

Just Call Me Jack: Pastor Hayford's heart, humility & authenticity allowed the Holy Spirit to shine through

The San Fernando Valley northwest of downtown Los Angeles is bordered by a quartet of mountain ranges that serve as the boundary of the huge fertile plain. Once home to thousands of acres of orange and lemon trees, after World War II most of the citrus groves gave way to middle class neighborhoods, parks and shopping centers.

It was in this sprawling suburban enclave known by Angelenos as simply "the Valley" that, in 1969, a young pastor named Jack Hayford found himself sitting at a stoplight in his car, not far from a small, struggling congregation called First Foursquare Church of Van Nuys. God spoke to him, confirming his calling to the church. Little did Hayford and his wife, Anna, know that the Lord would soon plant and root them there to nurture and expand a ministry beyond their wildest dreams.

Hayford had graduated top of his class from LIFE Bible College (now Life Pacific University) in 1956, where he had met his future wife, a clear-minded-and sharp-witted-Nebraskan named Anna Smith. Upon graduation, the man who would become his spiritual father, Dr. Vincent Bird, offered them an assignment at a small church in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The church had barely a dozen members when Hayford—only weeks short of his 22nd birthday—took over as pastor in May 1956. Though the church rarely managed more than 50 people in attendance, it was here in the heartland that Hayford developed his precise, passionate preaching style. Reflecting upon his time in Indiana, he later quipped, "It was good to be nobody."

After four years, Hayford and his wife were invited to return to his native California, where the young pastor—born in Los Angeles and raised in Oakland—stepped into a new role as national youth ministries director for his denomination. During this season, his skills as a preacher garnered invitations to preach throughout California, including Angelus Temple, the denomination's flagship church and the former pulpit of its founder, Aimee Semple McPherson.

Though Hayford was becoming a known name in the Foursquare movement, he had only a modest salary to support his growing family (two children, Rebecca and Jack II, and soon-to-come Mark and Christa). Additional income came through honorariums from preaching in churches throughout the West.

Hayford later recounted his emotional entanglement with another woman, which occurred during this time. The relationship snuck up on him, a deeply emotional connection that had him thinking he loved both his wife and the other woman. Though the relationship never turned physical, he wrestled with his conflicted heart and cried out to God. He came home at night and lay on the carpet, worshipping God and praying in tongues for deliverance. He finally confessed the inappropriate attachment to Anna, which devastated her.

Though the young minister felt enormous relief and spiritual breakthrough, it took two long, hard years for trust to be fully restored between him and his young bride. This ordeal—as horrible and traumatic as it was—also crystallized within Hayford two life-altering revelations: 1) spiritual warfare is real, and we must combat our adversary with all the tools God has given to us; and 2) the use of his prayer language (praying in tongues) was a key weapon in breaking the emotional prison that encircled him. He later wrote in his journal that “the heavens were opened to me after passing the test.”

Defying Pentecostal Stereotypes

Shortly after this intense episode, and with renewed commitment and focus, a new opportunity presented itself. Hayford became dean of students at LIFE Bible College. But both he and Anna knew that their primary calling was to the pastorate—so they prayed and waited for God’s timing. He loved his work with students at the Bible college. But he and Anna felt the Holy Spirit confirming the 1969 pastoral move to the interim position at First Foursquare Church of Van Nuys.

What started off as a temporary assignment at a little church of 18 people soon became a firm and permanent calling. In Hayford’s authorized biography, *Pastor Jack* (David C. Cook, 2020), written by his longtime friend and colleague S. David Moore, Hayford said: “The phrase *On The Way* focused on the fact we are all moving forward in ministry—that is, a congregation available to be Jesus’ life wherever we go and in whatever way He directs.” The name also referenced the location of the church building on Sherman Way, Moore points out. Most importantly, it affirmed that Jesus is *the Way*.

Another significant moment in the early days came in September 1971, recounts Moore, during a vision in which Hayford saw “an alignment between the throne of God described by John [in the book of Revelation], and the church he pastored on Sherman Way in Van Nuys. One seemed to blend into the other: vast multitudes of praising creatures in John’s vision overlapping with the praising people of The Church On The Way. As Hayford saw it, the entire San Fernando Valley ... became an amphitheater of praise surrounding God’s throne.”

