



Encourage

Inspiration for IPHC Leaders

ARTICLES THIS MONTH:

Build a Bridge: Why
You **Must** Empower
Young Leaders

BY LINDA FANNIN

You Can Smile
**During the
Storm**

Don't Let Prophetic
Ministry
Get Pathetic

Don't Be Afraid
Of Liturgy
A Young Pentecostal
Speaks Out



SPEAK LORD AND WE WILL LISTEN

Today even some evangelical Christians have abandoned the primacy of Scripture. We must hold fast to the Word of God!



BY DOUG BEACHAM

DOUG BEACHAM is the presiding bishop of the IPHC. He has served in various roles in the church including Georgia Conference Director, executive director of Church Education Ministries, and executive director of World Missions Ministries.

We believe the Bible is the Word of God. That means we recognize that the Holy Spirit moved upon men of God to declare His will through the Scriptures (see 2 Peter 1:20–21, NKJV). It is important to observe that the 2 Peter reference makes it clear that the interpretation of Scripture is not our private interpretation (1:20), and that “prophecy never came by the will of man” (1:21).

The passage of 2 Peter 1:16–21 specifically recounts a prophecy from God about His Son, the Lord Jesus

Christ, which Peter, James, and John heard on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:2–7). The apostle Peter then declares that Scripture is the Word of God given through men moved by the Holy Spirit.

In Hebrews 4:12 this Word is described as “living and powerful.” 2 Timothy 3:14–17 affirms the totality of Scripture as “given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

As most members of the IPHC know, this year we have focused on our first core value: *We Prayerfully Value Scripture*. It is the confidence we have in the truth of God’s Word as it reveals God’s glorious will and purposes for humanity.

Biblical faith is rooted in historical acts and revelation. God is at work in human history to redeem this sin-enslaved world through His Son Jesus Christ. Thus, history is not merely the past; history is being made now and unfolds before us. History is not simply a recounting of the acts of men and women; it is also a place of divine interaction and revelation.

This is why history and prophecy are interrelated. The more I read the biblical prophets, the more convinced I

am that they were excellent historians of the past, understanding the present, and anticipating the future based on the revelation from our covenant-making and covenant-keeping God.

This brings us back to 2 Peter 1:20–21 and the dual insight that interpretation of Scripture is not a private matter nor discerned solely by the will of man. This is pertinent today as the authority of Scripture is increasingly dismissed in western thought.

Today, those of us who say we are Bible-believing Christians are dismissed as anti-intellectual and ignorant of the liberating truths of the Renaissance and Enlightenment. We are marginalized as being on the wrong side of history, intolerant and narrow-minded.

We are considered anti-everything that is progressive. At its worse, we are perceived as mean-spirited, hateful, bigoted, and a threat that must be removed from influence in the public, and increasingly, the private sphere.

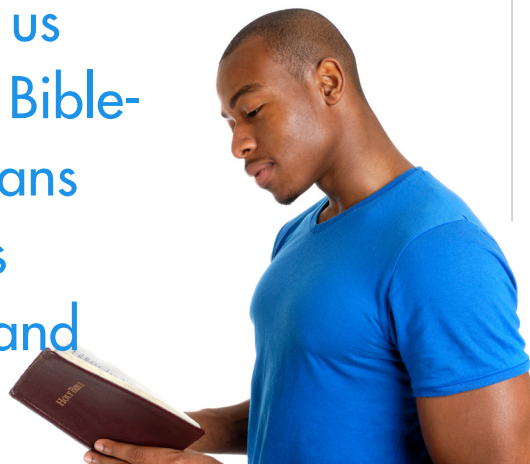
This is nowhere more evident in western society than in the resurgence of pagan sexuality in its numerous forms. Such sexual license, promoted by the media and sanctioned by legislative and court decisions, is more than an aberration. It is the ultimate result of an intentional rejection of the Judeo-Christian source of authority and replacing it with humanity's idolatry of self-and-culture.

