

Encourage

Inspiration for IPHC Leaders

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We Must Be His **WITNESSES** in Times of **DARKNESS**

The prophets of Israel called the nation to repentance in perilous times of judgment.



BY DOUG
BEACHAM

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Old Testament prophecies usually have a historical and future context. The historical context is often a word of judgment based on the failure to obey God's revealed will, relating to how we treat one another and others. The future context is often a word of hope and restoration.

This is seen in three passages in Isaiah 7, 9 and 11 that relate to the historical situation of Israel in the general time frame of 740-700 B.C. It is important to remember that the Jews were divided against one another following the united monarchy of David and Solomon, which was between 1000 to 922 B.C.

The southern kingdom, under the direct line of David, was composed of two tribes: Judah and Benjamin. The capital was Jerusalem. This kingdom was destroyed in 587 B.C with the Babylonian Conquest.

The northern kingdom was composed of the 10 remaining tribes, and its capital was in Samaria. The northern kingdom is called Israel in the Old Testament historical and prophetic books; it is also known as Samaria, and sometimes Ephraim. This kingdom was destroyed in the Assyrian Conquest of 721 B.C.

The Holy Spirit called His prophets to speak judgment and hope to one or both of these kingdoms. In the north the primary prophets were Elijah, Elisha, Amos and Hosea. In the south the primary prophets were Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk.

The three prophecies in Isaiah 7, 9 and 11 concern Judah during a time when Syria (Damascus), Israel (the northern kingdom) and Assyria were threatening the southern kingdom. These messages from the prophet Isaiah were also promises related to the coming Messiah.

Many pastors will preach from these three passages about the virgin birth of Jesus and Him as Immanuel (Is. 7:14). They will preach that “unto us a child is born ...” from Isaiah 9:6. They will also preach from Isaiah 11:1, which says: “There shall come forth a rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.”

Recently in reading these three passages again, I found myself intrigued by Isaiah 9:1 through 10:4. The prophetic promise of the Messiah, rooted in the historical experience of the 700s B.C., gave great hope for the Jews and for the world. You can hear that hope in “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” (9:2), and “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6).

As I continued to read the rest of the chapter, I heard a change in prophetic tone and saw a repeated refrain of judgment: “For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still” (9:12, 17, 21; 10:4). Four times this refrain of judgment is announced against the northern kingdom of Samaria, or Israel.

You can think of the refrain as a conclusion to four verses of a judgment song. It is doubtful many

churches today sing songs like this! But we must turn our ears to listen as the body of Christ and as His witnesses in our nations.

The first judgment song of Isaiah 9:8-12 is based on “pride and arrogance of heart” (9:9). The Septuagint (Greek) translation of pride is “hubris.” It is a flaw of individuals, and nations, in thinking we are self-sufficient. It is the arrogant idea that we are a law to ourselves, and that we are not bound by God.


The second judgment song of Isaiah 9:12-17 is an indictment of leaders who cause the people to err (9:16). Even though God brings judgment, the people refuse to repent because their leaders fail to repent and rightly discern the judgment upon them. Pride and arrogance have blinded leaders to the true situation.

The third judgment song of Isaiah 9:18-21 reveals that the sins of pride and rebellion have consequences; these sins turn people against one another. The wickedness of the land is like a consuming fire that burns up the land (9:18, 19). Brother turns against brother, people group against people group. The spirit of material and political greed consumes all.

The final judgment song is Isaiah 10:1-4, and it is directed to leaders, politicians and judges “who decree unrighteous decrees, who write misfortune, which they have prescribed to rob the needy of justice, and

to take what is right from the poor of My people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless” (10:1, 2).

The indictment in this passage is clear: The powerful have oppressed the powerless in order to satisfy the greed of their prideful hearts. The



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A place of hope. A people of promise.

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refrain sounds clear after each song: “For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.”

In this year as the IPHC has focused on the important issue of justice, I cannot help but be humbled by what Isaiah wrote about Samaria. The prophets were students of God’s Word (especially Deuteronomy), and they were astute observers of their own people. They were also knowledgeable of the national and international politics of their day.

All of this is brought together in these songs and the divine refrain. There comes a time in the life of a nation when divine judgment cannot be avoided. The evil is too great, too deeply embedded and too pervasive in spirit. Judgment is the only solution.