Growing inside Hayford was an increasing revelation of the power of worship combined with prayer, focused biblical teaching and real-world application. He was keenly aware that the early days of Pentecostalism were marked by emotionalism and—at times—less than astute Bible teaching. Make no mistake, however: Hayford was a staunch Pentecostal who believed in the power of prayer, healing, the gift of tongues, evangelism and the application of strong, biblical teaching. Moore puts it

well: "While never apologizing for his Pentecostal beliefs, his public ministry has defied Pentecostal stereotypes."

Rather than shouts and gesticulations, Hayford brought warmth, accessibility and a conversational style to the pulpit. He embraced all the gifts, explaining them in ways neither strange nor spooky. Just the opposite: raising one's hands in worship had biblical heft; speaking in tongues was a natural—but not exclusive—expression of worship. Slowly but surely—with the hippie movement in full swing and the cultural revolution underway—The Church On The Way drew people from all across LA. The Jesus Movement brought droves of young people to the church, and hundreds were accepting Christ. Celebrities such as Pat Boone, Dean Jones, Craig T. Nelson and Kathy Lee Gifford would at one time or another call the church their home.

Seeking Intimacy and Unity

By the mid-'70s the church was well on its way to establishing itself as a strong spiritual harbor in the chaotic seas of Los Angeles. The congregation looked like the body of Christ—Black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern—and all were welcome. Hayford worked hard to establish a sanctuary where Jesus' love could be fully sensed, understood and practiced—to be taken back out on the streets of the Valley and beyond. Moore captures this in *Pastor Jack*: "Reality, as Hayford came to grasp it, is that God works simultaneously in the visible and the invisible, in the physical and the spiritual The church at worship became an expression of the power of the kingdom of God with the literal presence of God in the middle of its sanctuary."

Daniel Brown echoes this sentiment. He started attending The Church On The Way in the mid-'70s while doing post-graduate work at UCLA. In 1978, Hayford invited Brown to join the staff as college pastor—a ministry that flourished during Brown's six years at the church, before he and his wife, Pamela, were

commissioned to start The Coastlands, a church in Aptos, California, that he pastored for 22 years.

“Jack rejected the idea that only certain people were called into ministry—he believed we are all called,” Brown says. For him, the indelible mark Hayford made on the body of Christ was to model “what it is to be wholly Spirit-filled in thought, mind and heart. The Holy Spirit had unimpeded access into virtually all of Jack’s facilities.”

This intimacy with Christ caused a deep self-awareness. Hayford was a brilliant preacher and orator who was confident in his skills, which could have easily led to hubris. His organic, daily relationship with Christ, however, produced a sometimes-surprising humility.

In the spring of 1998, my wife, Suzanne, and I were attending a marriage retreat through our church, South Coast Fellowship of Ventura, California. Our pastor, John Huffman, hosted the retreat in Pismo Beach, California, and Hayford and his wife made the three-hour drive to speak one evening. Afterward, we all went out to dinner.

During our animated conversation, Hayford made what I thought was an innocent comment about someone in his church. I had all but forgotten it when around 11 that night, the phone in our hotel room rang.

“Kyle, this is Jack. I need to apologize to you and Suzanne for my thoughtless comment this evening. It was insensitive, dishonoring and wrong. Do you forgive me?”

That was the essence of Hayford. Brown sums it up well: “There were no partitions left in his heart or mind ... he’d turn on a dime in repentance.”

I remember chatting with Hayford about the divide between the various branches of evangelicalism—particularly between conservatives and Pentecostals/charismatics. While sitting in

his office one day, he chuckled and said, “I try not to get offended when a well-meaning Christian leader says, ‘For a charismatic, your theology is so sound, Pastor Jack!’” He would laugh good-naturedly and move on, but I sensed a deeper hurt. While Hayford always extended magnanimity to leaders of other streams and denominations, the treatment was not always reciprocated.

