood up, wiped off the blood and limped across the line. Despite losing all hearing in his left ear and injuring his right quadricep, Bill Iffrig put one foot in front of the other, and did what he had come to Boston to do; finish.

Problems? Bombers? Handicaps? Failures? Get up and finish the race.

In 1984, Houston's First began pouring its heart, its membership and its money into declining inner-city churches. Out of just one came fourteen young men and women who were saved, called, and entered full-time ministry and are still in it. Among them was John Lapos.

John has a severe handicap. Born with cerebral palsy, one of his legs is so much shorter than the other that he almost walks sideways, and has all of his life.

As a baby, John was so small and deformed that his mother wanted to abandon him and seldom held him. Her doctor said, "You must. He cannot live without love." One day she would come to know Christ and everything changed.

John graduated from Southwestern Seminary and though he expected to be turned down, presented himself a candidate before the International Mission Board which had never appointed a physically challenged missionary.

When he was interviewed in 1996, they couldn't turn him down, changed their policy and commissioned him as their first underground missionary into China where he served four years.

For the past fifteen years, John Lapos has served in Thailand planting churches and evangelizing university campuses.

I have known John for seventeen years. Not one time, not for one minute have I seen him without a grin as big as heaven, handicap and all.

If the fruit of the Spirit is joy, John Lapos is a whole orchard of joy trees. I've never known a man as happy, smiling, joyous, and bubbling over with love for Jesus as John Lapos.

When he believes Philippians 4:13, nothing can keep a good man down.
"For I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Let's cut to the chase. Satan doesn't want you to finish strong. He's out to decapitate your ministry. "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*" (I Peter 5:8).

When he knocks you down, get back up: you gotta be an overcomer.

- David overcame his sin with Bathsheba by so deeply repenting that God would one day hold him up as an example of righteousness to his son, Solomon.
- Samson slew more of God's enemies the last hour of his life than all the rest of it combined. So Long Delilah, Hello Jesus!
- Peter denied the Lord but would become the mighty preacher at Pentecost.
- Evangelist David Ring has a speech impediment as did Evangelist Phil Schuler, and does Mega-church pastor John Meador and our new IMB President, David Platt.
- Pastor George Harris broke every bone in his face in a motorcycle accident. With eleven pins in his face and no visible signs of the injury, he continues to preach at age seventy-eight.
- Mega-church pastor Steve Gaines lives with pain in every joint in his body. Twenty-four hours a day.

- Arthur Craig lost his son in Afghanistan and his wife to cancer. He continues to pastor the largest deaf congregation in the Southern Baptist Convention and by the way, recently married a real sweetheart of a gal.
- Time for true confession. It took me forty years to overcome an inferiority complex about not having attended seminary. Don't know if you'd call 'em nightmares, but I could write a book about a recurring bad dream I've had through the years about being unprepared. Can't find the church, can't find my Bible, can't find my notes, and can't find my britches. ☹️ Kinda helped when they started teaching my books in seminary. 😊
- Jesus overcame sin, death, hell and the grave.

He did it *for* you. You can do it for Him. And you must.

Chapter 44

COURAGEOUS

Steve Riggle

Last year I preached at Houston's Grace Community Church. About five thousand worshippers were on fire for Christ. Really on fire. Pastor Steve Riggle is a man with the courage of his convictions.

He'll walk into any lions den to stand for what's right. And that would include the office of Houston's gay mayor, Anise Parker.

He led the battle against the mayor-led effort for a city ordinance allowing gay, bisexual, and transgender persons to use either men's or women's public restrooms as they choose. When the battle was lost, a team led by Pastor Riggle immediately filed for a referendum – a ballot vote the following November.

Pastor Riggle is also President of King's University with campuses in Van Nuys, Dallas and Houston. He has served as president of the International Body of Churches and serves on the Houston Pastor Council and the U.S. Pastor's Council. All are bold, social, conservative organizations committed to the moral and social righteousness inherent in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pastor Riggle is a visionary and a revolutionary. I think Martin Luther King, Jr. was precisely that as well. Spat upon, stoned, insulted and castigated, yet gracious, kind, and immovable.

Martin Luther King, Jr. changed the face of America with integration. Pastor Steve is doing the same with the integration of Christian values in its heart. And does America need to change? You tell me.

Where are our courageous leaders today? Everyone is saying, "Why doesn't somebody do something?" God is saying, "Why don't you do something?"

"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." II Chronicles 7:14

True spiritual awakening must include loving but bold addressing of America's centerpiece, politically correct sin of homosexuality, as well as all sin. Who's doing that?