Our task as God’s people in such an environment is to live righteously, speak courageously, intercede for divine mercy and remember the hope that is in the gospel. That hope speaks to our individual sin and to the sins of the nation to which we are assigned to live as witnesses. □



If we value biblical justice, we must pursue freedom for those who suffer from domestic violence.



BY RUTH
PERRY

RUTH PERRY, a licensed IPHC minister, earned her Masters in Educational Ministries from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. She and her husband, Logan, live and minister in central Virginia, where they are raising their three children. Ruth is passionate about empowering women and girls to find their callings in the kingdom. She blogs at thebeautifulkingdomwarriors.wordpress.com. You can follow her on Facebook at The Beautiful Kingdom Warriors.

Imagine you've pastored a church for many years, and one of your church members, Cindy, comes to meet with you. She describes, through tears, an incident when her husband, Mark, threw her to the ground in a fit of rage. She tells you that when he loses his temper like this, he later apologizes and she forgives him.

"But I walk on eggshells around him," Cindy says. "I just try to quell the tension so it won't boil over again."

You are surprised that Mark loses his temper like this. He's a respected businessman and deacon in your church. Do you counsel Cindy to forgive Mark once again, and suggest they get marriage counseling? Or do you recognize that Cindy is trapped in an abusive marriage and report this incident to the authorities?

You have come face-to-face with the ugly issue of domestic violence. I hope these guidelines will clarify how to respond effectively.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness month in the United States. The sheer impact of domestic violence in our country is staggering. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence says nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused in our country. Also, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have been victims of severe intimate partner violence in their lifetime.

It is no better worldwide. The Global Health Organization estimates that 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence. Yet while the impact of domestic violence is vast, it is rarely discussed in churches.

Because of the shame that accompanies domestic violence, victims typically suffer in silence. Lifeway Research asked Protestant pastors in 2014 how often they addressed the issue. Four out of 10 pastors admitted to rarely or never addressing it, while another 22 percent said they discussed the issue only once a year.

I will never forget the first time I learned of domestic violence in the church. I was a young seminary student, enrolled in a class about ministry to women. Aside

from a handful of female seminarians, most of the students were future pastors' wives auditing the class for free.

When the topic of domestic violence arose, one of the wives told us that she was an EMT, and when she took a job with a local rescue squad, she was received very coldly. Eventually, her colleagues explained that they had responded to so many domestic violence calls from student housing that they hated the seminary community.

Sadly, churches have often enabled domestic violence. But just because we have a high view of marriage doesn't mean we should tolerate abuse. Jeff Crippen, author of *Unholy Charade: Unmasking the Domestic Abuser in the Church*, writes: "When one marriage partner engages in willful, habitual, unrepentant breaking of the marriage vows, what was supposed to be a marriage has become a distorted, evil instrument of slavery."

Here are three ways IPHC churches must respond to domestic violence:

1. LEARN ABOUT THE DYNAMICS OF ABUSE.

Domestic violence occurs because the abuser wants control over others. Ruth Tucker, author of *Black and White Bible, Black and Blue Wife*, was married to a pastor. She says people could easily assume she was married to a mentally disturbed man. "But that was not the case," Tucker writes. "My ex-husband's only outwardly identifiable trait was his strong opposition to women in ministry and equal partnerships in marriage and the accompanying misogyny, though well disguised in public."

There are three stages in abuse that repeat in a cycle, escalating over time. Recognizing this pattern when learning of an incident like Cindy and Mark's will help you identify that abuse is occurring rather than a typical marriage conflict.

Stage 1 is known as "Honeymoon." Initially, an abuser ensnares a victim through "love-bombing," coming off as "too-good-to-be-true." As the cycle continues and abuse escalates, this stage becomes a time of seemingly genuine remorse and repentance on the part of the abuser, with promises and crocodile tears. The victim has renewed hope, and is often encouraged by other Christians to reconcile and to forgive.

Stage 2 is "Tension Building." The abuser withdraws affection and begins nit-picking, isolating the victim and tearing down their self-esteem with name-calling and criticism. Feeling entitled, there is a bottomless pit of needs the victim must meet.

Stage 3 is "Accute Explosion." This is the stage when abuse reaches a boiling point in rage or violence. The abuser rationalizes their behavior, enabling them to escalate their abuse over time. But in order to retain control, they will feign regret and the cycle goes back to the honeymoon stage, starting over.

