

Who's to Blame for the Eddie Long Soap Opera?

I don't know **Eddie Long**. I've never met the guy, have no idea where his heart is and am in no place to judge where he stands before God. But considering the soap opera surrounding him over the past year—from a sex scandal to a burglary case to multiple lawsuits to his church's school closing to divorce to being crowned "king"—it's safe to say this probably wasn't the guy's favorite year. It's also obvious, based upon the state and fruit of his ministry, that after walking through a season of true healing (which I pray he'll do), he needs to reconsider the people surrounding him—those in his "inner circle."

Part of Eddie Long's true healing, if it comes, will involve 'fessing up to whatever mistakes he needs to own. But an equal part will be recognizing that he, for whatever reason, succumbed to one of the American church's most destructive paradigms: the leadership bubble. I'm referring to the incredible man-made force that insulates thousands of pastors, bishops, apostles, prophets and ministry leaders (particularly in the **charismatic movement** that I cover) and makes them unapproachable superbeings who sweep in from the heavenlies to deliver **divine messages** on Sunday mornings, and then are swept away by the winds of their assistants, never to be bothered by the commoners.

I've met a lot of these leaders (both the self-appointed and non) and, because of the nature of my job, shared heart-to-heart conversations with them. The truth is, most have sincere hearts and an honest desire to see God's kingdom established on earth as it is in heaven. (No comment on the other leaders.) But what so often taints their ministry, reputation and legacy isn't their own motives, it's the culture they allow to be furthered by those who continue to prop up "God's

anointed" at any cost. This posse of personal assistants, aides, bodyguards, executive secretaries and the like creates such a protective cocoon around the leader that it's no wonder sin and dysfunction spring to life in almost every case. We were never meant to be so detached from the Body we're all connected to—and that's especially true for leaders.

To me, that's the real tragedy of what's going on at Eddie Long's church. Beyond the charade of a so-called rabbi crowning a man whose character is under question as "king," beyond the recent apology from both for offending the Jewish community, beyond even the embarrassing fact that thousands stood by and applauded this ridiculously bizarre ceremony ... beyond all the things wrong with this picture lies a serious issue of how we build kingdoms for our leaders—and in turn, how those leaders keep those kingdoms intact.

I seem to remember Jesus having a strong reaction to this kind of foolishness in His Father's house. I also recall Him coming as King and establishing the one true kingdom that renders all others powerless. So why, after all these years, are so many of today's church leaders (and their entourages) still trying to build—and then hold onto—their own plastic thrones? Have we forgotten that Jesus' own model of kingship centered on **servanthood**, submission, humility and genuine love? Have we overlooked the fact that Jesus' definition of a great leader was one who was more concerned about being "the least" than what title was given to him?

God help us.

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