

10 Powerful Leadership Lessons From Reinhard Bonnke's Life and Ministry

Evangelist Reinhard Bonnke is the only person who could walk out into an open field, and a million people would show up time after time. I often heard Bonnke say, "My goal is to plunder hell and populate heaven." When he and I were together one time during the filming and editing of his "Full Flame Film Series" in Orlando, he said, "A church that is not interested in winning the lost, is lost itself." For more than 50 years, Bonnke devoted his life to the reaching and winning of the lost primarily in Africa and throughout the world. When I learned of his graduation to eternity on Dec. 7, 2019, I began to ponder the life lessons he had taught me. I humbly pass these life lessons on to you.

Embrace

Evangelist Bonnke embraced the Lord, life and the lost. When the Lord called him into ministry, he and his wife, Anni, packed up their bags and moved to Maseru, Lesotho, in 1969. Maseru is the place where it all began, as God shaped a young man of faith and began to mold the "character of faith" in him that would later challenge the devil across the entire continent of Africa and scores of still-undreamed-of places beyond.

The Bonnkes spent seven long years in Maseru, doing the work of missionaries in the traditional way. But during those years the call to evangelism that burned in his soul took wings. Through repeated miracles and moves of the Holy Spirit, literally millions of men and women across the world heard the Good News of the gospel through his anointed ministry. Whatever our Lord calls us to, we are to embrace it with all

of our hearts.

Exchange

Life is filled with exchanges from “this” to “that,” and from “here” to “there.” On one occasion, Bonnke and I were sitting together in the Minneapolis International Airport, waiting to fly to Orlando. While we waited, he shared about the huge financial difficulties the ministry faced during the early years in Lesotho.

He said to me, “In those early years, we could hardly make financial ends meet each week. On one particular week, we were \$50 short from being able to pay our office rent. I began to wonder how we would ever have a significant ministry, if we could not even raise \$50 to pay for our office each month. While I was standing on a street corner, near our office, the Lord asked me a penetrating question: ‘Do you want me to make you a millionaire?’ I thought about this question for a moment and then I yelled, ‘I don’t want you to make me a millionaire. I want you to make me a soul-millionaire!’”

Evangelist Bonnke was willing to make the exchange of the lesser for the greater, the smaller for the larger. A lot of Christian leaders envision a larger ministry but do not take the initial steps of faith to get there. They say, “Someday, but not today.”

Some years ago, Bonnke and I were together in Springfield, Missouri. On Sunday, he ministered at James River Church, followed by a meeting at the Assemblies of God Headquarters on Monday. He had been sharing with me his desire to move his ministry credentials from Germany to the General Council of the Assemblies of God. Thus, I arranged a meeting with Dr. Thomas E. Trask, former General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God, Bonnke and me. During our meeting, Bonnke announced to Dr. Trask his intention to fully immigrate to the United States and to move his ministry credentials to the

Assemblies of God. In the months that followed, he fully made this exchange in his life.

Envision

In the early days in Lesotho, God showed Rev. Bonnke a vision of a “blood-washed Africa.” Even though at that time there was little evidence in his ministry that such a grand idea was even remotely possible, Bonnke took hold of the vision and, in Jesus’ name, began to speak it and live it.

In 1974 the evangelistic organization that is today still known as Christ for all Nations was born, and a small team gathered around the young evangelist to reach out to the peoples of Africa. The preaching of the Word began to produce a harvest of souls; and in addition to this, people were being healed of all kinds of diseases.

Bonnke often said to me, “I want to paint Africa red with the blood of Christ.” He communicated with large images and inspirational metaphors. He saw the big picture and the steps necessary to accomplish it!

When we were launching the Billion Soul Initiative, he stated to me: “I want to believe the Lord for 100 million souls to be saved or a tithe of the Billion Soul harvest.” Just think about this vision statement filled with faith! Evangelist Bonnke’s vision of 100 million souls being saved was not imaginary thinking, but a flow of where he was going in the years to come.

Execute

I heard Bonnke repeatedly say, “God works with the workers, goes with the goers but does not sit with the sitters.” To him, faith meant action. A man or woman of faith could not just sit down and wait for things to happen. He or she needed to get going in the right direction, expecting God to fulfill His vision to him or her.

Rev. Bonnke began to hold crusades in a stadium in Gaborone, Botswana, with only one small fellowship cooperating. His disappointment can be imagined when only 100 people came to the first meeting. He nevertheless preached as if the place were full. To his complete amazement, after only a few minutes, a man in the congregation jumped to his feet and disrupted the proceedings by shouting out, "I've just been healed!" This was repeated five times over as others shouted out the same words, resulting in an outburst of joyous praise.