I believe this truism bothered him not on a personal level but as someone who felt called to serve the *entire* body of Christ. For him, there was no separation. The kingdom was one, and the followers of Christ were His bride—not His harem. Therefore, the sadness (perhaps grief) he felt—though not expressed publicly—had to do with Jesus’ people being one, working as one, as He prayed in John 17.

Seeing Jesus as ‘Majesty’

Bill Greig III ran Gospel Light for many years, as had his father and grandfather. For more than four decades, Gospel Light’s book arm, Regal Books, served as Hayford’s primary publisher. Hayford and Anna shared many meals with Greig and his wife, Rhonni, and a close friendship ensued. Greig says, “During the hardest season of our lives, the Hayfords invited us to their home for a meal together, and a time of prayer, encouragement and vision. At a time when it seemed all was lost, Jack and Anna lifted us into the presence of His majesty.”

And so it also was for veteran Christian publishing leader Kim Bangs, current editorial director for Chosen Books/Baker Publishing Group. Over the three-plus decades that she knew Hayford, she recalls, “Pastor Jack and Anna called me family. It was shocking then and still is today.” She adds, “His passion for what he felt was the next book to write inspired me to listen to the Holy Spirit and respond accordingly. In one of our meetings, his book *Worship His Majesty* was born.”

That's a defining word for Hayford: *majesty*. Not only did he pen the timeless worship song "Majesty"—along with more than 500 other songs—but it was the posture he always took with Jesus. He saw Him as King; as his true Lord and sovereign. And when tragedy struck the life of his family and church, he maintained the same posture.

Lana Duim started attending The Church On The Way in 1976 and joined the staff. In October 2003, not long after Hayford's son-in-law Bauer assumed leadership, he died of an aneurysm.

Hayford was then serving as chancellor of The King's University (formerly The King's Seminary), which he and the church had founded. Duim says that at this time, Hayford stepped back into the role of senior pastor of the church.

"The weight, the responsibility and the call were immense," she says. "The death of his son-in-law was heartbreaking and tragic. Yet, Jack's commitment to go through and press on to answer the call of the Lord was incredible."

The expression of this love and brokenness in Christ spilled into neighborhoods across the Southland. Hayford and his team partnered with LA's Black and Hispanic leaders after the LA riots and the Rodney King beating. He became friends with such respected area leaders as Bishop Charles Blake, Christian community development icon Dr. John Perkins and others.

My first experience with Hayford occurred in 1976 as a brand new 14-year-old Christian from nearby Glendale. I was blown away by the power of the worship at The Church on the Way and soaked up his teaching like a sponge.

After high school, I attended UCLA, and my friends and I would drive over the hill from Westwood to hear Hayford preach. Several years later, I began what would become a three-decade professional relationship with him. As the publisher at Regal Books (Gospel Light), in Ventura, I served as his editor on several of his titles, including *I'll Hold You in Heaven*, a

book for those who have lost an infant child, which later ministered personally to my wife and me.

One of the most memorable nights of my life occurred during Christmastime 1995 when the Hayfords gathered with a handful of other couples at their home in the Valley. My wife and I, along with Greig, his wife, Rhonni; Greig's brother Gary and wife, Katherine; broke bread with John and Carol Wimber, Peter and Doris Wagner, John and Julie Dawson, John and Vera Mae Perkins, and Greig's parents, Bill Greig Jr.—president emeritus of GL—and Doris. After dinner, we gathered around the piano to hear two spiritual giants sing their famous worship songs: Hayford sang "Majesty," and Wimber sang "Isn't He?" That night we were simply brothers and sisters worshipping our beloved King.

Losing his beloved Anna to pancreatic cancer in early 2017 devastated Hayford. That's why I was so happy to hear that love found him again in 2018 when he married his second wife, Valerie Lamire, his constant companion during his final few years. His legacy lives on in the powerful ministry at The Church On The Way under the dynamic leadership of pastors Tim and Deborah Clark along with Doug and Christa Andersen.

Non-Pentecostal pastors have called Hayford one of the greatest Pentecostal leaders of the past century. I would agree—but remove the word "Pentecostal." Although he embraced Pentecostalism, he was one of the church's greatest leaders and teachers, period—regardless of denomination or movement. I await the day when I kneel with him before the greatest King of all and, together, we worship His majesty.

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