

Healers of the Wounded Soul

John and Paula Sandford, founders of the Elijah House ministry, are pioneers of the inner-healing movement. They paid a high price to carry their message to the church

John Sandford is a man not easily run out of town. He fights back like a native of the Wild West he hails from, using weapons that never go out of style-bullets of blessing and arrows of forgiveness.

From his earliest days as a pastor John Sandford became so experienced in addressing both internal and external battles that his insights eventually formed the foundation of his celebrated Elijah House-a prayer and counseling ministry focused on evangelizing unbelievers through inner healing. But the insights didn't come easily.

Members of his congregation in a wild mining town in Idaho tried to oust him from the pulpit several times after he confronted sin, encouraged people to take personal responsibility for their thoughts and actions, and prayed for both physical and inner healing. But John stayed on, practicing an attitude of forgiveness mixed with dogged determination not to let anyone run him out of town except the Lord. Eventually, other members of the town rose up against John and his family as well.

"Back in 1965, ours was a rough town that contained five houses of prostitution," John explains. "Through the prayers of a lot of people, the government closed the houses down, and the national television crews came to report on the story.

"Their evening news clip would have showed store owners saying

the closure of the brothels will hurt their business and women will be raped on the streets. But when they got to my church and asked me what I thought and I said, 'Hallelujah, it's an answer to prayer,' that became the evening news clip."

As a result of John's prime-time commentary, the Sandfords' children were harassed. But despite the persecution, John and Paula determined to stay until they had heard from God. During their nine years in that pastorate they learned many of the scriptural truths they later wrote about-truths that unlock hearts to the processes of inner healing and transformation.

The Elijah Task

In 1973, God released the Sandfords to move to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, to launch Elijah House.

"We had no idea what we were getting into," John told Charisma.

He says they knew only that they were called to an Elijah task: "to turn the hearts of fathers to their children and children to their fathers in the spirit of repentance" and "to restore all things in preparation for the return of the Lord."

For many years they sought to heal families as a pastoral counseling team. They then launched into training others and releasing them to become healers in their own churches and communities.

In their spare time, between changing diapers-and planes-they wrote books.

Their first counseling-oriented book, *Restoring the Christian Family* (1980), established their reputations as Christian

counselors. Their second book, *The Transformation of the Inner Man*, cemented their role as pioneers in inner healing despite the challenging concepts it contained. This book has become a classic, having sold nearly 2 million copies since its publication in 1982. It was followed by *Healing the Wounded Spirit* in 1985. The Sandfords have written 14 books to date.

Because of the success of their books and the desperate need for healing prayer in the lives of believers worldwide, Elijah House grew. It now sits on 72 acres in Post Falls, Idaho, and contains a large administrative and training house, several small ministry cottages staffed by well-trained, seasoned prayer ministers, and some accommodations for those who fly in for weeklong prayer-ministry intensives.

There are Elijah House prayer-ministry centers in several other countries as well, including Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Austria, Finland and South Africa. Many missionaries are using the Sandfords' books and prayer-ministry model to bring transformation and sanctification to new believers. The ministry provides video schools to train prayer ministers and hosts about four live schools per year in the U.S., usually at the Post Falls headquarters.

As a result of John and Paula's ministry, inner healing has ceased to be looked upon as a questionable adjunct to faith. Instead, it is recognized as necessary for continuing maturation in the Lord as well as one of the primary means the Holy Spirit employs for the sanctification and transformation of every Christian, as John wrote in his more recent book *Elijah Among Us*.

Well-established ministers hail the Sandfords as the forerunners who paved the way for the proliferation of inner-

healing ministry today. "John and Paula Sandford are true pioneers in the fields of inner healing and deliverance," say Peter and Doris Wagner of Global Harvest Ministries.

In June, hundreds of people whose lives have been touched by the Sandfords' ministry gathered in Spokane, Washington, for the 30th anniversary celebration of Elijah House. The attendees included a mix of people from different denominational backgrounds and various ethnicities, both old and young, well-known prophetic ministers and lay believers. The celebration was symbolic of the Sandfords' call to turn the hearts of fathers and children toward one another-reconciling not just families but also diverse religious and ethnic groups.

Pioneers in the Prophetic

In addition to restoring inner-healing ministry to the church, the Sandfords are also credited with bringing to the body of Christ an understanding of the emerging prophetic movement. Three of John's books could be considered a trilogy of must reading for prophets and the church at large.

The Elijah Task (1977) predicted the rise of the prophetic movement and dispelled the sense of isolation prophetic ministers were feeling. Ten years later, John Wimber showcased many prophetic ministers during a conference held in Denver, launching them into prominence overnight. Now prophetic ministry, like inner healing, has become an integral part of charismatic Christianity.