The news that God was doing miracles in the stadium soon spread across the city; and by the final meeting, for the first time in his short ministry, Bonnke preached to a packed stadium. Thousands streamed forward for forgiveness of their sins, hundreds were healed and thousands more were baptized in the Holy Spirit—and this was just the beginning. On a return visit to the country of Botswana 12 years later, the leader of a large denomination reported that 80% of his current pastors were converts from that first crusade in Gaborone!

Expect

Evangelist Bonnke and his team expected the miraculous power of God to be demonstrated during the crusades. I saw firsthand the supernatural power of God outpoured during crusades and at Fire Conferences. During the crusades, I watched Bonnke stretch forth his hands toward the tens of thousands of people before him, asking the Lord to heal the sick like never before.

After he had prayed for miracles, you would hear people shouting in their native tongue, "I have been healed!" Then, Bonnke and his team would arrange for people to come to the stage to express their testimonies of healing. I heard testimonies of blind eyes opening, the lame walking and the deaf hearing!

During the Abuja, Nigeria, crusade, I decided to walk around

the parameter of the audience while Bonnke was preaching to them. It took nearly 45 minutes to just walk around the crowd! While I was walking around the audience, I eventually stood so far back that you could barely see the stage. Yet you could feel the power of God!

The people came expecting to be saved and healed, and God did not disappoint them. Over the years, I have stood amazed: We in the West have more and do less, while others have less and do more! During the Synergize 2014 Conference in Orlando, Florida, Dr. George Wood, former Assemblies of God superintendent, said, "We are going to have to believe in divine healing again, because our health insurance has become so expensive." Of course, the point he was making is that often we do not depend upon the Lord, but rather upon the skills of people for our success.

Bonnke said, "When you do business with people, you need money. When you do business with God, you need faith. Faith is the currency of the kingdom of God."

Excite

Evangelist Bonnke preached with excitement and passion. The audience was deeply moved by his heart and words expressed to them. I thought I had a burden for the lost until I heard him talk about his burden for the lost! His words and expression reminded me of the apostle Paul wishing to be cursed if that would mean the salvation of the Jews. It is rare indeed to find a Christian who loves the lost so much, he would be willing to be lost himself if it meant the salvation of the masses. Bonnke had a way of saying it and meaning it that moved your heart.

Open-air crusades became the order of the day, as hundreds of thousands flocked to every meeting. In one crusade held in Lagos, Nigeria, 1,600,000 people came to a single meeting, with a total of 6 million attending the five days of services.

The ministry team moved from East Africa to West Africa and back again as the two, now separate, technical and support teams organized events on opposite sides of the continent of Africa. Since the beginning of this evangelistic ministry, Bonnke preached face-to-face to multiple millions of people in Africa alone; and of that vast number, over 75 million responded to the call of salvation by filling out decision cards and were ushered into the church follow-up program.

Bonnke was a masterful communicator and an excellent author. Here are a few of his notable quotes:

—If you are doing nothing, God doesn't need to give you any help in doing nothing. Go out and do something impossible for Jesus, and then God will help you.

—Don't plan with what is in your pocket; plan with what is in God's pocket.

—Anyone can believe when God is already moving. But real faith is when you step out when it seems that God is not moving.

—I don't want to play with marbles when God told me to move mountains!

—The gospel is like water; no man invented it, yet no man can live without it.

—You must desire the fire, and claim your flame!

—Those who forever seek the will of God are overrun by those who do it.

I challenge every preacher to study his sermons and read his books. We often hear of bestselling authors being those who have sold hundreds of thousands of books or a few million copies. There are more than 200 million copies of Rev. Bonnke's books in print today!

Expand

Throughout the years, Bonnke continued to grow his life and ministry. We surprised him with a huge birthday cake for his 65th birthday. During the birthday party, someone asked him, "Do you plan to ever retire?" His answer was, "The large 747 planes are accelerating and going faster at take-off. I expect to be going forward and faster, when it is my time to take off for heaven." I thought that was a classic answer!

His ministry increased the number of crusades held per year in Africa and began to branch out to Asia by holding one crusade per year in that part of the world. Crusades followed in Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore and India, with three or four taking place in South America as well. Each event resulted in tens of thousands receiving Jesus Christ as their Savior, and multitudes were healed and delivered from demon forces.

In the industrialized world, the literature outreach known as "From Minus to Plus" has reached into 95 million homes in 12 different countries with tens of thousands of churches receiving converts from the resulting inquirers. Those countries include the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Hong Kong, Canada and the United States of America. This outreach actively continues at this present time in Finland, Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands.

Equip

When I first connected with Bonnke, it was during a time at Christ For All Nations when he was equipping fellow evangelists. I watched him pour out his heart with wisdom and words. On one occasion, we worked together to invite evangelists to come to CfaN to be equipped for ministry.

