

Encourage

Inspiration for IPHC Leaders

HOW TO ENDURE THE STORMS IN YOUR MINISTRY

BY RAY BUCCIARELLI

Lord, Interrupt
Us...And Bring
Your Kingdom!

BY DOUG BEACHAM

If There Is a
Choir in Heaven,
Where Is Yours?

BY TRÉS WARD

How Men
and Women
Can Effectively
Serve Together

BY KAREN LUCAS

Six Ways
Not to Take
an Offering

BY J. LEE GRADY

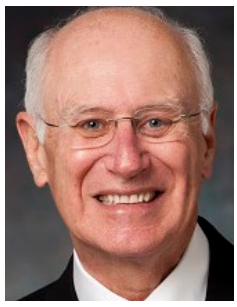




PHOTO BY VITALY VITORSKY

LORD, INTERRUPT US... And Bring Your Kingdom!

We need both God's love and His righteousness to shake the world.



BY DOUG
BEACHAM

DOUG BEACHAM is the presiding bishop of the IPHC. He has served in various roles in the church including Georgia Conference Superintendent, executive director of Church Education Ministries, and executive director of World Missions Ministries. You can follow Bishop Beacham on [Facebook](#) or Twitter [@DougBeacham](#).

This year the IPHC focus has been on our fourth core value, “We Prayerfully Value Christ’s Kingdom.” The call to “prayerfully value” is based on Jesus’ own instructions as we pray the prayer He gave to us, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” (Matthew 6:10 KJV).

We pray for divine order to interrupt the destructive order of Satan on the earth. We pray that the Father’s will for all creation, made known in heaven, will be made known on earth. In the classical version of the prayer, it concludes with allusions to Daniel 7:27, “...For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.” (Matthew 6:13).

Jesus’ entire Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:1—7:29 reverberates with kingdom language. Two of the Beatitudes are about the kingdom (5:3, 10). The poor in spirit have a share in the kingdom. Those persecuted for righteousness sake, who are usually persecuted by the worldly powers, have the promise of God’s eternal kingdom.

Jesus often connected the *kingdom* of God with the *righteousness* of God (Matthew 6:33). God’s righteousness is the manifestation of His faithfulness to His covenant word. God keeps His promises and thus is trustworthy. God’s kingdom is that sphere of existence, present and coming, where divine truth reigns through the fundamental nature of God Himself: love (1 John 4:16).

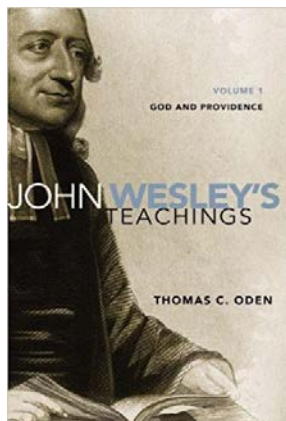
Thirty-six times in 1 John the noun or verb *love (agape)* is used, out of a hundred and five verses in the New King James. A third of the verses in 1 John are about the reality of God's love! This love is always being manifested in the relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and in the manifestation of divine love through us to others.

Larry W. Hurtado in *Destroyer of the gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2016), writes that the Christian understanding of God and love, an understanding rooted in the promises of God to Abraham and Israel and manifested in Jesus of Nazareth, was a radically new understanding to the Greek and Roman world.

Hurtado's work builds on the work of Rodney Stark, especially Stark's 1997, *The Rise of Christianity*. Both are important

sources as we consider how we should live as followers of Jesus in a post-Christian world—a world strikingly like the first century world of early Christianity.

But we must remember that the revelation: "God is love" is not the revelation of a deity who, under the banner of love, allows and accepts anything. Sadly, that



Every IPHC minister needs this book on John Wesley in his or her library.

is the characteristic of the modern chant "love wins." We all know there is not a pot of gold at the end of rainbows. Misappropriated from its Genesis 9 context of divine judgment and deliverance, the modern rainbow is but a fantasy that separates people from the life-transforming power of the kingdom of God.

This is why the apostle Paul, writing to the seat of imperial power in Rome, could write about the righteousness of God being revealed in the gospel "from faith to faith" (Romans 1:16–17). In God's righteousness, divine wrath is revealed (Romans 1:18–32).