This has become the defining marker of our era. Sadly, it also has become the defining marker in global Christianity, especially in the United States. Many have abandoned the biblical legacy of Luther, Calvin and Wesley. Even within some evangelical circles, the interpretation of Scripture has drifted towards one that abandons the priority of Scripture in speaking to our present age.

The nature of the conflict between biblical authority versus human reasoning is well revealed in Robert A.J. Gagnon with Dan O. Via, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004). Via provides the liberal interpretation of sexuality with a prevailing preference for human reasoning and the growth of human understanding. Gagnon provides the grounds for the historic Biblical interpretation of sexuality, the view held by the International Pentecostal Holiness Church.

I address this issue because it is ground zero in the battle for the souls of people. It is the place where “private interpretation” and “the will of man” from 2 Peter 1:20–21 is most evident in our day.

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A place of hope. A people of promise.

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But the issues over biblical authority speak to a wider range of concerns that should cause us to take stock of the full teaching of the Word of God as regards to the poor, issues of justice from a biblical standpoint and clarity of doctrine. And it speaks to how the Holy Spirit empowers us and transforms us into “epistles of Christ...written... by the Spirit of the living God...on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart” (2 Corinthians 3:3).

“Living epistles” understand the historic interpretations of the Christian community from around the globe, and they understand that Christian love is rooted in divine truth and not in the shifting tides of private interpretation and the will of man. This is why our first core value enables us to truly be a place of hope and a people of promise. □



Taking the baton: Young leaders from all over Europe gathered in Hungary in July for EuroQuest.

WE MUST BRIDGE THE GENERATION GAP IN MINISTRY

At a recent event in Hungary I learned the importance of empowering young leaders. Will you make room for them?



BY LINDA FANNIN

LINDA FANNIN and her late husband, David, served as IPHC missionaries in Africa and Eastern Europe for many years. After David died in 2011, Linda continued to serve in Hungary and managed the IPHC's resource center in Szigetszentmiklós, a suburb of Budapest. She recently earned an advanced degree from Oral Roberts University.

Recently I attended an event in Vajta, Hungary known as EuroQuest, an outreach associated with The Awakening team. This is an important ministry of the IPHC led by Max and Jessica Barroso. During the event, young, emerging leaders gather together in Europe, along with the American team, for a time of connection, celebration, training, and fun.

It is a time of building relationships while gaining a greater recognition of their own value and personal contribution to God's kingdom—and to find out how they individually and corporately fit into the larger picture of God's plan for Europe. Young leaders are responsible for the program at this event from the beginning to the end. The only stipulation of the career missionary is that they take a step back and allow these young leaders to develop without interference on our part, except to offer encouragement and prayer.

During free time and prayer, I had the opportunity to have some one-on-one time with many of the young leaders. Many of them related to me some of their concerns; they were often discouraged by expectations from their leaders that were either too high or too low.

Some felt as though they were expected to fit in the mold someone has made for them. Some of them were frightened to launch out to begin something new and different for fear of rocking the boat. Some even asked me, "Where is the line drawn between being rebellious to leadership and yet stepping out to listen to the call of God?"

My heart went out to them as they told me of their dreams and visions for the future. On the positive side this event was life changing for many, and a challenge to keep on course as God has ordered. They are fearless and intentional.

The theme of EuroQuest was “Rebuilding the Altar of God in Europe.” At one point in the program I felt the nudging of the Holy Spirit to go before the group and offer by proxy, a general apology for any failures of my generation to start the process of healing needed before rebuilding the altar. Even though this young generation could learn from our generation, and from the good that has been accomplished through us, it was necessary to stand in the pulpit as a representative for my generation and acknowledge that there was room for improvement.

I learned a valuable lesson during one of the fun evenings while introducing s’mores and marshmallows to the European youth. On the agenda was the traditional fire-jumping contest. Everyone was taking his or her turn to jump the fire so I lined up to prove I could do it. I was spurred on by some youth chanting my name and daring me!

