

Rich Wilkerson: What God Taught Me About Honor Through the PTL Debacle

I first met Steve Munsey in 1990 when a leader of the Assemblies of God asked Robyn and me to host the on-air, daily television show sponsored by supporters of Heritage Ministries. Heritage Ministries was what was left of the old PTL ministry Jim and Tammy Bakker led for many years. After the Bakkers were removed from the ministry because of a series of scandals, my friend Sam Johnson tried to save what was left of PTL. Sam was able to raise \$5 million to purchase a new facility and restart the television ministry under a new name—Heritage Ministries.

As part of the fallout from the Bakkers' scandal, Sam faced legal trouble of his own, so he had to give up the television ministry. That was when my wife and I were called to serve. Robyn had been the co-host of her father's television ministry for 10 years, but we knew little about hosting a daily television program or running a television ministry.

To be honest, I rarely watched *The PTL Club*. We were on the West Coast, where TBN and *The 700 Club* were viewed, and I had never heard of Steve Munsey. He was leading a church in Munster, Indiana, where he still lives and pastors.

The day Robyn and I arrived in Charlotte to assume the leadership of Heritage Ministries, we were introduced onscreen to the program's audience. Pastor Munsey, whom I was meeting for the first time, introduced and interviewed us. Throughout our interaction, he treated us with unusual kindness and honor, as if we were dignitaries.

Later I asked Sam who Pastor Munsey was, and he told me he was the person Heritage Ministries asked to work on the show

alongside Sam and to help raise the money for the television ministry. After seeing him in action, I understood why he and Sam had been able to raise so much money. Steve's ability to move a television audience to give to the work of the Lord is something I've never seen matched in my life.

During those first few weeks we were leading the ministry, Steve would call and ask how he could help, despite the fact that he didn't know us. Some people might have hoped to see us fail, but not Steve. He asked Robyn and me to come to his church in Indiana so they could receive an offering to help with the success of the ministry.

After we had been leading the ministry for six months, Sam's legal woes were resolved, so Robyn and I returned the leadership to him and continued doing what we had been called to do before, but we maintained our friendship with the Munseys.

We assumed leadership of Trinity Church in Miami almost a decade later in 1998. Trinity Church was and continues to be a congregation primarily of people of African descent. I didn't know how to lead a church, as I had been a traveling evangelist for most of my adult life, and I certainly did not know how to lead such an ethnically diverse church. After two years, we were growing to the point where we had to build an air dome tent on our property to hold the crowds.

Then Steve showed up at our office one afternoon. He was preaching in town for one of my friends and came over to see us. I was at my wit's end, and when he asked how I was, I told him I was out of gas and didn't know what to do next. His immediate response was, "I'll help you." Steve has a church that numbers over 10,000 attendees on any given weekend and is just as ethnically diverse.

Shortly after we reconnected in Miami, I was praying and felt the Lord nudge me to call Steve and apologize to him for the

debacle a decade earlier.

I said, "Steve, I want to ask your forgiveness for accepting a position in 1990 that you deserved. After all, you had raised the money day and night to see it continue, and I made the mistake of assuming I could step in as though nothing had happened. Will you forgive me?"

He said, "Rich, you've got to be kidding me. I've never met anyone like you before. You don't need to ask for my forgiveness. It was and still is in the hands of the Lord as to who He will promote or demote. It is my calling to honor people wherever I find them."

Steve and I are still close friends after all these years. From the day I met him, he resurrected in my life what my father had taught me to live by when I was a little boy. He reminded me of the importance of honor and made me want to incorporate in my life and ministry the same culture of honor Steve modeled.

From 2000 until now, Steve has talked with me almost weekly, coaching me and giving me ideas. His mentorship continues to show me that we are called to honor all people. {eo}

*This article is adapted from I Choose Honor: The Key to Relationships, Faith, and Life (Charisma House, 2019) by **Rich Wilkerson Sr.** Wilkerson is the founder of Peacemakers and the senior pastor of Trinity Church in Miami, Florida. He is also an evangelist and author. Since 1973 Wilkerson has ministered to youths and families through evangelism and local church ministry. His humorous style and power-packed speaking have been the keys to seeing thousands turn to Christ. More than 1.5 million students have attended his presentations on over sixteen hundred public school campuses throughout the United States and Canada. The Wilkerson's also serve as Chancellors at North Central University in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Wilkerson and his wife, Robyn, are ministering in the heart of*

Miami and continue to be committed to the local community through cutting-edge ministry outreaches. The Wilkerson's have been married for over forty years and have four sons, three daughters-in-law, and five grandchildren.