Divine wrath is not a negation of divine love. Rather, it reveals the certainty of divine righteousness. It means that God is so great, so powerful, that the destructive power of sin will be confronted by God Himself. It means that God takes sin seriously, because sin has seriously destroyed our relationship with Him. It means that God is determined to work in human

history, and at the end of it, restore His kingdom.

In recent weeks, I've been reading the late Dr. Thomas Oden's first volume of *John Wesley's Teachings*. These four volumes are a treasure trove of Wesley's understanding of the

May our lives be filled with God's love, a love that is rooted in God's unchanging Word!

Encourage

A place of hope. A people of promise.

August 2017

Vol. 4 No. 7

Editor in Chief

Dr. A.D. Beacham, Jr.

Publisher

International Pentecostal Holiness Church

Executive Editor

J. Lee Grady

Communications Director /

Associate Editor

Janese Bennett

Copy Editor

Deborah Delk Grady

Evangelism USA

D. Chris Thompson

World Missions Ministries

J. Talmadge Gardner

Discipleship Ministries

Thomas H. McGhee

**Clergy Development /
World Intercession Network**

Lou Shirey

Encourage is published monthly except in July and December by the International Pentecostal Holiness Church, P.O. Box 12609, Oklahoma City, OK 73157. Digital subscriptions are available free of charge by subscribing at iphc.org/connect. Images courtesy of thinkstockphotos.com unless otherwise noted.

Christian life. Every IPHC minister needs these in her/his library! One of the themes that constantly appears in Wesley's writing and preaching is the reality of God's love.

There is a profound sense of happiness and blessing that permeates a Christian's life when we understand God's love to us in Jesus Christ. We discover the reality of God's kingdom and have hope that is based on the promises of God.

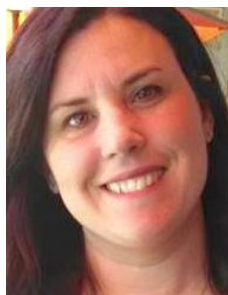
As we continue through the remainder of the year to focus on Christ's Kingdom, may our lives be filled with God's love, a love that is rooted in God's unchanging Word! □

As this column is written prior to the IPHC General Conference in Orlando on July 24–28, 2017, the results of our business will be known when this article is read. Our September issue will be devoted to the conference, and it will include a full report on what God says to us as a movement.

How Men and Women Can Effectively **SERVE TOGETHER**



Let's overcome the fears that keep us from becoming partners in the gospel.



BY **KAREN LUCAS**

KAREN LUCAS is a minister in the IPHC's North Carolina Conference and a graduate of Emmanuel College. She currently serves as Archives & Research Ministries Director of the NC Conference and also as worship pastor and outreach coordinator at Culbreth Memorial PH Church. She has served as a social worker for Falcon Children's Home and counselor for Royal Home Ministries. She is currently pursuing an M. Div. from Campbell University Divinity School. She and her husband, Chip, live in Falcon, North Carolina, with their three children.

Imagine this: Two police officers respond to a 911 call regarding a domestic dispute. Officer Brown secures the perimeter as officer Jacobs cautiously approaches the entrance of the home. Emotions are high.

Brown and Jacobs have responded to enough similar calls in the past to communicate without words. Jacobs looks to Brown and with one affirmative nod back, she knows he has her back. She confidently knocks on the door, announcing their presence, and then stands ready for the occupants to respond.

An hour later, the situation is de-escalated and sorted. The two officers sit down at the local pizzeria to enjoy a meal while reviewing the call and discussing weekend activities they are planning with their families.

Brown and Jacobs are partners on the job and have their own families and life outside of work. Each of them is best suited for certain aspects of their work. That is what makes them good partners. The fact that Brown is male and Jacobs is female does not affect their partnership negatively. What if men and women could work together in ministry just as effectively?

From the very beginning, God brought men and women together for a purpose. First, he brought them together to create a full reflection of his image (see Genesis 1:28) and to subdue the earth. Later, he brought men and women together to spread the gospel and build His church.

Some Christians have anxieties about working in ministry with people of the opposite sex. Yet we know that in order to be a healthy church, we must find a way to do so effectively. Here are five fears we must first confront that inhibit Christians from ministering well with people of the opposite sex:

1. FEAR OF MEETING PRIVATELY WITH SOMEONE OF THE OPPOSITE SEX.

It is true that public settings are often the best venue for engaging in communication with people of the opposite sex. However, when the idea of avoiding privacy has gone too far, it has led to some strange protocol within church culture.