Suddenly, one of the young men jumped up and held me back—protecting me from the flames! It was at that point the Holy Spirit taught me a lesson of limitation, I

had the heart and will to take the risk, but not the stamina and endurance to jump the fire anymore.

The lesson learned was that this new generation of fire-jumpers are now the risk takers for the kingdom. It is okay that I can no longer do what I used to do in ministry; my job now is to be walking alongside them—to cheer them on and to help wherever I am needed.

Passing the baton to the next generation means that the previous generation must let go and allow emerging leaders to take their place. There is no greater joy and fulfillment, for me, than to see the progress of these emerging leaders in their personal lives and in ministry.

I often tell the youth in Europe that I am only the scaffolding around them, but they are the ones to build His kingdom and take it to the next level. It is my heart to help bring east and west Europe together as one—each needs the other to bring healing to their nations. Together they will be a mighty force endowed with the Spirit of God to do exceeding and

greater things than what my generation has done.

As I say this, I also want to give honor and respect to my generation of leaders for all that has been accomplished, but with the understanding that this new generation is going to do ministry differently. After the apology, I was so happy

Passing the baton to the next generation means that the previous generation must let go and allow emerging leaders to take their place.

to receive special prayer as I stood in proxy for my generation.

I so appreciated the love and honor expressed to me by so many young people during EuroQuest! All of them have so much to give. I implore my generation to accept this next generation with open arms and I implore the new generation of leaders to be patient as we make

the necessary needed change.

The new generation, often referred to as Millennials, may not do ministry like past generations did it—but let’s listen to them with open hearts and open ears! Although they can learn from the experience of the previous generation, there is much to learn from them, too.

We have such a wonderful opportunity to pour into the next emerging leaders. Our goal is to have multi-generations working together—loving and learning from each other!

Millennials want the generations working together in harmony and they also want Christians from different nations working together in harmony to bring the world to Christ.

The bridges of Budapest are beautiful by night. I have a vision of these youth as bridges crossing and crisscrossing throughout the nations with the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I see an international and multi-generational Church coming together, loving, learning and doing ministry together. I pray that the fire that was ignited in Hungary will spread throughout Europe! □



IPHC missionary Linda Fannin laughs with some of the young leaders who attended the EuroQuest retreat in July.

SACRAMENTAL PENTECOSTALISM: AN ALTERNATIVE WAY FOR A NEW GENERATION

Many younger Pentecostals are introducing liturgy in their worship. This isn't a fad—it anchors us in our faith.



BY BRAD
CHANDLER

BRAD CHANDLER and wife, Stephanie, share the joy of leading middle-school, high school and college students closer to Christ every day. A graduate of Southeastern University, Brad serves as the student ministries pastor at Trinity Worship Center in Burlington, NC.

In eighth grade, I had a crush on a girl in our marching band. She was cute, outgoing, played the flute, and was...well... Catholic. No big deal right? Except my Bible Belt, Baptist/Pentecostal parents shut down that teenage affection pretty quickly!

At the time I didn't understand what the difference was. Yet in hindsight I'm not sure that the result would have changed if she were Episcopalian, Presbyterian or Anglican—even though the charismatic movement exposed many mainstream denominations in the 1960s and 70s to Pentecostal practices. I'm convinced that my eighth-grade romance shutdown had little to do with any sharp distinction of theological differences.

No, it was simply a lack of understanding of how Jesus-professing believers from all traditions, even liturgical, are tied to the historicity of the Christian faith. We feared what was foreign and unknown.

My first encounter with historical liturgy and sacrament wasn't until my time in college. A few professors introduced practices like lectio divina (Latin for sacred reading), the Book of Common Prayer, lectionaries, daily prayer offices and responsive readings. I began to realize that baptism and the Lord's Table were something more than obligatory ordinances that you did once a quarter, and much more than a symbol. There was something new and fresh about all of this and I couldn't quite understand it.

I grew up in a Pentecostal church and used to write these practices off as remnants of dead religion. Yet now through these practices, I was encountering the Lord in a much deeper way than I ever did at an emotional camp meeting service. For the first time I felt rooted in something deeper than local religion.