In the sequel, Elijah Among Us (2002), John provides a more mature description of the prophetic office-a role that goes

beyond merely giving personal words to edifying the body of Christ through teaching, intercession and prophetic proclamation. His *Healing the Nations* (2000), though an earlier publication, could be considered the third book of the trilogy as it covers the intercessory call of the prophet and his role as a watchman in the Spirit.

Although John knew that his original calling was that of a prophet, he was wise enough not to fuel the fires of persecution by talking about it. Instead, he continued writing, praying and quietly healing, enabling others to come to the forefront. It was as if he prophesied to himself when he wrote:

“Whoever then would come in the power of Elijah must divest himself of visions of grandeur. The prophet of the New Testament is not the miracle worker, not the healer, not the teacher, not the evangelist. He does not stand in the limelight.

“The prophet is the enabler, the spark plug who gets other people going. The New Testament prophet bows his spirit to prayer, unbeknownst to the rest of the body, and others find themselves healing or teaching or speaking.”

Prophetic ministers such as John Paul Jackson, founder of Streams Ministries, and James Goll, founder of Encounters Network, credit the Sandfords with influencing and shaping their ministries.

“For many years John Sandford has been an enormous blessing to me and my family, as well as my ministry,” Jackson says. “He is not afraid to take a stand for what he believes. ... John is

a friend, an elder statesman, and a man I love and highly respect.”

Goll says of their work: “The Elijah Task was used to give me language and a compass when I was desperately seeking for one! Elijah Among Us is a masterpiece sequel that brings the revelatory realm into understandable terms and transferable concepts.”

But it wasn’t just the Sandfords’ books that influenced Goll. “What has impacted me the most from these dear people’s lives is their longevity and quality as a couple in ministry, partnering together. John and Paula are godly examples of transgenerational ministry. Michal Ann and I want to be like them with a gleam in our eyes for Jesus when we get to be their age!”

Standing Through Persecution

The Sandfords’ teachings on healing hearts are well integrated into church sermons and counseling ministries today, but they haven’t always been accepted. Many people have criticized the couple’s techniques. But God placed a resolve in John’s heart to persevere from the time He called him to minister.

John was born in Joplin, Missouri, in July 1929. His mother was a descendant of the Osage tribe and his father an entrepreneur. After a brief sojourn in Southern California, the Sandford family moved back to the Midwest, where John spent most of his school years.

In 1947, the summer before he was to leave for college, John stood in the yard, spading the ground for a small garden.

Suddenly, the clouds parted and the sun shone through in the form of a cross. John heard the voice of the Lord say, "You are to be a minister."

Shortly before leaving for Drury University in Springfield, Missouri, John preached his first sermon. Afterward, his mother told him about a dream she had received while in her first month of pregnancy. In this dream she felt the power of God shoot through her like 1,000 volts of electricity and heard a voice say: "Do not be afraid, for I am God. You are to have a son who will be My servant." She kept these words hidden until after John announced his decision to become a minister.

"I needed that confirmation to help me stand throughout my ministry," John confessed.

He and Paula met in 1949 while they were students at Drury and eloped. Soon after graduating, they attended Chicago Theological Seminary. In 1958, John was ordained in the Congregational church.

Within a few months of ordination the Holy Spirit fell on John while he was sleeping, and he woke up speaking in tongues. An Episcopal priest friend of theirs confided that he had been praying for John and Paula for the previous two years to receive the Holy Spirit and invited them to join an ecumenical prayer group. The experience helped John to see the validity of corporate intercession and spiritual warfare and to understand how Christians could become demonized, and it launched him into a ministry of sanctification and transformation.

Not long afterward he met and started working with Agnes Sanford. From 1958-1968 he taught in Sanford's schools, working with her to pioneer inner healing.

"She was the first to discover how to pray for the deep wounds of others," John says. "She and others were interested in healing so that they could function and live a good life.

"But I was trained in transformation theology. So I was the first one to see the Lord wasn't just interested in healing. He was interested in eternity and transforming our nature into that of our Lord Jesus Christ. Inner healing is one tool to get that process done."

John developed his own ministry just as controversy began to soar about Agnes' healing techniques and the language she used in her ministry.

"One of the mistakes she made was in using unspiritual terms to describe spiritual things," John says. "She started to explain the gifts of knowledge by reaching into research on the paranormal and [using] ... terms such as 'clairaudience' and 'clairvoyance,' which later on became thought of as occult."

The resulting controversy drove John and Paula to become theologically and scripturally sound. It also taught them more about forgiveness.