For example, consider the old rules of keeping the door open or having a third person present for meetings with someone of the opposite sex. When a male ministry leader asks for a confidential meeting with his female pastor but arrives to find the pastor's husband or another staff member present, that is not confidential.

Likewise, if she leaves a door open and voices can carry down the hallway, that is not private. This type of policy implies that the pastor does not trust herself to maintain self-control over her sexual impulses or that she does not trust the man who has asked for the meeting to be able to control himself. Perhaps she does not trust church members to think the best of either of them. None of these reasons are very gracious or encouraging.

An alternative to the open-door policy would be to have a glass panel installed on the internal doors of a church building. A pastor or church leader can sit in plain view of the window and a second chair can be placed out of view. That way, those outside of the room cannot hear the conversation or see the face of the person who has requested privacy.

2. FEAR OF MISUNDERSTANDING OR OFFENDING PEOPLE OF THE OPPOSITE SEX.

Keep your thinking and your conversation free of presumption. Not all women are the same and not all men are the same.

Men, keep in mind that your female co-worker at church is not the same as your mother, your wife, your sister or your daughter. Her interests, gifts, fears, strengths and disposition are her own and no one else's. She is uniquely made, just as you are.

Women, keep in mind that your male co-worker at church is not the

same as your father, your husband, your brother or your son. We are all individuals. Applying stereotypes and being presumptuous results in unnecessary frustration and friction. So, get to know each other and practice the arts of listening and clear communication instead.

3. FEAR OF BECOMING INVISIBLE.

Women have experienced the disappointment of having their input dismissed by a man, only to later notice him voice her ideas as his own. Consequently, these women may withhold their insights, opinions or even abilities from group discussion and ministry.

If you are a male who notices that a female withholds input from staff meetings, round table discussions or ministry settings, ask her why she is holding back. If she is afraid of being dismissed or of having her ideas stolen, partner with her. Share her ideas for her and give her credit for them until she is comfortable to do so for herself.

Or, if you hear her share an idea that is dismissed only to hear it resurface with gusto from a guy across the room say, "Yes! I thought that was a great idea when Laura mentioned it a few minutes ago." Be a good brother. Make sure that she is given respect and heard equally at the table.

4. FEAR OF APPEARING TOO FEMININE OR TOO MASCULINE.

Some men are afraid that if they are not clearly seen as the leader when working with a female, they will be thought of as weak and/or feminine. Conversely, some women fear that if they are not seen as submissive when working with a male, that they will be thought of as someone who is too aggressive and "trying to be a man."

Being a strong leader is no more masculine than being an attentive parent is feminine. Leadership should be evident in both sexes just as good

parenting should be exhibited from both sexes.

No particular leadership style belongs exclusively to men or women. People should be free to develop their own leadership style according to their gifting and calling, regardless of gender.

5. FEAR THAT WOMEN ARE TOO WEAK TO LEAD WELL.

This is a fear that has kept gifted women from being given opportunities to grow and develop as leaders. I have spoken with several female ministry leaders to try to determine what has led to their success.

I interviewed Rev. Vera Griffin, the first paid general evangelist

of the North Carolina Conference of the IPHC, Beth Stephens-Johnson, a world-famous Pentecostal evangelist, Rev. Blanche Pollard, one of the first ordained female pastors of the IPHC and Rev. Rose Boyd, the director of Operation Teaching Tools, an IPHC organization that serves the missions department of our denomination. I also studied the ministry timeline of Beatriz Lopez, a recent IPHC female bishop from Cuba.

These women all had men in their lives who affirmed their calling, equipped them for ministry and provided them with one-on-one mentorship. These men did not stop with mentorship, though. They also opened doors of opportunity for them to use their gifts and their callings. Just like men, women become good leaders when they have good mentors who also give them opportunities to further develop themselves within their calling.

Leaders, be fearless. Teach the young men and women you mentor to also be fearless. Teach them to learn to get to know each other, trust each other and then to simply get to work answering the call together. If we believe that we are better together, let's be better together! □

"Some Christians have anxieties about working in ministry with people of the opposite sex. Yet we must find a way to do this effectively."



If There Is a Choir in Heaven, Where Is Yours?

Most churches today are getting rid of their choirs. I think that's a bad idea.