The decline and fall of every nation in history has paralleled the lack of courageous preaching by both prophet and pastor.

It's tough to go against the grain.

- Daniel in the lion's den.
- Paul in the mamertine prison.

- Martyrs in Iraq, Iran and Jordan.
- Jesus on the cross.

Stand. And when you do, choose the hill you die on. It really doesn't matter what color you paint the nurseries or where you hold youth camp this summer.

Pastor Jim Birchfield, First Pres Houston, led the effort to move his church to a more theologically orthodox denomination.

Larry Hall, Rector of St. John the Divine Episcopal in Houston, led the movement in his denomination against the ordination of gay priests. It takes courage.

- To be bold is not to be offensive and obnoxious. It's to be courageous and confident: unafraid to act, unafraid to speak the truth in love.
- To be bold is to trust God's faithfulness when no one else believes.
- To be bold is to stand alone.
- To be bold is to be anchored securely in knowing "I stand on His promises—in His Word—and in His will."
- To be bold is to be unmovable and unwavering with a heart full of grace.

- And when you stand for God, expect Him to show up.
- Daniel confronted Belshazar. And the hand of God wrote on the wall.
- Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal. “Let the God that answers by fire, let Him be God.” And they had to call 911.
- Paul confronted the brethren at Galatia for their false doctrine and Simon Peter when he pulled the old religious switcheroo out of fear of the Jews and they turned the world upside down.

To be bold is to speak what is right, not what is politically correct.

Our cities no longer have a Christmas parade, now it's a Holiday parade. There's no more “Merry Christmas,” only “Happy Holidays.” Perish the thought that the United States of America would have the audacity to celebrate the birth of the One who birthed and sustains her to this very hour!

Will you boldly speak the next time you lead in prayer at a secular gathering? Or will you do what is politically correct, and not pray in the name of Jesus?

If you've been to Calvary, I think you know the answer.

It may cost you everything. Yes, they crucified Jesus, but remember who THEY were and be bold.

Only yesterday I stood with Houston pastors at a press conference as United States Senator Ted Cruz spoke out against Mayor Parker's attempt to subpoena the sermons of five pastors who had preached against homosexuality.

Without Steve Riggle, there would have been no such event.

Steve Riggle is courageous.

Are you?

Chapter 45

RELAXED

Charles Allen

In 1970, I came to Houston's First. Located downtown, only four blocks away was First Methodist.

I became personal friends with Pastor Charlie Allen and his successors Bill Pinson and Steve Wende. I spoke at Bill's memorial service and Steve serves on our board at Houston Christian High. All three are solid, Gospel brothers. Of course, they don't quite get 'em wet enough when they baptize 'em. ☺

Early on, Charles invited me to his study for lunch. He was a laid back preacher with a Southern drawl and big easy-goin' grin.

I had been preaching through Revelation for about a year and as always, he had listened to every radio broadcast of my sermons. One day in his office he said, "John, I think you're the greatest preacher in the world, but I don't believe a dadgum thing you've said for a year."

I'm a pre-millennialist and I think Charlie was – well – something else.

I said, "That's okay, Charlie. It's your right to be wrong." And we both had a good laugh.

When I consulted with him about relocating and building a new building, he showed me around the church and gave me a big list of “not to’s” when we built.

First Methodist was one of the first churches in America to plant a satellite campus. Both are thriving today under the leadership of Pastor Steve Wende.

In 1974, First Methodist had a fire that greatly damaged their auditorium and had to move into a downtown hotel ballroom during a year of remodeling.

As the two oldest churches in the city we were very much sister churches, certainly brother pastors.

The fire happened on a Saturday morning. The next day, we took up a large offering to help First Methodist. When I called Charles to make an appointment to take him the check he said, “No John, bring it over next Sunday and present it in the morning service so we can give First Baptist a big Methodist hug.”

Charles Allen. Southern born and bred and well – “laid back” to say the least.

I asked him one day how he managed to counsel ten or fifteen people almost every day. He said, "I give everybody ten minutes and ask them two questions, 'What's your problem?' and 'Whatch'a gonna do about it?'"

My favorite picture of Charles Haddon Spurgeon is of him in a double-breasted suit, tie and vest, laid back in an easy chair, feet propped up on a footstool and as I recall, a cigar or pipe in his hand. (Haven't seen the picture in a while.)

Don't know if that's what Jesus had in mind when He said, "*Come ye apart and rest awhile,*" but I do know this, you'd better come apart and rest awhile or you will come apart.