2. USE YOUR PULPIT TO COUNTER ABUSE

Statistically, it is likely that domestic violence is occurring in families in your church. We must consider how an abuser may hear our sermons and twist them to justify entitlement and control at home.

Not all abusers are male, but a big contributor to domestic violence among Christians is the privilege of men and subjugation of women that is implicitly or explicitly taught in churches.

Pastors must assume there are abusers in their churches, and then consider how an abuser may be hearing their sermons and filtering the Bible's teachings on male headship

"You must boldly proclaim the equality of women in the church, and regularly expose the evil of abuse in your sermons."



and wifely submission through a desire for absolute control and power at home.

You must boldly proclaim the equality of women in the church and regularly expose the evil of abuse in your sermons. Pray publicly for victims of abuse, so that they know you are a safe person to approach for help.

We must also proactively amplify the voices, gifts and callings of women in our churches. If men are holding all the power and authority in our churches, women and girls are unconsciously socialized to see themselves as inferior. It benefits everyone and is vital for the work of the kingdom that women and girls are functioning in their full capacity as image bearers of Christ.

3. BE PREPARED TO RESPOND TO REPORTS OF ABUSE

If we want to convey God's heart for justice and mercy, we must pursue liberation for those caught in the snare of domestic violence. And we must humbly acknowledge when we are out of our depth. It is far easier to believe a "repentant" abuser than to do the hard work of helping a victim escape and get back on their feet. Here are a few steps recommended by Pastor Jeff Crippen in his book:

- Take any kind of abuse seriously. Justice and protection for victims should be our priority.
- Recognize that anyone, no matter how well-respected or likeable, can be guilty of abuse.
- Before allegations of abuse arise, be prepared by forming alliances with local domestic violence shelters and counseling centers in your community.
- When a charge of abuse comes, believe the victim. Shame and fear hinder victims from speaking, so it is vital they be believed. False reports are very rare.
- Report the accusation to law enforcement. Allow the authorities to investigate and let the chips fall where they may.

Let's pray that God will give all IPHC churches the wisdom and courage needed to confront domestic violence and to share Christ's love and healing to victims. □



Bivocational Ministry Is a **JUGGLING ACT**

More pastors today are in the marketplace. These tips will help you balance all your responsibilities.

It's not easy being a bi-vocational pastor. People always ask me how I have the time to pastor a church and work a full-time job. If you happen to be in this position, or if your pastor is bi-vocational, you may wonder how a church leader can have a full-time career while running a ministry, maintaining a healthy marriage and managing a family. I can tell you it is possible!

I didn't plan to become a pastor. I started in leadership at my local church at age 18. Then I studied criminal justice in college and I was hired as a law enforcement officer by age 22. Pastoring was not even on my radar.

I got married at 24, had my first child at 27 and then went to Bible school at 29. My purpose for enrolling in theological training was simply to get a deeper knowledge of my faith and the Word of God. But I continued my spiritual training on various levels through correspondence classes—all while working the midnight shift on patrol. (I studied between 3 a.m. and 5 a.m.!)

I was finally ordained in 2009, and I served as an associate pastor. But recently I felt God calling me to take the senior pastor role at the church I've attended my entire life. Pastoring became my "advocation" rather than just a vocation. By "advocation" I mean I have a passion to lead people into spiritual depth, train leaders and impact my region for Christ.

This passion is what keeps me going. It is what drives me to endure the hard work and the long days. My 27 years on the police force became a blessing. I realize now that I don't need a full-time salary from my church, and my church is not financially burdened with my insurance. I have peace knowing that we can use church funds to reach our community rather than just paying for my support.

Many of my pastor friends are or have been bi-vocational pastors. Some have full-time careers and are pastors on the side; some own their own businesses; and some are full-time pastors who supplement their income in various ways to help the church financially. I see more and more church leaders following this model today.