BY TRÉS
WARD

TRÉS WARD is the new director of the Emmanuel Singers at Emmanuel College, where he will be serving as the Director of Outreach and Assistant to the President. He has been a high school chorus teacher in Greensboro, North Carolina, for the last four years and has ministered as an evangelist from the Cornerstone Conference since 2009. Trés now lives in Franklin Springs, Georgia, with his wife, Rachael.

It is profound how greatly music can move, inspire, challenge, speak to and even speak *for* us. Music is a gracious gift from God and I believe that the musical heights we experience and enjoy are often manifestations of the presence of God as the gifts that He has given us are being displayed for His glory.

For thousands of years—before the last two centuries gave us PA systems, microphones, and digital sound engineering—there was only one sure way to create a lot of sound when singing: you needed *a lot of voices*. The challenge of working with many voices as opposed to the few that sing in many worship settings today, is that every individual voice is different, so it takes more honing of the skill and growing together as a group to create a great sound.

God is so creative that there are no two people on the face of the earth whose voices and manner of speaking are entirely the same. Since each individual voice is so unique to the Lord, just imagine how pleased He must be when we join our voices *together* in worship.

The research of singing with others in a choir setting has shown that there is a deep spiritual bond that occurs, the singers become more active in other areas of life and ministry, and their hearts even begin to beat at the same rate while singing due to the common breathing patterns. Is it any wonder that God loves to hear us join and sing together?

I have observed the trend of a decreasing number of churches that have choirs that regularly sing in the worship services, learn new music or harmonize in three or four parts. Many churches have no choir at all.

Perhaps this could be because of changing musical styles and a seeming lack of interest among the congregation or the church leadership. Some see choirs being replaced by smaller vocal teams. For whatever the reason the choir may not be surviving in some churches, I believe that there is a very spiritual and deeply biblical case to be made for the role of the church choir.

Since the days of the early church, singing has been an integral part of the life of every congregation. In fact, an astounding eighty-five to ninety percent of all choral music that goes back to 500 A.D. is considered sacred and was written to be sung in church.

J.S. Bach led a church choir in his German hometown where he is said to have written a new song every week. He would write out the parts for each individual instrument in the orchestra and all the singers. Then the song would be sung in the Sunday worship service.

He noted on each piece of music, "SDG", which stood for *Soli Deo Gloria* meaning "Glory to God alone."

There is a very familiar New Testament text that Bible scholars believe was originally sung—what our culture might consider a worship chorus. It may be challenging to envision yourself singing this in church next Sunday morning, but it was likely very familiar in the early church. The apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 2:8–11 (KJV):

"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore, God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth. And that ever tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

I believe there is deep spiritual impact when a choir prepares and delivers a message in song to the glory of God. On the day Solomon's Temple was dedicated, the choir sang and when the voices of the people were joined together in chorus, the "Shekinah" glory of God came down. Look at this example of the great impact voices joined in chorus can make, found in 2 Chronicles 5:13-14:

"...(T)he trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the Lord, saying 'For he is good; for his mercy endureth forever,' that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God" (KJV).

During my college days, I served as a worship pastor in

a local IPHC church and took these verses as the theme and mission for our choir. I believe that making "one sound" encapsulates the role of a choir in the life of a church; so we made that our mission according to the Scripture. When we gather a choir, we may compile an array of voices to sing in two, three, even four or more voice parts, but we create only one sound so that God may be glorified.

In a church culture that appears to be moving away

"I believe there is deep spiritual impact when a choir prepares and delivers a message in song to the glory of God."