The Christian faith became alive to me as something much more than good behavior. The sacraments were causing a stirring in my spirit. My soul felt anchored to the past and hopeful for the future all at once. And all the while, I still considered myself a Pentecostal with no doubt that the Holy Spirit had filled me up to overflowing.

Ever since then, I've felt like a misfit wherever I go in the evangelical church world. Because I'm relatively young, the expectation is that I'm some kind of lobbyist for brighter lights, louder music and relevance—the most overused word in today's evangelicalism. I feel the expectation to fit a mold that says we have to go bigger, better, faster, stronger to reach this new generation.

Yet at the core of my being, I know that it's all a lie. Bigger buildings, HD screens and felt-needs messages don't in themselves make biblical disciples.

But hear me on this: I'm not advocating that we return to a stagnant traditionalism that posits Christ against culture. I don't believe in the sacred and secular divide, and to be honest, I'm tired of the worship wars conversation. This new generation has moved past traditional versus contemporary and is looking for something more.

So where am I to fit in all of this? I'm a Spirit-filled, Pentecostal youth pastor who loves art, liturgy and music. Yet I'm suspicious of the hip, entertainment culture that the church has purchased. When I mustered up the bravery to talk about this inner struggle, I began to find that I was not alone.

In fact, I'm discovering that there are scores of others out there who are looking for the roots of our faith in charismatic settings. There are pastors and writers like Jonathan Martin in Charlotte, North Carolina and Glenn Packiam in Colorado Springs, Colorado; scholars like Dr. Cheryl Bridges Johns and Dr. Chris Green, two of IPHC's own.

There are conferences like the Praxis Conference held in Tulsa, Oklahoma this year—not to mention the countless conversations with friends from near and far that are feeling the same prophetic restlessness with the state of Pentecostal/evangelical worship and practice.

I believe Pentecostal worship and practice is at a critical crossroads. The last thing that Pentecostalism needs is

to be like everyone else. The moment we lose our distinctiveness, our ability to work from the margins, we lose a key aspect about what it means to be Pentecostal.

We've always been a people who have carved a different way than the rest of the church world. Yet more times than not, we seem all too satisfied with being lumped in with the rest of mainstream evangelicalism with the added spice of being filled with the Holy Spirit. If we become ashamed of our roots, we rob ourselves of an opportunity to blaze a new trail once again.

The only thing worse than Pentecostals becoming like everyone else is if we stayed where we are. The caricatures of charismatic televangelists, prophecy charlatans, prosperity and hyper-grace doctrines and dispensational eschatology are eroding the treasures found in the roots of our young tradition.

The legalism, lingering racism and hostility to the surrounding culture don't help the issue either. Something has to change if we are to recover or reinvent our identity on what it means to be Spirit-filled believers.

So what does this have to do with liturgy and sacrament? Relative to the rest of Christian tradition, Pentecostalism is still a very young movement, just north of 100 years. I believe that the Pentecostal world of today is experiencing a settling of the foundation. There are cracks, creaks, pops, groans and restlessness—but all of it is the sound of a new generation that's settling itself on the historicity of our faith.

Though early Pentecostals were adamant about non-creedalism, today's Pentecostals are finding meaning and fresh fire in the creeds

of old. Speaking in tongues and prophecy are still to be embraced--yet we're encountering the same Holy Ghost in communal readings, solemn confession and the simplicity of communion at the Lord's Table.

There's a generation of young, Spirit-filled believers who are becoming less concerned with style, form or emotion. We are looking for substance and an anchored faith. The discussion has shifted from which decade we should derive our music from to which century we should look to for timeless anointing.