I once knew an evangelist who traveled and preached 51 weeks every year, every night, back to back. The great majority of those days, he preached two, three, and four times a day and two or three of the seven nights while he was at home the week between Christmas and New Year's.

January 1 "on the road again." Predictably, he came apart.

A dear pastor friend committed suicide. Years before, he had a serious emotional breakdown. "John," he said, "I never got over the pressure of Sunday." He never relaxed on Monday. Never took a day off. 365 days a year.

My fifth year at Houston's First, the church gave me the entire summer off. I can't begin to describe the new life in my soul and in the church the first of September. It was a gift for me -- and a gift for them.

Take those vacations and sabbaticals. And don't call the office when you do.

Come aside and rest awhile.

Do what you like.

Go where you want.

Include some physical activity.

Do something unrelated to what you normally do and in a complete change of scenery,

Include your family in at least *part* of it.

Include the Lord in *all* of it.

And be sure to have some quiet time, some down time, some "just you and the Lord" time.

Praying and going to *play* is as important as praying and going to *work*.

Our friend, Dottie Brewer, spent a harried day rushing from one playground to another with her seven-year-old grandson.

At their bedtime prayers, he said, “Granny, I’m so tired. You do the praying, and I’ll just do the ‘Yes, Lord’ stuff.” Kids say the darndest things, don’t they?

When you look back at the end of your life, few things will seem as important as those times of letting go, building up, then getting ready to “bring it” again.

If Jesus needed to head for the desert, so do you.

Slow down.

Chapter 46

BELIEVING

Tom Elliff

After leaving First Southern Del City for Houston's First, I was followed by three very special pastors, each of whom would one day be President of the Southern Baptist Convention. Two, presidents of mighty agencies as well.

Jimmy Draper, Bailey Smith and Tom Elliff are exceptional leaders and highly evangelistic. Think of' First Southern rubbed off on 'em. ☺

Tom's dad, J.T. would become Director of Missions for the Oklahoma City Association, his brother, Bill, pastor of Summit Church in Little Rock, and his brother, Jim, would pastor and then found Christian Communications Worldwide. Tom's sister, Sandy, would become the wife of Bailey Smith who, after pastoring First Southern continued ministry as a vocational evangelist. From Tom's granddad came twenty-two ministers, missionaries and evangelists...and counting!

Serving as a summer youth pastor, Tom took his youth group to the Arkansas State Baptist Camp where E. F. Hallock was camp pastor. "Preacher" Hallock was a man of faith, widely known as "the man who lived by the promises of God." Tom was captivated by the stories of faith of this great man.

After answering God's call to ministry that summer, Tom chose "Preacher" Hallock as his mentor for many years.

Throughout college God continued to develop Pastor Elliff's understanding that God's children live by faith.

At the end of one fall semester, he lacked the money to take his finals and finish. There was no visible provision. One night, he walked down the steps of his attic apartment, over to the Ouachita River a few blocks away and knelt by a tree in prayer. He prayed for a long time and God ignited the promises of Philippians 4:19 in his heart, *"And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."*

Exhausted and bowed in prayer, he fell asleep only to awaken with snow falling around him. Returning to the apartment in the early morning hours, he started up the steps, and was surprised to see an envelope, addressed to him, lying on the third step. Inside was a check written a month earlier from a church where he had ministered, with the exact amount of money he needed. Tom knew "Who" had orchestrated its timely arrival.

Tom arrived at First Southern just as the oil "boom" was turning to a "bust" that would bankrupt thousands and drive dozens of banks out of business. The church was in the closing phases of a massive building program

with an indebtedness of over \$20 million dollars. The interest alone was almost \$8,000 a day!

Financial counselors urged him to lead the church to file for bankruptcy. God said, “Don’t do it! Stay. Keep paying...in faith.”

In faith he began to preach, pray and chip away. During those days the IMB first approached Tom about being president. Again God said, “No, stay – in faith.” He obeyed.

Over the next twenty years, the church would baptize almost 7,000 new believers, take 139 teams to the mission field, and see many of its members enter full-time ministry. They built a debt-free family life center, in addition to paying off all bond holders, while reducing the debt to \$2 million dollars.

In 2005, he left First Southern to become the IMB’s Senior VP.

In 2010, the presidential search committee would again ask him to become president. This time God said, “Yes.”

In the Spring of 2011, Tom Elliff became the eleventh president of the greatest missionary body in the history of the Christian faith.