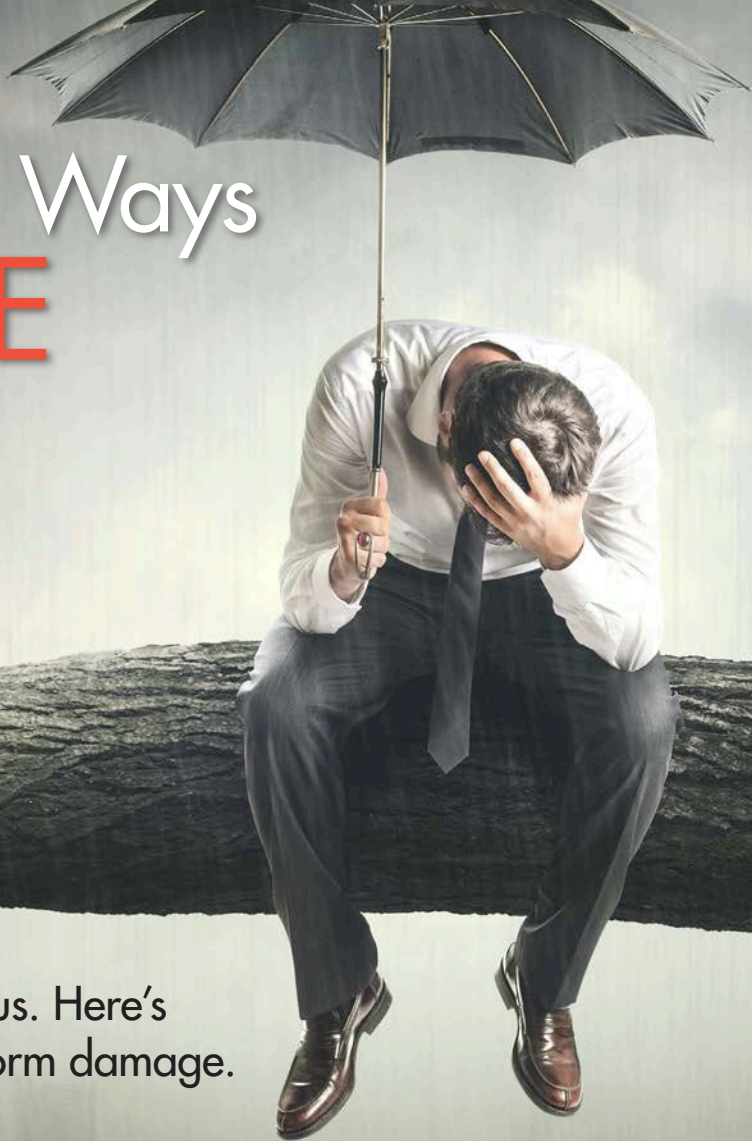
from using choirs as a regular part of worship, I believe that we are in great need of moving *toward* choirs. In addition to the biblical basis for choral music, the local church choir offers a great opportunity for ministry to those with musical talents who may not be able to participate on the praise team.

Choirs also lend themselves toward intergenerational, interracial and inter-gender worship where men, women, teens and children of all ethnicities can be a part of the same ministry at the same time. A wide variety of musical styles can be sung, including black gospel, southern gospel, contemporary Christian music, modern worship songs and even songs in other languages for special mission events.

There is no question that it can be challenging to find the time, skills, and leadership to sustain a thriving and effective choir; however, I believe it is worth considering. Having a choir creates a place for generations, races, and genders to minister together on the same platform in unity, and provides the opportunity to create rich, skillful, and anointed music that glorifies God.

After all, singing to God is what we will be doing for eternity where the voices from every tribe, tongue, and nation will worship God together with their unique voices and fill all of heaven for the endless ages. □

Five Essential Ways to **ENDURE** Ministry **STORMS**



Spiritual hurricanes hit all of us. Here's how you can minimize the storm damage.



BY RAY
BUCCIARELLI

RAY BUCCIARELLI is an IPHC missionary candidate. Ordained in the Ephesians 4 Network, he serves as the missions pastor at Faith Christian Church in Melvindale, Michigan. He and his wife, Kathy, have four children.

Hurricane Sandy hit New York City in 2012. It was a significant memory for me because I had preached in the Bronx that morning. By the time our service had ended, people were rushing to get home and prepare for the coming storm.

It was already noticeable that the weather conditions were changing rapidly. The bridges and subways were closing, and hotels were filling up as flights were being canceled—including mine. I escaped from La Guardia Airport on the last flight to “anywhere but here,” but it was not pleasant.

To this day, that flight is the roughest that I have experienced, especially the departure. Big storms affect everything. Gratefully, I avoided that storm and its devastation with only an entertaining story.

Escaping the storms of ministry are not always that easy. They are often heartbreaking.

Some storms you will face as a leader will simply need to be endured alone, and only you are left with the cleanup. After escaping from the hurricane's path, once I had arrived safely on the ground, I worried about my friends back in New York.

The storm pounded its way across the East Coast. I followed the impact from my safe distance over the course of the following days, watching images of million-dollar homes that had been destroyed. I was reminded in those moments that only with a well-honed perspective and proper preparation can one withstand major trials.

