

Facing the Facts

Instead of simply hoping that things will get better, we must honestly face the issues.

I've always wondered why some churches grow and some don't. Consider two charismatic churches: Same city. Same doctrine. Same Holy Spirit. Yet one booms and one folds. Since I've passed the half century mark, I've realized that the explanation is too complicated to reduce to idealistic formulas of what works and what doesn't.

We charismatics seem to gravitate to the latest thing that brings results. A few years ago it was discipleship, then "name it and claim it." After that it was spiritual warfare. Now it's apostolic authority.

No matter what the current ministry focus is, when we espouse it, some things change, but others don't. We take three steps forward and two steps back.

In his book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins provides some insight that might help us address this phenomenon. He documents the results of a five-year study of the histories of 28 elite companies, in which he evaluated why some that for many years had been merely "good" made a transition to "great"—defined as outperforming the general stock market in cumulative stock returns an average of seven times in 15 years.

One of the characteristics Collins says made good companies great was their willingness to confront the brutal facts of their current reality while at the same time having absolute faith that they would prevail in the end.

I recognize the danger of applying secular insight to the church: It omits the spiritual dimension. But didn't Jesus say that "'the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light'" (Luke 16:8, KJV)?

I believe it's time for the charismatic community to confront the brutal facts, especially those related to churches. Consider that:

- * Overall there is little true growth. Most is transfer growth.

- * Hundreds of thousands of charismatics have been so offended by leaders they have either stopped going to church or attend a middle-of-the-road Protestant church where the leadership isn't weird, even if there is no life.

- * Many leaders in charismatic churches are self-centered. The entire ministry revolves around their vision, and they live a nice lifestyle because they control the finances.

- * Few ministries support others that are being attacked. Witness the Assembly of God congregation in Texas that lost a lawsuit because they prayed deliverance over a member of the church. Even if there were abuses, we need to defend their scriptural rights.

- **Many ministries go further and actually malign others. Consider how the prophetic ministry has been maligned by pastors because of abuses by a few.

- * Few preachers preach against sin. If they do, it's the sin

of not tithing or not supporting the leadership. But what about racism? What about failing to come against the radical homosexual social agenda? What about greed, materialism and other sins?

Instead of simply hoping that things will get better, or staying in our small circles where some of the problems don't exist, or failing to deal with ongoing problems that hinder growth both numerically and spiritually, we must honestly face the issues. Why do people leave charismatic churches? Why are charismatics ridiculed and characterized based on the extremes of some?

We could get discouraged looking at the problems. Yet for ministries to grow—for the entire renewal movement to grow and change the church—we must have absolute faith we will prevail in the end.

For all the prophets who have bowed the knee to Baal, many haven't. Many ministries are growing and prospering and helping people become true disciples.

Leaders such as John Bevere are confronting the problem of offenses among Christians. The growth of his ministry and sales of his books testify to the fact that believers are receiving the message.

Many leaders are confronting sin. And many are standing against the tide in our culture, believing we will prevail.

It's time for us to focus on the realities we face. Then, we must walk in absolute faith that there are solutions—and believe God will bring them about.

It's as Bob Mumford said years ago: "I've read the last chapter of the book, and we win."

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