

BILL ANDERSON
MINISTRIES

THE KIRKENDORFF
SHOE KINGDOM

My name is Buff Kirkendorff. Well, actually, it's Buford, but not many people around here know that. Dr. Meitzen who delivered me, I guess. Grandma and the aunts and their kids. And Miss Teeny Adkins, the school principal. I mean, having welcomed the Mayflower, what doesn't she know? Here's how it happened: when I was born, Mom saw me, thought our country NEEDED a senator named Kirkendorff and Grandma told her Buford sounded senatorial. Always sounded canine to me. Anyway, I'm Buff.

I've been asked by some friends to tell my story, which is why I'm writing this. Never wrote anything before. My story never impressed me much, but, well, I'll just tell it like it happened. Or "fell out" as they say around here.

I finished Redford High School, went over to Victavia and did a year in their junior college, and then returned home and took a job clerking at a local hardware store while I tried to keep the ancestral ranch/farm moving along. Really, it sorta ran itself except for the rye-grass patch we planted every early fall to lure the deer in for a closer shot.

The town job wasn't much, but Addie Sue Willington grew up here, too--I met her when we played in the high school band together--and she thought just staying around here was good enough and we'd just buy a house, have some kids, and be good Redfordians. (Yeah, I know, some say it ought to be "Redfordites" because that sounds more like the Bible, but the English teachers themselves couldn't agree, so we're sorta split on the deal. But we're here anyway.)

Well, old man Stimson had a shoe factory in a little beat-up building on one of our back streets. Fact is, a lot of older Redford is mostly back streets, what with Farm-to-Market #416 serving as our main street, drag strip and cruising scene all in one. The lights get dim when you leave FM #416. Until you get out close to the new interstate. Old Mr. Stimson had inherited the shoe factory from his father who, in turn, got it from his father. I think it goes back to Moses.

Somewhere in the dim and distant past, I guess, they made good shoes and a good living out of making good shoes, but that was all before the memory of any living person. Except maybe for Miss Bessie Hornbuckle, who's been here since dirt was invented--just this side of Teeny Adkins. Anyway, I heard that old Mr. Stimson wanted to sell his shoe-factory. Made sense because he was moving up on eighty and had no kin. Miss Sadie, his wife, had died twenty years earlier.

Rumor had it that he wanted to give his money to the Fish-and-Firearm Club because his cousin Earl had once been a (very obviously self-taught) taxidermist and the whole family liked that sort of thing. So, he wanted to sell out before he died. Well, I made him an offer of \$3,000 for the factory, hoof, hide, hump and all. Lotta money, but Addie Sue and me talked about it and thought we could make a go of it. Her dad had worked there so he knew all the ins and outs of the factory. And there were a lot of them. Ins and outs, I mean.

The management “structure” was as tangled up as two miles of ten-year-old spooled-up barbed-wire. We’d just keep the employees, all four of them, she’d keep the books---she was always good in math ---and I’d sorta oversee the whole operation. Mr. Stimson got wide-eyed, which he didn’t do often, when he heard my offer, and took the deal right there. Hoof, hide, hump and all. I later learned that he was looking for about \$2,500; coulda saved that \$500 and shortened the projected pay-back at the bank by at least a year.

The bank. To my good fortune, Chino Gonzales, my life-long buddy, became the loan officer a couple of years after college. Gave me a super deal, not because I own anything much, but because he knows me and Addie Sue---I think he was once sweet on her---are hard-working and upright people. Besides that, they’re looking for loan deals. So I got a four percent deal, pay-back in eight years. No big problem if things went as we hoped they would.

Next step was for me and Addie Sue to start reading up on shoe factories. Were we shocked or what! Do you know how many six-employee shoe-factories there are in this country? How about none? Zip. Zilch. Matter of fact, we provided some real humor for small business gurus. Several of them said we gave a new meaning to the word “small” when accompanied with “business.” Undaunted (I’m not sure what that word means, but Brother Sumpkins uses it sometimes on Sunday and I think it means “tough” or “gritty” or something like that, so undaunted) we sat down and drew up plans for a successful operation.