Evangelist Bonnke was all about multiplication of Christian leaders worldwide. While he hosted crusades at night, he would teach pastors during morning sessions. The morning sessions

were called Fire Conferences. I write more about the Fire Conferences in the next section. The point is: Though it was most demanding, he knew that pastors needed to be equipped if the work was going to be multiplied. Only eternity will record how many thousands of churches were started through the crusades and how many new converts ended up in new and existing churches.

It was a joy to partner with Bonnke when U.S. pastors chose to join us for two difference crusades in Nigeria. In addition to challenging pastors during crusades, he was deeply committed to encouraging U.S. pastors. I heard him express on different occasions his burden for America to experience revival and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as he had seen in other nations.

Empower

I witnessed firsthand the absolute, phenomenal unleashing of God's power through Rev. Bonnke's life and ministry. During the Abuja, Nigeria, crusade, he hosted a three-day Fire Conference for pastors and Christian leaders. On the last day of the Fire Conference, we began just after sunrise due to the intense heat during the day. While the crusade took place more than 20 miles outside of the city, the Fire Conference took place near the city. We met in a large asphalt area with a high fence around it. By 7 a.m., there were more than 100,000 leaders in attendance! I watched leaders climb the fence to get into the conference. They were so desperate to be touched by God.

At the close of his message, Bonnke announced, "When I begin to pray for you, you will hear a thunder in the sky, like a lightning bolt hitting the ground here."

I remember looking up into the clear blue sky, thinking, "Did he say a thunder and a lightning bolt?"

Then, Bonnke said, "When I begin to pray for you, if you wish

to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, reach out to the Lord! He wants to empower you today, like they were empowered on the Day of Pentecost.”

Next, when he began to pray for this massive crowd, I heard with my own ears a thunder in the sky and felt the power of God hit the pavement all around me. I looked at the sea of people with their hands lifted and watched as tens of thousands of them instantly began to pray in “new tongues.”

Bonnke said to me, “James, come with me. We are going to lay hands on as many as possible.” It was common for Bonnke to pray for as many as possible wherever he went. As we began to move through the huge crowd, pastors and leaders began passing out under the power of God. There were thousands of people lying on the asphalt across the open area.

As Bonnke and I walked together, he looked at one of the U.S. pastors who had come with me. This pastor was standing approximately 12 feet away from an office wall (before the Fire Conference began that morning, we had met in this office). When Bonnke looked at my pastor friend during the prayer time, I heard him say, “Lord, please touch John in a special way.” I saw John’s feet leave the ground as he floated through the air, landing near the office wall, and passed out under the power of God. You can say what you will, but I saw this with my own eyes.

The Lord’s powerful anointing rested upon Bonnke’s life!

Entrust

A faith that cannot be tested is a faith that cannot be trusted. I remember Bonnke and I meeting in Dr. Bill Bright’s private office at Campus Crusade for Christ in 2004. During this meeting, he was sharing his vision for the future in general and about CfaN in particular. He said, “As an evangelist, one has to be prepared to go from feast to famine and famine to feast.” In other words, there are ups and downs

for the life and ministry of the evangelist.

On another occasion, while we were traveling together to minister at a church in the U.S., he shared that he was earnestly praying for the Lord to show him who his successor would be at CfaN. On numerous instances, he shared his enthusiasm regarding Evangelist Daniel Kolenda. Evangelist Kolenda became the President of CfaN in 2013. As Bonnke traveled through life, he was thinking and praying beyond the grave for the work to continue after his departure.

As I reflect on Bonnke's life and friendship, I know that he will be truly missed throughout the body of Christ. I know I will miss him! He lived an amazing, faith-filled life. When Bonnke came to a city, it was common for a special parade to take place, welcoming him! The police would escort him from the place where he was staying during the crusade all the way into the countryside where the crusade was taking place. When the nightly crusade was over, the police would escort him back. I remember riding with him in the car going to such a crusade. As we turned onto a two-way road, the police drove ahead of us, moving all cars from both sides of the road so Bonnke and his team could safely drive to the crusade.

I am a stronger Christian because of Evangelist Bonnke's influence in my life. On one occasion, we were speaking at the same conference in Surabaya, Indonesia. During the conference, we got together for fellowship and prayer in his hotel room. After our time of fellowship, he took the time to lay his hands on me and to intercede for my life and ministry. Those were holy moments in my life. He had time for the masses, but he also had time for one-on-one. My prayer is for the Lord to raise up thousands of faith-filled and Spirit-empowered evangelists throughout the world today! {eoa}

Dr. James O. Davis is the founder/president of Cutting Edge International and Global Church Network () in greater Orlando.