I've discovered that most bi-vocational pastors often hold many of the same characteristics. Here are a few of them:

By **RAY
BUCCIARELLI**

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- ▲ They are in it because of a true spiritual calling, not necessarily for the income or the position. They can hold their heads head high. They have overcome the stigma that they are not full-time pastors. And they can't be labeled hirelings.
- ▲ They identify with the apostle Paul, who made tents while effectively planting churches. (see Acts 18:3).
- ▲ They become great delegators because they don't have time to do everything. And with this mindset, they are keen to train the younger generation. They are not as tempted to hold on to their positions.
- ▲ They understand flexibility. Their marketplace and business knowledge is a constant reminder that social and technological trends change quickly. This knowledge helps them keep things creative so they aren't afraid to think outside the box.
- ▲ Because they tend to be open to new ideas, they aren't afraid to bring the church into the community or marketplace. Because they have secular jobs, they are constantly thinking of ways to interact with non-Christians.
- ▲ Because they work in the community, it's likely they will remain loyal to one church, rather than looking for the next job with a bigger and better church.
- ▲ Because they are hard workers, they are great time managers. But on the flip side, they may also have the tendency to be workaholics.
- ▲ They often feel conflicted because pastoring is their spiritual calling but not their vocation. They most likely would be willing to be in ministry fulltime if the finances allowed it.

According to the 2015 Faith Communities Today survey, fewer than two-thirds (62.2 percent) of U.S. churches have a full-time pastor. That's down from 71.4 percent in 2010. Yet most people assume that if you are a pastor, it is your full-time job. Based on current trends, we will have more bi-vocational pastors in the next season. Here are five practical ways you can help your pastor if he or she is bi-vocational:

1. CONSIDER THEIR WORKLOAD.

The typical bi-vocational pastor has a marriage and a family to maintain as well a church and a career to manage. They do it without complaining or discussing the challenges.

This often means that they don't have a lot of extra time for hospital visits, counseling, preparing their weekly sermons or lunch meetings. It can also leave them feeling lonely, discouraged and inadequate for the position they've been called to. If not careful, this will be a strain physically, emotionally and spiritually.

2. RECOGNIZE AND ENCOURAGE THEM.

Simply being aware of the challenges bi-vocational leaders face is a major step in helping them. It means the world to a pastor when he or she hears that you appreciate the extra work and effort they are putting forth to make the church work and keep the people strong in their walk with Jesus.

3. STEP UP AND SUPPORT THEM.

What can you do to help fill in the gaps at the church? Offer your assistance joyfully and be a co-laborer with your pastor. Don't forget to be kind to their spouse and children.

Ministry can be very hard on a family. The children see how much effort, time and sacrifice it takes for their parent to pastor. When they see people who are disrespectful and non-supportive, it can embitter them to the church and scar them for a lifetime with deep hurts and regrets. Don't be that person. Help guard your pastor and his family from caustic people.

4. PRAY FOR THEM.

This is one of the most important things you can do. It can be extremely comforting to hear a parishioner say: "Pastor, I pray for you and your family daily". Those are sweet words that melt away my doubts and let me know my brothers and sisters in Christ are carrying the load with me.

5. ALLOW THEM TO TAKE A BREAK.

Ministry is spiritually draining, and ministers need to be replenished. Help them plan a vacation from the church that coincides with time off from their

"Whether they are full time pastors or bi-vocational pastors, we should be honoring those who are called by God to lead us."

job. They need the rest, and their families need time with them.

No pastor wants to tell their congregation that they need a break. When another church leader lovingly and publicly offers for their pastor to take a vacation, it shows tremendous love and support.

May I even suggest that you collect a special "love offering" to make sure they are assured their congregation is sending them with a full blessing. Besides, it's more about the pastors building their marriages and keeping the family strong than it is about getting away from the church. You want your pastor to have a strong marriage and family, right? Support them in making that happen.

Of course this is not a concise list, but it begins the awareness that most pastors work diligently to guard, feed and encourage their congregations. Whether they are full-time pastors or bi-vocational pastors, we should be honoring those who are called by God to lead us.

A pastor is worthy of honor, regardless of whether he gets his primary paycheck from a secular job or his church. Paul told Timothy: "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" (1 Tim. 5:17-18, NKJV).

Are you juggling one or two jobs while leading a church? It's not an easy feat. But as a bi-vocational pastor I can promise you that my ministry is easier when I know the people around me are fully supportive. Please keep the prayers and the encouragement coming! It means more than anyone will ever know. □

Are You Willing to **CHANGE** to Reach Today's Generation?



You can't effectively reach younger people if you're not flexible. Here are seven steps you must take.



BY BEN
CRISP

BEN CRISP was called to ministry at the age of 10. He pursued this call fervently throughout his teen years, and then he attended the IPHC's Emmanuel College, where he obtained his B.A. in Christian Ministry. He then obtained an M. Div. from Regent University, where he met his wife, Tiffany Crisp. He is now pursuing his Doctor of Strategic Leadership-Ecclesial Leadership at Regent University's School of Business and Leadership. Benjamin is the lead pastor of [Reflection Church](#) in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He can be reached at bcrisp@reflection.church.