Understanding, navigating and managing the storms of ministry will be a key factor in the longevity of any church leader. If you have been in ministry for

any length of time, you have most likely been through a few trials that made it seem as though a spiritual hurricane was unleashed on you.

Some challenges are small, while others nearly break the most seasoned of saints. Trials can also hit us from any area of life beyond ministry, including family, finances and health. We may know all of the appropriate theology in our heads because we have confidently counseled others through their own rough times, but it can seem so different when it hits us.

Here are five steps geared toward enduring the leadership storm. I believe that these practical steps will assist you as a ministry leader. May they help you to keep a proper perspective and recover quickly from “storm damage.”

1. REMEMBER GOD’S FAITHFULNESS.

If you are currently in leadership, then you have survived every storm so far. Good job! Remember those trials that seemed so big when you first started? How did God bring you through them? He is faithful and has a plan to strengthen you in this hour, too.

Consider keeping a journal of every obstacle that the Lord has helped you to overcome throughout the years. You can reflect on each time He was faithful and brought you through the pain. You may be reminded of the pain, but focus on the victory.

How might the things that seem so overwhelming now appear compared to the hardships you once faced? Yes, God was there then—and He remains faithful now. Stay faithful to Him and watch how He pulls you through the next trial!

2. HIDE AND SEEK.

Pray, pray, pray. Sounds obvious, right? A trial will do one of two things to a ministry leader: It will either drive you to your knees, or dry you up spiritually.

Satan does not play fairly, and he will continue to hit hard while you are down, leaving you feeling abandoned. Sometimes it can be a struggle just to muster up the faith to pray during a trial. Trust God to give you the wisdom to overcome.

Let this storm draw you closer to God. James 1:5 says: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (NKJV). Hiding away and seeking your mighty God is your only chance of overcoming and being truly victorious. He loves you! Hide away and seek Him.

3. LOVE THE STORM.

Nobody wants to hear this, especially when a storm comes in the form of betrayal by a friend or acquaintance. But you must love the person who is responsible for your storm.

There was a time in my life when someone tried to overtake my ministry. I was angry, but I asked God for wisdom on how to handle it. I knew that God’s answer was not from my own flesh. He commanded me to love them. Ouch!

Ultimately, I was obedient and trusted God. I ended up sending them a card of encouragement in my own handwriting and included a generous gift toward a fundraiser they were running. (I knew the fundraiser was for overtaking my ministry.)

Later, truth prevailed and I could hold my head high knowing that I had endured my trial through love. Love suffers long and is kind; love never fails.

I now love that storm because of what I learned from it and how it brought growth in me. God was ultimately in it the whole time; now I try to recognize this and love a new storm from the outset.

4. REJOICE AND BE GRATEFUL.

James 1:2-4 says: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (NKJV).

Sometimes I think God might receive a different kind of glory than we would expect from a personal trial. Imagine Satan trying to break you while you endure it by faith. You must trust God even when you cannot see Him in it.

Imagine God watching you with favor as you trust Him more than your circumstances. Now imagine how much it brings Him glory when you rejoice and trust Him with gratitude even when He is silent.

5. GROW SPIRITUALLY.

Sometimes growth comes through developing a new perspective. Hebrews 12:7 tells us: “If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?” (NKJV). Indeed, there is real purpose for your pain.

What happens *inside* us is more important than what happens *to* us. How we respond to the storm through remembering, praying, loving and rejoicing is the key to victory.

Somebody in your circle of friends and mentors has likely been through this before. If they are a trusted source and have survived it with grace and integrity, ask them how they made it through. Glean advice and gain strength from those more experienced than you.

I recently went to a mentor about a challenge I was facing. He laughed and said, “Oh, you’ll survive this.” That was all I needed to hear. You *will* survive this. □

“Consider keeping a journal of every obstacle that the Lord has helped you to overcome throughout the years. You may be reminded of the pain, but focus on the victory.”



SIX

Ways NOT to Take an Offering

Offering time is a holy time.
Always use integrity when
you collect God's money.



BY J. LEE
GRADY

J. LEE GRADY is an ordained IPHC minister who directs The Mordecai Project, an international outreach focused on confronting gender-based violence. For 18 years he served as an editor with Charisma magazine, and he is the author of several books including the newly released *Set My Heart on Fire*, a Bible study on the Holy Spirit. He and his wife, Deborah, live in LaGrange, Georgia.