It's a peculiar place to be in, but I'm confident in this: There are no better hands for liturgy

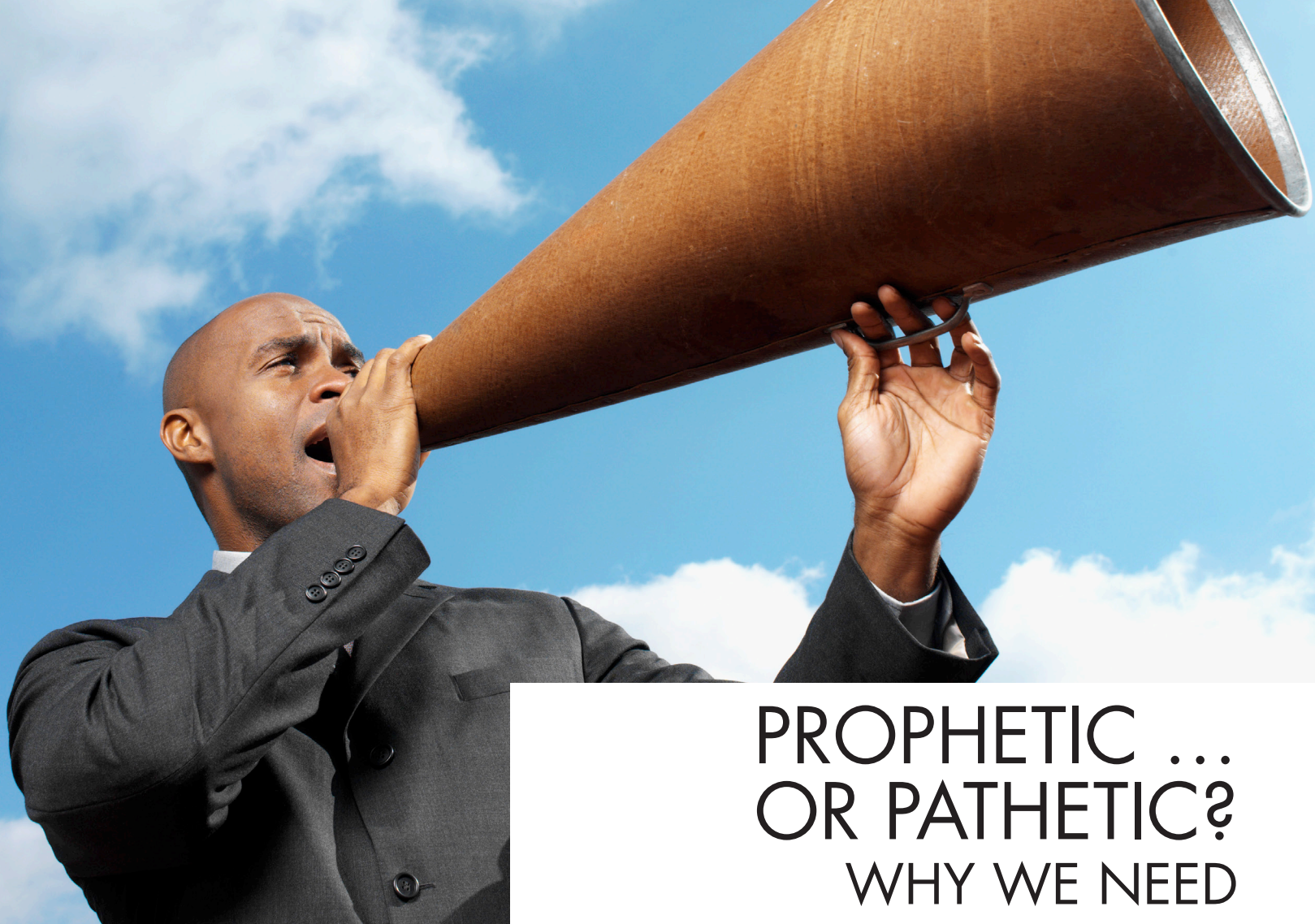
and sacrament to be in than those of renewed Pentecostals. When people of the Spirit embrace the heritage of our faith, dynamic things will happen.