The Sandfords' oldest son, Loren, pastor of New Song Fellowship in Denver, says of this time: "Not many realize the depth and intensity of the persecution my parents suffered during the years when the content of what God had shown them was largely misunderstood and misinterpreted by large segments

of the body of Christ. All of us in the family felt it.

“But even in all that ... pain and rejection, they led us in perseverance in love for others in the face of trial, never quitting and never returning insult for insult or wound for wound—a lesson in the way of the cross that profoundly shaped my life and became the foundation for my own lifetime in professional ministry.”

John and Paula’s experience of receiving the baptism of the Spirit in 1958 and their commitment to the infallibility of Scripture put them at odds with the very liberal mainline denomination they were part of, Loren told *Charisma*. Then, as the charismatic movement unfolded in the 1960s and 1970s, evangelicals and Pentecostals joined the attacks against John and Paula.

Much of their criticism came out of a misunderstanding of the “finished” work of Christ. Because they believed that individuals were deemed holy and fully transformed at the moment of salvation, inner healing seemed to them to be irrelevant.

Initially, the Sandfords were accused of being heretics who were opposed to the cross, when in reality everything they taught was based on a theology of the ongoing work of the cross in believers’ lives—the process of sanctification and of working out the salvation Jesus won on Calvary. Later they were accused of espousing practices they never taught, such as creative visualization, and of teaching people to blame parents for their troubles, when in fact the Sandfords taught a strong form of personal responsibility, including confession of and repentance for one’s own sins.

In spite of the criticism leveled at them through the years, the Sandfords have remained strong, and the destiny of Elijah House continues to unfold. Churches are calling for Elijah House staff to come and spend time in their churches, counseling and consulting with leaders. Leaders who have run into trouble often stay with the Sandfords, seeking intensive prayer. Many of those leaders are from various First Nations tribes.

But because of health concerns and time constraints, the Sandfords have turned the work of Elijah House over to capable administrators such as their son Mark, who is assuming a more visible leadership role, and are focusing on fulfilling their original call-on a broader scale. It's no longer about simply personal restoration.

Says John: "Restoring individual lives has shifted into a mandate of restoring all things."

Mentoring the Next Generation

John and Paula Sandford have cut back their ministry at Elijah House in recent years to focus on their larger mandate of "restoring all things." In the last decade, they have moved into reconciling the hearts of Catholics and Protestants, Native Americans and Caucasians, Jews and Gentiles, youth and elders. But their primary focus is mentoring the next generation.

They have made it a priority to speak at an annual conference hosted by Richard Twiss of Wiconi International that promotes reconciliation and healing within the First Nations tribes and at an annual workshop in Michael Ellis' young-adult boot camps that is geared to training the next generation of leaders from many nations.

According to Twiss: "John and Paula have been avid supporters of God's work to bring healing to our First Nations people through the presentation of the Good News of Jesus Christ in culturally relevant ways to our people. As an Osage leader, John was ... at the inaugural World Christian Gathering on Indigenous People in New Zealand [in 1996], like an apostolic father affirming his commitment and blessing as we danced, drummed and sang our prayers to the glory of God."

Twiss credits the Sandfords with having a major influence on many Native leaders, including himself.

"My wife, Katherine, and I are deeply grateful for the way John and Paula have taken us into their lives to pray with us, given us counsel for important decisions, and just been like a mom and dad cheering us on from behind. They continue to be a great blessing to the Father's work among First Nations people today, from which we and hundreds of others receive a great benefit."

In January 1996 Michael Ellis, founder of Nehemiah Ministries in Atlanta (), ran into the Sandfords in Toronto. It was a meeting destined to make an impact on the next generation of young leaders and revivalists. Ellis ended up traveling with the Sandfords intermittently for two years, learning more about blending power ministry and inner healing.

In 2001, Ellis started Nehemiah Ministry International, a school of ministry for young adults, using the Sandfords' teachings on inner healing and deliverance as a foundation. The most recent eight-week boot camp held in Brazil last March and April enrolled 50 students from 13 nations and hosted such world-renowned speakers as John Sandford, Heidi Baker, Bobby

Conners and others. Ellis uses his own funds to underwrite the \$100,000 cost of the school.

Sandford was thrilled to see how well the young adults in Brazil embraced his teachings. "The eagerness and hunger of the students was really striking. I would teach two lessons in the morning and over lunch they would start asking me questions. Before long there would be 20 or more chairs gathered around us," he said.

The young adults did more than receive Sandford's teachings on inner healing; they began giving them away. One student from Thailand is using inner-healing prayer for tsunami victims.

Says Ellis: "At the end of the school I would always ask the students, 'What was the most important thing you learned?' All would say the Elijah House teaching.

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