Recently a friend and mentor recommended I read *Canoeing the Mountains*—an exceptional book by Tod Bolsinger about Christian leadership in our changing world. A statement from the author captivated me: *Yesterday's solutions are today's problems*. The structures, systems and processes that brought past success may be the very things that hinder our efforts to reach of millennials, Generation Z and beyond.

I'm sure it's no surprise that churches today find it difficult to appeal to younger people. We are outdated and out of sync with the emerging generation in many ways. What changes are required?

As a millennial pastor, I believe there are seven specific steps we must take to renovate our churches. Only through renovation can we remove religious systems and mindsets that hinder the spread of the gospel.

1. WE MUST HONOR.

I've heard pastors blame Millennials and Generation Z for so many things. Our sacred pulpits have been turned into bully pulpits against the younger generation. I've heard many disrespectful jabs at their work ethic, their dreams and their callings.

Please don't say, "those Millennials are..." It's inappropriate to make blanket statements about group identity. Just because you are born in a particular generation doesn't mean you adopt the group identity. These generalizations are judgmental.

The next Billy Graham or Reinhard Bonnke may be listening to you. May we never pour cold water on the fiery dreams of younger Christians. Paul exhorted the believers in Rome to "outdo one another in showing honor" (Rom 12:10). When we foster a culture of honor toward younger generations, we affirm their dignity and unique contributions. They will want to come back to our church.

2. WE MUST BE HONEST.

Social media has changed our perceptions of each other. Younger generations constantly compare their lives through the lens of social media highlight reels. Honesty and authenticity are lacking in this filtered environment.

It's like a breath of fresh air when pastors are straightforward in their communication and authentic about their shortcomings. I'm not advocating for sermons to become

unfiltered counseling sessions. But I am advocating for a culture of honest teaching that doesn't hide certain doctrines until newer families have been coming for six months.

Pastors should be willing to be vulnerable about their flaws. We don't have to act perfect. Jesus is the Savior; we aren't. Our preaching shouldn't turn us into celebrity preachers so people will rave about us. Instead, our preaching should make all generations say, "Isn't Christ wonderful!"

3. WE MUST PREPARE.

As Spirit-led people, we tend to steer away from planning. Yet preparation is the key that unlocks spiritual spontaneity. If we want to feel the fresh wind of heaven, we must offer our preparation to the Lord and watch as He transforms it into something beautiful.

God calls us to take the harvest seriously. We must prayerfully plan ahead so that we can market the incredible initiatives our churches offer. The younger generation likes to plan ahead and tends to be less spontaneous due to the busyness of life. If we want to see younger generations involved, we must provide a heads up.

Many churches are attempting to create a family feel that moves beyond a 60-minute show. However, starting services late, not having systems for follow-up, not having smooth transitions, not knowing the words to songs, and not having the sound mixed well does not provide a family feel. All of these problems reflect a lack of preparation. To young families visiting our churches, our lack of preparation sends a message that we don't care.

4. WE MUST BUILD INTER-GENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS.

I'll never forget attending Free Chapel, in Gainesville, Georgia, while I was at Emmanuel College. Pastor Jentzen Franklin stood at the door after every service to shake everyone's hand. Yet many churches have created systems that keep people away from the pastor.

No church should get so large that its leaders stop caring for people. If we aren't careful, we find ourselves loving the crowds but disliking the individuals who make up the crowd. Younger generations are craving relationship and attention.

People often joke about young people being obsessed with hanging out at coffee shops. Have you ever considered that this may just be an attempt at meaningful conversation and relationship? If you are older, please take a Millennial or Gen-Z out for coffee. Share your story. Listen to theirs. You may be shocked by what you have in common.

Older people have so much to offer to the younger generation. Please don't see retirement through the egocentric eyes of Western society. View it through the eyes of the kingdom. Take that free time and begin building relationship with younger generations. We need you.

5. WE MUST OFFER SPIRITUAL DEPTH.

Carey Nieuwhof, a pastor and best-selling author, recently had a roundtable discussion with two mega-church pastors. They discussed how younger generations are moving away from the attractional church model to the charismatic church model. Why is that?