I'm confident of this whenever my congregation in North Carolina responds with shouting and vocal, corporate prayer to an ancient passage or lectionary reading. I'm reminded of this when I watch our IPHC leadership begin our General Conference at the Lord's Table. I was reminded of this in Chile when I heard the collective roar of the Jotabeche Church standing in unison and declaring "Gloria a Dios" throughout Bishop Duran's message.

Young leaders and seasoned leaders alike are faced with a unique opportunity as we blaze a new trail in Pentecostalism that isn't really new at all. Navigating these unfamiliar waters could change everything.

I guess I'm just naïve enough to believe that this isn't a fad; it's foundational. And we're just scratching the surface of what's to come. □

"There's a generation of young, Spirit-filled believers who are becoming less concerned with style, form or emotion. We are looking for substance and an anchored faith."



PROPHETIC ... OR PATHETIC? WHY WE NEED GUIDELINES FOR PROPHECY



BY J. LEE
GRADY

J. LEE GRADY is an ordained IPHC minister who serves as contributing editor of Charisma magazine and editor of Encourage. He also directs The Mordecai Project, an international missions organization based in Florida. He is a member of the IPHC's Sonshine Conference.

While ministering in Eastern Europe recently, I learned about a church leader who aired an audacious claim. He said he had been taken to heaven in some sort of fantastic vision and that while in glory he met and talked to the apostle Paul himself.

The clincher is even more ridiculous: This self-appointed leader said Paul commissioned him as an apostle to his country, adding that anyone else who claims to be in that office is going straight to hell.

This isn't the most diplomatic way to win followers!

There have always been and always will be religious megalomaniacs who split churches with claims of special "prophetic" revelations. But the saddest part is that men like this give the biblical gift of prophecy a bad name and cause people to be suspicious of anything of a supernatural nature.

While I was in Hungary in July I helped teach at a prophetic school that is sponsored annually by Peter Lakatos, the leader of the IPHC in that country. I shared these points below with the students during his conference. I think they will help you in your local church, especially if you want to develop a prophetic ministry that is healthy, God-honoring and faithful to the New Testament.

In my experience with prophetic ministry over the years, I believe there are five big mistakes we make in this important area.

1. GIVING PROPHETS ELITE STATUS. Nowhere in the New Testament are prophets exalted to a privileged class. Paul himself said all members of the body need each other, and in his discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14, he warns against ranking spirituality by gifting. He wrote, “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you!’” (1 Cor. 12:21, NASB).

Many prophets get a disease that I call egotisticus giganticus. They are puffed up by their revelations. Then, when people line up to hear them, they are forced to come up with more sensational claims—along with names, dates and exotic manifestations. Let’s dispense with the arrogance and empower the average Joes and Janes in the local church so they can encourage people through biblical prophetic ministry.

2. PROMOTING CHARISMATIC CHAOS.

Some people act weird when they prophesy in order to get attention. Some shake in funny ways, speak in affected tones or use archaic “Listen thou to me!” lingo. It’s okay to be passionate, but you don’t need to scare people.

Some have been deceived into thinking that they must shake their heads or scream in order to get their point across. This must have been happening in Corinth, too, but Paul brought swift correction. In New Testament times, pagan prophets spoke in ecstatic speech because they were possessed by demons. But Paul told the Corinthians, “The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets” (1 Cor. 14:32).

You should never be out of control when you deliver a word from God. The fruit of the Holy Spirit includes both gentleness and self-control. If you are prophesying like a banshee, you are either influenced by a religious spirit or you need to be ushered out of the room until someone can calm you down.

3. ALLOWING HARSH PROPHETIC WORDS TO ABUSE PEOPLE. Some people who claim to have the gift of prophecy need to be warned to stop speaking altogether. I know of a church where a lady routinely

gave personal words to people warning of calamities or judgments. She even said that God wanted to kill them! Usually these angry “prophets” claim to know all the unconfessed sins in a person’s life.

New Testament prophecy is specifically used to encourage, comfort and exhort believers (see 1 Cor. 14:3). That rules out condemnation and harsh criticism disguised as a word from God. Our heavenly Father does not speak to His children in a hateful, scolding tone. He is an encourager, even when He brings correction. Remember: Paul said that if you use the gift of prophecy without love, it is useless (see 1 Cor. 13:2)!