Over the next three and a half years, he led the board to make many world-impacting decisions. Here are two of my favorites:

- Streamline the board to prioritize church planting, evangelism and discipleship as the essential, non-negotiable elements in engaging unreached people groups.
- Allow otherwise qualified missionaries lacking seminary degrees to go directly to the field and complete their seminary education online.

Leading the greatest evangelical body in history to fulfill the Great Commission requires a man of leadership, vision and faith.

God also spoke clearly to Tom's heart about a plan to reach the world's remaining unreached people groups. There was no money and no way, but the board put the plan in effect in faith. During the next three and half years, they would join with other Great Commission ministries and witness the greatest drop in numbers of unreached, unengaged people groups in history.

By faith the children of Israel came out of bondage in Egypt and through the wilderness to the border of the Promised Land. It was time to go forward.

God is never pleased when His children are content to simply stand still.

Joshua and Caleb had faith that they could conquer the land. The other ten spies said, "No way! Too many giants, great armies, fortified cities."

God said, "Way."

The difference in going forward and not going forward is enormous. Those who believed possessed the land. Those who didn't kicked the bucket.

Never forget; there's always a reason not to go forward. From the days of the Roman Empire, there *have been* and will *always be* obstacles, opposition, problems, and excuses. Real-life giants abound. But the decision to go forward is always made in faith. *"These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age"* 1 Corinthians 10:11 (NLT)

Everything God has done in the past is intended to encourage us that He can and will do it again. *"And the LORD said to Moses, 'How long will these people treat me with contempt? Will they never believe me, even after all the miraculous signs I have done among them?'"* Numbers 14:11 (NLT).

God didn't ask, "Why don't they understand Me? Why don't they figure Me out? Why can't they calculate what I'm doing?" He said, "Why don't they **believe** Me?"

The church of Jesus Christ has always made her greatest advance in times of greatest difficulty, in faith.

Under the penalty of death, first-century believers declared allegiance, not to Nero, but to Jesus. And the church grew exponentially.

Although China bans foreign missionaries and often harasses and imprisons

In 2006, State Administration for Religious Affairs Director ye Xiaowen reported to audiences at Beijing University and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences that the number of Christians in China had risen to 130 million: against all odds.

At the Red Sea the Israelites were in a heap of trouble. Moses said, "Stand still boys and see what God's gonna do!"

Our calling is never to sight, but to faith.

Red Seas don't part...

Bushes don't burn yet not be consumed ...

Lame men don't walk ...

Saviors don't rise from the dead ...

Or do they?

In both my churches, we never saw how we could reasonably do anything we ever did. Every great advance was accomplished by faith.

In 1972, Houston's First voted to relocate and build new buildings. The contractor told us the price would be \$3.2 million. The lowest bid was \$8.1 million. We had to make a choice: remain small and accomplish little or step out in faith and accomplish much. We chose the latter. By faith!

Every great decision is made with an element of risk. And that's where faith comes in. The confirmation comes after the commitment, not before. ***The lights don't come on until you flip the switch.*** Hello!

Since Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees, God has never failed a person who stepped out on His promises in faith. *And you won't be the first.*

"Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" Romans 10:17.

Read it. Stand on it. And don't make other provision—just in case it doesn't happen.

Remember, it's never the size of the mountain, but the size of the God that moves it.

Chapter 47

BE

Bill Shivler

I've always been taken with the words of Jesus, "You are the light of the world." Just shine. "You are the salt of the earth." Just be. He didn't say, "*Do* something," He said, "*Be* something": what you *are*.

When light is just being light, it brightens and illuminates. When salt is just being salt, it preserves and savors. Light doesn't have to work at shining; it just shines. Salt doesn't have to try to be salty; it just is.

I'm not really sure which eternity will reveal had the greater impact, the "*do*" pastor or the "*be*" pastor. But while I thrill at all Jesus said and did, I am impacted 24/7 by who He was.

I recently asked three different groups of friends, "What was the most important factor in the man you chose to be your pastor?"

Almost none said anything about what he could do. All said much about "who he was."

I Peter 5:1-4 is the premiere New Testament job description of a shepherd. It says only two things he is to do: "feed the flock and lead the flock." But six things he is to be.

Quit *trying* and start *being*.

Jesus “on”: Pressure “off.”

Just show people the face of Jesus and if necessary, use words.

Our friend Fay Black suspended her steady stream of Bible studies and lunches with girlfriends because of a deepening desire to “*be a doer of the Word and not a hearer only.*” She went to work at a Christian mission that offered food, clothing, prayer and salvation to everyone who walked through the door.