Young people are tired of the 60-minute show filled with gimmicks and a TED talk. We can get that from YouTube. Young Christians today crave a deeper spiritual experience. As Pentecostals, let us not tuck away our greatest recruiting tool in the backroom or in small groups. Let the gifts of the Holy Spirit flow. The Holy Spirit is the one who points people to Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is the most attractional influence in your church. For too long, we've attempted to reach the world with one hand tied behind our back. The fear of man has crippled our willingness to allow the Spirit to manifest His power. It's time to break off fear and welcome the flow. Let us jump into the river of God and watch as younger generations are transformed.

6. WE MUST PROVIDE AN ANCIENT-FUTURE EXPERIENCE.

Technology changes so fast that what was advanced five-years ago is nearly

obsolete. New updates are available for apps almost daily. With so much change, younger generations long for something that is lasting.

We have a 2,000-year-old well of church history and spiritual practices to

"Our message never changes, and we must never compromise. ... However, the methodologies we embrace are always evolving. If they don't, we will become an old wineskin."

drink from. Let us not be so consumed with the next trend that we miss out on our beautiful past. Don't forsake celebrating Advent, Lent and Pentecost. Don't forsake liturgy. Don't forsake benedictions or the Eucharist. Don't forsake the extraordinary spiritual rhythms of ancient church fathers and mothers.

We must reframe these ancient practices while

remaining tethered to their beauty and historicity. Let us masterfully communicate the longstanding beauty of God's gospel and Christ's Church.

7. WE MUST BE OPEN AND FLEXIBLE.

Jesus shifted the very fabric of Jewish tradition. His ministry changed the name of their religious affiliation. Jesus' ministry changed the day and the place where they worshipped. He also changed their dietary restrictions and their expectation of inner purity. Jesus challenged nearly every presupposition the Jews held dear.

Let us not be so locked into old processes, systems and methods that we miss out on the new doors God is opening for the spread of His gospel. Our message never changes, and we must never compromise. We never move away from the authority of Scripture. However, the methodologies we embrace are always evolving. If they don't, we become an old wineskin.

We cannot think we have "figured out" church and church growth. We must always be open. We must always be reading, learning and listening to the whisper of the Holy Spirit. This will allow us to successfully navigate our ever-changing world. When we embrace change, we demonstrate our commitment to younger generations and our love for them. ■

The **10** Biggest Mistakes to Avoid in Mentoring



If you want to impact the next generation,
you must develop the art of effective discipleship.



BY J. LEE
GRADY

J. LEE GRADY is an author, traveling minister and former editor of *Charisma* magazine. Author of several books including *10 Lies the Church Tells Women* and *Set My Heart on Fire*, Lee leads The Mordecai Project—a missionary organization that focuses on bringing the healing of Christ to women who are abused and marginalized. Lee has been ordained in the IPHC since 2000, and he and his wife, Deborah, live in LaGrange, Georgia. You can learn more about his ministry at leegrady.com.

Back in May of this year I took a two-week ministry trip to Singapore, where I preached in eight different churches. I enjoyed every opportunity to speak to crowds, but the most fulfilling part of the journey was not the public meetings. What brought the most satisfaction was mentoring the five young men who accompanied me on the trip—Alberto, Hani, Sireesh, Billy and Peter.

The most satisfying moment of the trip occurred on a Sunday night, when I watched Alberto pray for a group of people at the conclusion of a service. I've been mentoring Alberto for two years, so I was thrilled to see him stepping out to invest in others. This is the power of mentoring: When you spend quality time with a disciple, they will grow spiritually and eventually become mentors themselves.

Mentoring is a fundamental biblical concept, but it has become a lost art in today's megachurch scene. Moses mentored Joshua, Naomi mentored Ruth, Elijah mentored Elisha and Paul poured his life into Timothy. But today we prefer an impersonal, assembly-line approach to training rather than the more time-consuming, one-on-one strategy.

I've made mentoring my priority because I believe God prefers quality over quantity. Even though Jesus did lots of crowd ministry, He devoted most of His time to training His core group. And He did such a good job of preparing His small band of disciples that He told them they would do "greater works" than He did (see John 14:12). An effective mentor allows his disciple to stand on his shoulders and surpass him.