4. NOT MENTORING PROPHETS. Today we have forgotten the importance of mentorship. We have Bible colleges for preachers, but we neglect training in other vital areas—including spiritual gifts. We wrongly assume that if a person is blessed with a spiritual gift like prophecy, it just flows without any instruction.

In the Old Testament, there were schools of prophets. Second Kings 6:1-6 tells how Elisha went with some younger prophets to build an expansion to their school, and one of the men lost the blade of the axe he was using to cut down trees for timber.

Because the older prophet was with the younger ones, the head of the axe was recovered by a miracle Elisha performed. I believe miracles are linked to mentorship. When no mentors are around, we foolishly try to cut down trees with an axe handle—and we end up relying on our own good ideas and programs instead of God’s power.

Don’t assume you know everything. Don’t be so eager to go until you grow to maturity.

5. SHUTTING DOWN PROPHECY BECAUSE THE GIFT WAS ABUSED.

Because of the problems I’ve mentioned, some pastors just give up and shut prophecy down. They’d rather have a safe church environment than expose people to any possibility of a prophetic catastrophe.

If this were the wisest thing to do, why didn’t Paul clamp down on all charismatic expression among the Corinthians? Things were wild there—with off-the-wall prophecies, out-of-control prophets and harsh messages.

Yet Paul offered these life-giving words: “Desire earnestly spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1), and he ended his discourse by saying “desire earnestly to prophesy” (v. 39). Shutting down charismatic gifts is unbiblical. Instead of limiting the way God wants to communicate to us, let’s honor the Holy Spirit and learn to exercise prophecy the way He intended. □

We have forgotten the importance of mentorship. We have Bible colleges for preachers, but we neglect training in other vital areas—including spiritual gifts.



YOU CAN SMILE EVEN IN THE STORM

As a leader, you must learn to rejoice even when your world is caving in. You can smile even in hard times!



BY **RANDELL
O. DRAKE**

RANDELL DRAKE serves as bishop of New Horizons Ministries, a network of IPHC churches in Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Kansas. He and his wife, Michelle, live in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. Randell is the author of the book *Just Sayin'* (available from Tate Publishing).

When I heard the recent news of Robin Williams' suicide—and revelations of his long-time battle with depression—I thought about how this amazing comedian brought laughter to so many people. Only those closest to him knew his battle. Most of us only saw his smile and laughed at his humor.

For church leaders and pastors, we often put on a smile to hide our hurts, pain, frustrations and disappointments with life. (Some are even hiding a persistent depression that goes beyond the normal sadness and requires help to heal. If that is you, please reach out and let others know.) But what about that smile you slip on and off as easily as a pair of well-worn shoes? Is it genuine? Or is it fake?

A few months after I was elected the bishop of New Horizons Ministries in the IPHC, my predecessor Jim Eby called me. After a few minutes of exchanging pleasantries and discussing some issues, Jim asked, "Are you still smiling?"

"Huh?" I asked.

"Are you still smiling?" he continued. "Even when difficulties come, when people are unreasonable, challenges are mounting, you can hardly believe the actions of some Christians, or you are having a rough day—are you still smiling? Will you smile, not because you like your circumstances, but because you know God is with you, His joy is in you and you are doing His will? So, I ask you again, are you still smiling?"

I was.

Now I want to ask you. Are you still smiling?

Have you ever been asked, "How are you doing?" And you answered, "Okay, under the circumstances?"

Under the circumstances? We should be on top of our circumstances, not under them. God wants us to overcome our circumstances and challenges through Him. (Again, we don't want to make light of clinical depression. I'm talking about the type of negative thinking that gets us down in the dumps.)