I've seen it all when it comes to church offerings. Once when I attended an outdoor service in Nigeria, deacons used wheelbarrows and pickup trucks to collect money because more than 500,000 people were in the audience. Yet I know an IPHC pastor in Malawi who collects the equivalent of 80 cents in his offering plate each Sunday because his members are so poor. With that money, he has planted several churches!

Giving is a huge part of the Christian life. Jesus encouraged generosity; the first disciples collected offerings; and the apostle Paul said, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7b). Paul taught us that collecting money to support the church's mission should be done with integrity and that believers should respond with generous hearts.

But even in the first century, some Christians resisted the idea of giving to God's work. Others used strong-arm tactics to get their hands in people's pockets. We are still dealing with this problem 2,000 years later. Here are six of the most reckless tactics used today to raise funds in church:

1. THE ENDLESS APPEAL.

Some preachers drone on and on for 45 minutes to collect an offering—and then they take another 15 minutes to pass the buckets. This is rude and insensitive—and it reveals a lack of faith on the part of leaders. You don't have to talk people out of their money or hold them hostage until they give out of frustration. Trust God to supply the need rather than begging.

2. THE SALESMAN'S EXTORTION.

Certain slick preachers in our movement are known for their uncanny ability to open people's wallets. But these fundraising "skills" are more akin to those of a used car salesman than a minister of the gospel. They promise magical benefits to those who give large amounts. They also set deadlines. I once heard a preacher suggest that if people gave "right now," their unsaved children would find salvation!

Never give in response to manipulation. Paul taught us that when we sow, we will reap. But in the same passage, he also said if we sow to the flesh we will "reap corruption" (Gal. 6:8).

If you give in response to a prompting of the Holy Spirit, you will be blessed. But if you give because the preacher twisted your arm or used pressure tactics, your gift will not be blessed. Paul told us to give "not grudgingly or out of necessity" (2 Cor. 9:7).

3. THE GIVE-TO-GET TRADEOFF.

There is no question that God blesses generous people. If you keep your hands open to God by giving, He will open a channel of blessing for you. But God is not a slot machine, and His goodness is not for sale.

Never believe a preacher who says you can buy the Holy Spirit's anointing. And never follow a preacher who guarantees you will get a new house or a new car if you put a certain amount in the offering plate.

4. THE HOLY GHOST AUCTION.

Numerous times I've heard a preacher announce that he needs a certain number of people to give \$1,000—and he will wait for hands to go in the air. Next, he needs \$500 gifts, \$250 and so on. Within a few minutes, the church has become a cattle auction. Sometimes the donors are asked to stand—suggesting that God blesses rich people but not the widow on a fixed income who doesn't have means to give a big amount.

"I cringe when I hear pastors tell people they will be under a curse if they don't tithe. We should never put a guilt trip on people while collecting money."



Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because they liked to blow trumpets in public to announce they were giving to the poor. He told them: "When you do your charitable deeds, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deeds may be in secret" (Matt. 6:3-4).

Can you imagine Jesus asking rich people to stand and give their large checks while everyone in the audience applauds them? He actually pointed out a poor widow and raved about her tiny gift.

5. THE RAILING JUDGMENT.

I cringe when I hear pastors tell people they will be under a curse if they don't tithe. I don't tithe to appease God's anger; I give more than a tithe because I love to share God's goodness. We should never put a guilt trip on people while collecting money.

The church is no place for threats. Zacchaeus was a greedy tax collector, but Jesus did not attack him for his thievery; He extended mercy—and this melted Zacchaeus' heart and made him a lavish giver.

6. THE PATHETIC APOLOGY.

Sometimes we act timid about collecting offerings, maybe because the world thinks all Christians are fakes and that churches are "all about money." But we have nothing to apologize for! We are involved in the greatest mission on planet Earth, and God Himself supplies the funds needed to evangelize the world.

When we collect offerings, we are engaging in a holy process. God is just as much involved in the offering as He is in worship, the preaching of the Word or the demonstration of spiritual gifts. God allows us to be His vessels to give, and then He rewards us abundantly so we can give more.

The church has been sustained for 2,000 years by supernatural giving. He is in our midst, and He blesses both the giver and the gift. While we seek to become more generous, let's learn to be more faithful in the way we steward God's money. □