

T.D. Jakes Gives Leadership Principles

I've had a lot of interesting guests this week. I've visited with Dr. Mark Rutland, the incoming president of Oral Roberts University, along with Mart Green, the chairman of the board. Later, I received a visit from Bill Anderson, the president of CBA, our industry's trade association, and we had a great meeting. And I had a wonderful time with my friend and mentor Dr. Jack Hayford, who was in town attending a meeting of the National Association of Evangelicals.

But by far the highlight of the week was an opportunity to participate in The Forum at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida. This is an annual event that brings in top leaders. This year the speakers included Jack Welch of GE, Dave Ramsey, Craig Groeschel, Megyn Kelly of Fox News, as well as author and consultant Patrick Lencioni, and my longtime friend Bishop T.D. Jakes.

I had the honor of conducting a 30-minute question-and-answer interview with Bishop Jakes on stage after he gave a rousing speech on "the way up is the way down," going along with the theme of The Forum—servant leadership.

Southeastern University is an incredible place. It's located in Lakeland—"the world's citrus center"—not far from my home of Orlando. I grew up in this town. In fact, my father took a position as Dean of Men and professor at Southeastern in 1962 while I was in elementary school. Ten years later, I met my wife, Joy, while she was a student there and I was studying at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida.

So I've seen up close and personal the incredible changes and

growth that have taken place at Southeastern over the last few years. When my father started working there, it had barely 500 students. Then it grew to more than 1,000. But it has exploded to more than 3,000 students under the capable visionary leadership of Dr. Mark Rutland, who has recently taken the top post at Oral Roberts University. On a beautiful spring day, it was great to be on the campus, to see the magnificent buildings, to meet the young students and several of the faculty and staff.

Southeastern uses the motto "igniting the flame of servant leadership," and Jakes certainly did that. He told the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet, showing that God Himself knew that the way up was down. He reminded us that if we exalt ourselves God has promised to humble us, but if we humble ourselves, God will exalt us.

Jakes had us laughing and crying. We marveled at the poetry of his words, the clarity of his thoughts and the passion of his delivery. Then, as is the university's style with all their speakers, I was able to interview him. I reminisced about my visit with him in West Virginia when his ministry was just beginning to emerge, and how we ran cover stories of him and his ministry in *Ministry Today* and *Charisma*. Of course, if you've read these magazines you know that he's written for them many times and that we have covered his ministry as it's grown and developed.

I remember that when I was in West Virginia Jakes showed me in his pastoral office a bullet hole in the wall where someone had fired a gunshot through the window. He left it as a reminder of the racism that undoubtedly prompted it and his vulnerability and the protection of God.

The last time I saw Bishop Jakes was last June when he and I and other Christian leaders were invited to meet with then Sen. Barack Obama. So although we did not specifically talk about politics at The Forum, I did ask him to share with the

mostly white audience what it feels like to have a black man in the White House. He reminded us that the issues are a lot more than just racial or electing a black man. But he did say that many white Americans cannot appreciate the significance of realizing that the American Dream is accessible to all Americans.

He also gave us very practical advice about the need to change. He pointed out that companies that do not change, such as the grocery store A&P, no longer exist. He told us to not surround ourselves with people who think just like we do, and that diversity is not just in the color of skin but also in how we think. Meeting new people, understanding new people and even experiencing their pain helps us to be more accessible.

Jakes also challenged us to walk in our destiny, to mentor and serve a new generation. He challenged us to not get stale, but to sharpen the blade. He said, "Businesses wither and become stale if they stay the same." But the message that he emphasized over and over again was that "the only way to become big is to get small enough to serve." A quote I jotted down in my notes is: "Real power is not at the top, but at the bottom."

I was close enough to Jakes during our interview that I could see that a tear actually came to his eye when I asked him about his work in Africa. I've known him well enough and long enough to know that it's not an act. There really is a side of him that is a tough-minded entrepreneur and businessman. But he also has a side that's more like Mother Teresa; he is really caring for the hurting and the downtrodden. That's why people respond to him. He's genuine. And he's also a great role model for many.

As usual, please give your comments.

Steve Strang