I am 5-foot, 7-inches tall on my “tall days.” In some cultures I might be considered at least above average, but not where I live. I am short—almost Zacchaeus-like. I am vertically challenged! I always wanted to be tall so I could play basketball. Alas, it was not to be. My son, Evan, who is 5-foot, 10-inches tall, got the family recessive tall gene. In our home, he seems tall, but on the basketball court, he seems to be that little sapling in the forest of giant sequoias going up and down the court.

What’s the point, you ask?

I have determined to not let my height determine my joy. I won’t win dunking contests. I will not be shopping in the Big and Tall department. But my height does not determine my spiritual size. We are new creatures in Jesus according to 2 Corinthians 5:17, so I believe I am six feet tall and muscular in my spirit!

How do you see yourself? Will circumstances in your life control you? Will you let your past go and embrace your future?

Consider these scriptures:

“I can do all things through Christ who gives strength to me” (Philippians 4:13 NKJV).

“Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4 NASB).

“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession” (1 Peter 2:9 NIV).

We are made in His image according to Genesis 1:26; we are His workmanship according to Ephesians 2:10 NASB; we are His people according to Psalm 100:3. As we encounter tough times, we can smile, remembering our loving, caring God who directs our paths according to Proverbs 3:5–6 NKJV.

We have much to smile about. If the joy of the Lord is our strength, then why dwell in bitterness or despair and become weak? Eternal joy is not influenced by conditions; temporal happiness is. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit; happiness is a by-product of our situation.

Often, I find myself smiling in the Spirit while struggling in the flesh. Do you? That doesn’t mean that we cannot



I can imagine Peter
smiling as he walked
on water with Jesus.
How about you?
Will you smile
in your storms? I
believe you can.

grieve the losses—especially the loss of loved ones, but even in grief there is hope. That’s not being a hypocrite; that’s being a Spirit-filled, grace motivated, joyful, victorious, empowered child of God!

Still smiling? Yes, I am.

I have resolved to not live out my life defeated. I may have challenges, setbacks, difficulties, troubles and trials, but I am blessed and secure in my relationship with Christ, because nothing can separate me from Him (Romans 8:35–39). We can persevere because God has promised to be with us to the end (Matthew 28:20).

Still smiling? Yes, you can.

Of course, some tests we face are not of our own doing. People make decisions that affect us. We can’t control others, but we can take charge of our own reactions.

Life is bitter sometimes. Will you take lemons and make lemonade? It’s a cliché, but the idea is correct. Making something sweet out of something sour is a victory. Electing to not be under your circumstances, but over them, is a life choice. It isn’t something that we achieve in our own strength, but as we cast our cares upon God—He lifts us up.

One of my favorite Bible stories is

about Peter walking on the water (Matthew 14:28–33). The disciples were in a boat on a lake in a storm. Jesus appeared, walking on the water. Peter made a request. Jesus said, “Come,” and Peter obeyed. He walked on water, took his eyes off Jesus, started to sink and was rescued by Jesus—who took him by the hand and walked with him back to the boat.

I love this story and have heard many sermons on it. The messages usually focus on doubting and faith. Yet, I offer to you some other considerations.

Peter may have momentarily succumbed to doubt while venturing out there, but he was the only one with enough faith to get out of the boat and walk on water. No one else joined him.

Peter walked on water not once but twice. Jesus caught Peter by the hand and they returned to the boat. So, how did they get there?

The Bible doesn’t declare that Jesus dragged Peter through the water back to the boat.

I believe Peter walked on water twice—once without Jesus and once with Jesus. The lesson? It’s better to be holding Jesus’ hand on the stormy sea than in the boat without Him. I think that will preach!

Peter is the only person I know of who gets to have the following inscribed on his tombstone: “I walked on water. How about you?”

So, when you are struggling in your career, job, family life, spiritual walk, friendships, decision-making, consider the importance of taking risks, making faith-filled choices, experiencing the unknown, embarking on a journey to uncharted waters and attempting new things.

Remember the story of Peter and Jesus and consider this: If you never get out of the boat, you will never walk on the water. I can imagine Peter smiling as he walked on water with Jesus. How about you? Will you smile in your storms? I believe you can. □