

Audience of One

R.T. Kendall, the prolific author and former pastor of Westminster Chapel in London, has a frightening challenge for a production-focused church during the coronavirus: “What if, for the next four months, God hides His face?”

Kendall continues: “[Perhaps] at the end of July, I find out I’ve not written a book. I’ve not written a blog. I’ve not preached a sermon. God could do that. He can do that. I don’t have any right to demand and say, ‘Lord, you’ve got to do this for me.’ The curse of our generation is a feeling of entitlement. And I don’t ever want to be like that.”

Instead, Kendall says believers must focus not on performing and producing for others, but listening to and following God’s still, small voice—even if it looks countercultural, uncool or unfruitful.

“I approach every day like the leper who came to Jesus: ‘Lord, if You will, You can do this. You don’t have to, but if You will,’” Kendall says. “That will be my attitude every day for the next six months: to say, ‘Lord, what is it You want me to do? How should I spend my time?’ I’m hoping He’s going to show up, but I cannot snap my fingers and make Him do this or that.”

In that sense, Kendall says the true test during this season will not be whether or not we receive accurate or stirring prophetic words, unlock new revelations from Scripture, inspire and exhort people to faith on Twitter and Instagram, write a brilliant new book to publish next year or preach a great sermon on a livestream. The proof of our dependence on God will not be demonstrated through any external work that can be shown or relayed to any other person. It will be whether our hearts listened humbly to God for His leading—whether or not He deigns to speak.

Is your heart to achieve for God or to follow God? They are not always the same thing, Kendall says. His new book, *For an Audience of One*, is about the importance of prioritizing God—and what He thinks about you—before all else.

“Wait for that moment, and it will come,” Kendall says. “We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of the things done in the body, whether they are good or bad, [according to] 2 Corinthians 5:10. Live for one thing and one thing alone: When Jesus looks at you and says, ‘Well done.’ That’s the goal. That’s all that will matter one day.”

Kendall told *Charisma* why God put this topic on his heart, how he has struggled to implement this in his own life and what believers can do to practice this heart posture every day.

Who Gets the Praise?

Kendall says he received the original inspiration for *For an Audience of One* in 1956.

“I read a little word about Billy Graham in a British magazine,” Kendall says. “The statement was, ‘He preached to millions, but it was really for an audience of one.’ That gripped me so much. It coheres perfectly with the verse that I’ve sought to be governed by for over 65 years, John 5:44, which is when Jesus said to the Pharisees, ‘How can you believe, who receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that comes from God alone?’ ... They only wanted the approval of one another. They didn’t want to break ranks, and they were scared of being thrown out of the synagogue if they confessed that Jesus was the Christ.”

Kendall says he has been striving to live out that verse for the past 64 years, but he has not perfected it. He jokes that if he waited until he mastered the skill before writing, he would never write the book.

Instead, Kendall says, “what I’ve sought to do is show what

that verse means. Those who do live for the praise of God are not bothered so much by the criticisms of people or even their praise. ... None of us are perfect at that. Of course, when I preach a sermon, I think, *I hope I did a good job*. [When I] write a book, I hope people like it. So I'm not emancipated entirely. But I can say it's my goal. It's my effort and desire to get His praise only."

Kendall says Daniel modeled this trait admirably in the Bible.

"Daniel in the lion's den refused to give in when people caught him praying," Kendall says. "He kept praying even though they said, 'If you do this, you're going against the king.'"

Kendall shares that during his time pastoring Westminster, he encountered two different situations in which he was tempted to look to others' approval instead of God's. In the first situation, he says, he resisted the temptation.

"I was at Westminster 25 years, and there was one particular board member who clearly wanted to control," Kendall says. "As long as I pleased him, he was happy. One day, I took a stand that he wasn't happy about, and he eventually resigned and went off and wouldn't speak [to me] anymore. But I'm thankful that I did not let him influence me. I stood alone, and I thank God that I did, because in that particular case, we were exactly right. Time has vindicated the decision we made. At the time, you trust that you're doing the right thing, but now I know, and I can look back on it and say, 'Thank God, I didn't let that man bully me or influence me.'"

But Kendall will be the first to say he is not perfect—and his second example illustrates a time when he craved the approval of others.

"I preached a sermon in Bournemouth, England, 25 years ago," Kendall says. "An organization by the name of Easter People had these annual conferences, and there were 2,000 people

there. It was their annual meeting, and I was honored to be there, and I wanted to preach a good sermon, so I did. When the sermon was finished, I sat down expecting that somebody might come along and say, 'Thank you!' 'Well done!' 'We needed that!' 'Good job!' Anything.

"No one said a word. I'm ashamed to say I sat there for 10 minutes waiting for somebody. Finally, they began to turn out the lights. I went to my car and had a two-hour drive back to London from Bournemouth."

He says during that drive, he asked God how he did, and says even God did not respond to Him. He realized how silly his frustration was—Kendall laughs, "I can't imagine Jesus after ... the Sermon on the Mount [calling] his disciples and saying, 'Peter, come here. How'd I do? What do you think of My sermon?'—and got over it within a couple days. He denied himself and kept following God instead.

Last year, Kendall received a big surprise.

"I was in North London, preaching in an Anglican Church, and as I walked out after the service, a lady tugged my elbow and said, 'Can I have a quick word with you?'" Kendall says. "I said, 'Sure.' She said, 'You won't remember this. But 25 years ago, you preached a sermon for the Easter people in Bournemouth. ... I was converted that night.'

"My word, I thought I was a failure. Here I was wanting the approval of man, and God wouldn't let me have it. Twenty-five years later, He let me know I did OK. ... But God doesn't always give you the pat on the back that you like at the time."

Time Is Love

Kendall says it takes time, dedication and clear boundaries to embody this heart posture in everyday life. He says if a believer wants to truly live for an audience of one, that starts with prioritizing spending time with God.

"How much do you pray?" Kendall asks. "Children spell love 'T-I-M-E.' So I ask the question, 'How much time have you got for the Lord every day?' I used to urge people at Westminster Chapel to pray 30 minutes a day. I would ask ministers to pray one hour a day—not counting sermon preparation nor praying with people at the hospital. I mean total time on your knees, as it were, just waiting before God. John Wesley and Martin Luther prayed two hours a day. Where are the Luthers today? Where are the John Wesleys today? People today don't have time for God."

Kendall says the only way to get to know anybody is to spend time with them. He says the people who know Him best, for instance, are the ones who make time to be with Him—and that's true for most people. Likewise, those who make time for God will get to know and value His ways.

"It's a matter of priority," Kendall says. "... We must put God first. And if you do that, all the rest will follow. It's like tithing. The way to tithe is to take 10% of your income off the top and give that to God, and then live on the 90%—that's the principle we live by—and God will bless you. He's promised to do that. So it goes with time. Give Him so much time, and you'll have the rest of the day with more quality things to do, and you won't waste so much time."

The other important part of honoring God above all others, according to Kendall, is to have clearly defined moral boundaries informed by the Word of God.

"When you develop an understanding of His ways, of His Word, you're going to know what to do," he says. "You'll know what principles you can't break or violate. If you've done [tithed time], and you've got the rest of the day left, how you going to spend it? It will be based upon how well you got to know the Lord and His ways. You're more likely never to goof up when you're living by principles He's taught you." {eo}

Taylor Berglund *is the associate editor of Charisma magazine and the host of several podcasts on the Charisma Podcast Network.*