Although Fay had never met a stranger, she was nervous as folks formed a line outside, waiting for the doors to open on her very first day. She had entered a world of grace with rules to be followed and order to be kept. She quietly withdrew to a back room to seek the Lord’s direction.

“Just be, “ He told her. His clear impression replaced her nervousness with His peace.

She literally wanted to hang on to the words, “Just be.” So she wrote them on a small piece of paper and tucked it in her apron pocket. As she wrote the words, Jesus spoke to her with a deep assurance, “I created you for my pleasure. Just let Me be your hands, your feet and your eyes. I will show you what to do as you let Me live through you.”

Two names came to mind when I thought about pastors with a sweet, gentle and loving Christ-like spirit: people who just make you feel like you're walking in the presence of the Master. Duane Brooks and Bill Shivler came to mind. You know the name Duane Brooks, special mega-church pastor of Tallowood Houston.

You've probably never heard the name Bill Shivler, but you will. He'll be the guy standing right next to Billy Graham when they pass out the crowns. If there was ever a pastor who brought people to Christ more by his life than his lectures, it was Bill Shivler.

Bill pastored many churches, none over one hundred fifty members. Among them, Second Lagrange, TX; Baptist Lighthouse, Meridian, MS; and First Glen Rose, TX to name a few. Every life he touched felt it was the touch of the Master's hand.

Well into his eighties, he once drove all night from Clifton, Texas to Houston to pray with a sick family member of one of his members, then drove back.

When he visited a home, he always left a business card that read:

“If you missed me, you missed nothing.

If you missed my church, you missed something.

If you miss Jesus, you miss everything.”

Before his death, he asked that a second-hand tombstone be placed on his grave and new words chiseled, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved.”

At his funeral, busloads of former church members and members of the general public overflowed the Glen Rose Civic Center with a thousand persons inside and thousands more outside. That’s right – thousands.

“Don’t look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don’t fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention.”

“Be wary of false preachers who smile a lot, dripping with practiced sincerity. Chances are they are out to rip you off some way or other. Don’t be impressed with charisma; look for character. Who preachers are is the main thing, not what they say. A genuine leader will never exploit your emotions or your pocketbook. These diseased trees with their bad apples are going to be chopped down and burned.” Matthew 7:13-20 (MSG)

Chapter 48

COMMITTED

Jim Cymbala

God has used this man to build one of the legendary churches of North America in one of its toughest spots.

The area of Brooklyn to which God called Pastor Jim is as hard as it gets: poverty and unemployment, gang lords and fatherless homes, prostitutes and pimps, violence and warfare, drugs and pushers. That's Jim's parish. Talk about tough. Easy to throw in the towel – real fast.

We recently visited on a Sunday morning: the 2,500 seat auditorium was packed. We finally got in after standing in line an hour for one of four services.

Jim stayed at Brooklyn Tabernacle for one reason; Jim Cymbala is not only called, Jim is committed to the call. Immovably, unshakably – committed.

Each year worshippers from across the Roman Empire filled Jerusalem to overflowing during Passover week. This year the crowd was even larger as

everyone was eager to see the young upstart prophet from Nazareth who claimed to be the Messiah and was reportedly healing the blind and raising the dead.

When He did so before their very eyes, the response was overwhelming. *“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, **many believed in his name**, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man”* (John 2:23–25).

John doesn't attempt to number the crowd, he simply uses the generic term “many.” You may be certain the number who believed was very large. And what would Jesus do? Send the disciples among them with decision cards and Gospels of John? Don't think so. He didn't even acknowledge their response, but turned and walked away.

The reason is buried in verse 24, *“**He knew all men.**”* He looked in their hearts and knew they only responded because of the miracles. They were more excited about *what He had done* than *who He was*. He knew when the miracles were gone, they'd be gone and didn't commit Himself to *them* because they didn't really *commit themselves to Him*.

The nature of Christian commitment is 100 percent, and it's irrevocable. Commitment is by definition not temporary. Commitment means once and for

all. When a man's committed to prison for life, he's committed to prison for life.

Suppose I were to ask you, "Is your wife faithful?" Would you respond, "Well yes, she's *pretty* faithful"?

Tell me now, do you really want to be married to someone who's just

You're either faithful or you're not: you're either committed or you're not.

Faithful commitment doesn't *make* you His disciple. It validates the fact that you *are* His disciple.