After I left Singapore, my disciple Alberto was inspired to mentor some of the new converts he prayed for in that Sunday night service meeting. Then he begged me for some coaching. He specifically asked if I could create a list of mistakes to avoid in mentoring. I am sharing that list here, knowing that we all need to do a better job of investing in younger believers:

1. Don't ignore communication from your disciple.

Discipleship requires your time. Answer calls or texts and make sure your disciple knows you are accessible. The young people I mentor know that I consider them a priority. I may not be able to drop everything the moment they contact me, but they know I will get back to them because I value the relationship.

2. Don't act disgusted if they confess serious sin.

True emotional healing requires transparency and repentance. But you must show mercy and sensitivity when your disciple decides to bare his or her soul. Don't act shocked ("You did what?!") when they admit their weaknesses.

Biblical restoration requires gentleness, as well as a realization that you are capable of making the same mistakes others do. Galatians 6:1 says: "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each on looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted."

3. Don't ever break confidence.

I've met Christians who closed their hearts and even stopped going to church because a pastor or a mentor blabbed about confessions they shared privately. If the person you are mentoring trusts you enough to admit their deepest struggles, be a faithful steward with that information. It is not yours to share with anyone else. And never, ever use confidential confessions in a sermon!

4. Don't baby your disciples.

A friend of mine who is involved in campus ministry told me recently he believes university students today are more emotionally vulnerable than students from previous generations. Many of them need emotional support animals to handle anxiety; others are addicted to prescription medicines because they can't cope. Some of this is because of family breakdown, or because of overprotective "helicopter parenting."

You must treat your disciples as adults. Don't coddle them or spoil them. The apostle Paul said: "When I became a man I put away childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11b). You'll never lead people to spiritual health if you treat them like juveniles. Expect growth and maturity.

5. Don't avoid confrontation.

Young people today have been told by high school teachers, university professors, politicians, peers and even ministers that morality is relative. Our culture preaches a distorted form of tolerance that requires us to accept any and all viewpoints, even those that are unbiblical.

In this era of "hyper-grace" theology, some Christians have backed away of any form of tough love because they're afraid of appearing narrow-minded, legalistic or politically incorrect. You must get over this fear. If you truly love your disciples, you will lovingly but firmly correct them when necessary.

"Stick with your disciples during good times and bad. Speak words of life and encouragement. Love them, forgive them and never stop praying for them."

6. Don't control or manipulate.

You are not running your disciples' lives. Your job is to help them hear from God for themselves—not to hear from God for them. Always point them to Jesus, not to your opinions.

7. Don't be possessive.

Your goal as a mentor is to serve your disciple and to help him or her grow. But you are not the only person they need in their lives. Leave room for friends and other pastors or mentors, and don't be jealous if they go to someone else for help.

I am often reminded that the paralyzed man in Mark 2 was carried by four men. Those men cared so much about their friend that they tore the roof off the house and lowered the man into the crowd so Jesus could see him (see Mark 2:1:12). It took four guys to help that crippled man. Don't ever think you are the only person who can help someone!

8. Don't allow the relationship to become codependent.

Don't allow your disciples to develop an unhealthy reliance upon you. And never try to get your emotional needs met in a discipleship relationship.

9. Don't ever exploit your disciples financially.

Over the years I've met pastors or mentors who asked their mentees to join their "downline" in a network marketing business or to invest in buying clubs or foreign currency schemes. This is a huge mistake. Using a mentoring relationship to enrich yourself contradicts everything Jesus said about purity of heart.

When the apostle Paul said goodbye to his disciples on the beach near Ephesus, he told them: "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes" (see Acts 20:33). Paul could hold up his head and say that he never abused anyone financially. His motives for discipleship were pure. This must be your testimony as well.

10. Don't ever give up on your disciples.

When Jesus first met Simon, He changed his name to Cephas, which means "rock" (see John 1:42). Jesus was speaking in faith, because Peter certainly did not act like a rock most of the time! He was unstable and erratic, and after following Christ for three years he ended up denying Jesus.

Yet Jesus did not kick Peter to the curb after he denied Him. No, He didn't disqualify Peter for his sin—He forgave him and restored him. Jesus continued to see Peter through eyes of grace, just as He had first seen him when they met near the shores of Galilee.

Stick with your disciples during good times and bad, even if they have serious moral failures. Speak words of life and encouragement. Love them, forgive them and never stop praying for them. Be a mentor for a lifetime. □



A worthwhile investment: Lee Grady with (L to R) Billy, Alberto and Sireesh in Singapore.