Don't even think about quitting. God's call is irrevocable. "*For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance*" (Romans 11:29)

You can't wake up in a new world every day and re-decide your commitment to follow Him. "Wherever He leads I'll go;" doesn't have an escape clause. You settled that in the call. You settled that at the cross.

After our church called my successor, I learned the majority of letters of recommendation to our Pastor Search Committee came from men recommending themselves. Unbelievable. The chairman of another search committee told me that 90 percent of their letters were self-recommendations. Didn't ask, but I'm pretty sure they were not pastors recommending themselves to smaller churches.

Campus Crusade has a great phrase, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." And He does. And remember He's never early and He's never late, He's always on time. Romans 8:28 is still in the Bible and He's still got the "Whole wide world in His hands." Let Him promote you. At His pace.

Don't look for greener pastures. Cultivate the one you already have. That's what faithful people do. God has your phone number and knows your address with zip code.

In London during World War II, a little girl was praying one night before going to bed. She prayed for her mother and daddy, her friends, her puppy, and concluded, "And dear Lord, please take care of Yourself, because if anything happens to You, we're sunk."

Let God be God. He's really good at being God! And He still answers the prayers of little girls.

At the end of your life only two words matter: *Well done*. Nothing else; your status, your position, your income, your fame, accolades from your peers, nothing. Just two words, *well done*.

Not, "You set the record," "You reached the pinnacle," "You wrote the books," or "You were *the man*." Just two words: Well done! Whether you've been given five talents, two talents, or one talent makes no difference. The Billy Bob of whom you've never heard, will hear the same *well done* as the Billy Graham the whole world acclaims, if he was faithful to do what he could, with what he had, where he was, for His glory.

Winners don't cut and run. Winners don't give up. Winners don't quit.

Vince Lombardi was the unquestioned greatest football coach who ever walked the sidelines. Mr. Lombardi got it right. Who could forget his famous quote, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." When you were called to run the race, you were called to finish it – no matter how tough it gets. If God wanted a quitter, He would have called a quitter, but He didn't, He called you.

JUST DO IT!

Quit? Don't even think about it.

Your church needs you. Your country needs you. Your Lord needs you.

Yes I know it's tough out there. Stock markets rise and fall; sin abounds; pressures mount; governments fail; terrorism threatens; martyrdom looms on the horizon.

But God is still on the throne, the promises of God are still true, the Great Commission has not been revoked and Jesus Christ is still Lord over planet earth.

B. J. Morbitzer said it well,

"I am a soldier in the army of God. The Lord Jesus Christ is my commanding officer. The Holy Bible is my Code of Conduct. Faith, prayer, and the Word are my weapons of warfare. I have been taught by the Holy Spirit, trained by experience, tried by adversity and tested by fire.

I am a volunteer in this army and I am enlisted for eternity.

I will either retire in this army at the rapture or die in this army; but I will not get out, sell out, be talked out, or pushed out.

I am faithful, reliable, capable and dependable.

If my God needs me, I am there. If He needs me in the Sunday school, to teach the children, work with the youth, help adults or just sit and learn, He can use me because I am there.

I am a soldier. I am not a baby.

I do not need to be pampered, petted, primed up, pumped up, picked up or pepped up.

I am a soldier. No one has to call me, remind me, write me, visit me, entice me, or lure me.

I am a soldier. I am not a wimp. I am in place, saluting my King, obeying His orders, praising His name, and building His kingdom!

No one has to send me flowers, gifts, food, cards, candy or give me handouts. I do not need to be cuddled, cradled, cared for, or catered to. I am committed. I cannot have my feelings hurt bad enough to turn me around. I cannot be discouraged enough to turn me aside. I cannot lose enough to cause me to quit.

When Jesus called me into this army, I had nothing. If I end up with nothing, I will still come out ahead. I will win. My God has and will continue to supply all of my need. I am more than a conqueror. I will always triumph.

I can do all things through Christ. The devil cannot defeat me. People cannot disillusion me. Weather cannot weary me. Sickness cannot stop me. Battles cannot beat me. Money cannot buy me. Governments cannot silence me and hell cannot handle me.

I am a soldier. Even death cannot destroy me. For when my Commander calls me from this battlefield, He will promote me to Captain and then allow me to rule with Him.

I am a soldier in the army, and I am marching, claiming victory. I will not give up. I will not run around. I am a soldier, marching heaven bound."

Mister Rickey, "God built me to last."

~Rookie Jackie

Brother Pastor, "God built you to last too. "

~Coach Johnny.

DON'T QUIT