Took us some time, but we thought through it all as best we could, trying to cover all of the questions that we thought might arise. Of course, what we didn’t know was the business hadn’t done anything different in two generations. To say the place was in a rut would be like saying that the Royal Gorge is a good-sized ditch. Nobody in the place had had a new thought in sixteen years. Shoot, maybe twice that long. In fact, having a new thought was against company policy. The latest innovation was to put a dead-bolt lock in the front door four years earlier. And that was produced by the third break-in in a month.

Don’t know what on earth they were breaking in for. Nobody would be caught dead wearing Stimson Shoes. I mean, it was brown brogans or else. Well, actually, sometimes the dead were caught with them on because Mr. Stimson offered his shoes, free of charge, to people who were too poor to buy their dead family members shoes. Lotta people, after eyeing the brown brogans, just went ahead and buried ‘em barefooted. But despite the fact that the operation was small, it had collected six file cabinets of operational procedure material. Actually, if you hadn’t seen shoes in the store window you wouldn’t have known by the “operation-al” files what they were making.

After collecting something like a ton of information on how to run a small business, going down to the library and listening to so many tapes that we had a six-week dizzy spell, and talking with the people at the junior college over in Victavia about such things, we sat down one night and, for the most part, held our heads in our hands wondering about a lot of stuff, like, why in the name of God did we do this. I mean, we had to pay the loan off and I could hear the meter running.

On top of that the “financials,” as they call them, were worse off---if that were possible---than we imagined. They lacked 45 dollars and 42 cents having anything! And with new owners, creditors began to show up---people we didn’t know existed, looking for payment on bills contracted years before.

But something happened early the next morning. After a fitful night, I went out to the barn, climbed up into the loft like I used to do as a kid, and thought the thing through like I used to do as a kid. And, like it used to happen to me, presto blinko (my uncle brought that home from the war), I had my answer! Why make this thing so complicated? Look: everybody’s got feet and nearly everybody wears shoes on their feet. All we gotta do is make the best shoes we can, price them right, and shoe-needy people would choose to buy them. If we did that, everything else would fall into place. So, when the sun got up and we got the chores done, I told Addie Sue we had to talk. I told her about my epiphany (that means, as old man Brody says, “A light-bulb moment”). We’d set about doing one thing: advancing the Kirkendorff Shoe Kingdom. Sounded sorta pretentious---the “kingdom” thing, but it wasn’t too complex and we’d had enough of complex. At least it was a place to start.

And my head wasn’t crowded inside any more; the wad of barbed-wire began slowly unwinding. No matter what it took, that was our first job and our only job. Advancing the Kirkendorff Shoe Kingdom. If something or some-one did that, they stayed; if they didn’t, they didn’t. Simple as that. If processes and procedures did that, they stayed; if they didn’t, they didn’t. Presto blinko! It was so simple that I could write it down in one sentence: **THE ENTIRE BUSINESS OF ANYBODY WHO WORKS HERE AND EVERYTHING WE DO HERE IS TO SEEK FIRST THE KIRKENDORFF SHOE KINGDOM.**

We couldn’t wait to get the employees together and share our idea. Well, as unused to new ideas as they were, it went over like an expectant pole-vaulter. Severe cases of corporate brain-cramp occurred. Stimson shoes were especially designed to dig your heels in! Their dominant feature! To put it in the vernacular, the employees had a collective conniption fit. Why change anything, they whined. I mean, haven’t we always done it this way?

And isn’t this a very comfortable place to work, just like it is? Why complicate matters? What would the community think if all of a sudden Stimson started selling shoes or something? And it might require that people assume new assignments. Or attend training sessions. Or change time schedules. Or maybe somebody might even have to go. Or, all heaven forbid, we might have to hire somebody new, and since everybody was aware of the dire financial condition of the company, they knew for sure and certain that couldn’t happen. And who around here, for crying out loud, knows anything about a kingdom, anyway? This is not some God-forsaken European country where they still have royalty and stuff like that. And didn’t we whup (that’s how we say “whip” around here) ‘em in a war? Two or three times? I still call it “Woeful Wednesday.” It produced a big run on antacids down at the corner drugstore.

But, even though I didn’t wear Stimson shoes (are you serious?), I could dig my heels in, too. After all, it was my business. So, I told them, “It is my way or Farm-to-Market 416!” “Go home and get happy,” I told

them, or “stay home and get hungry!” My voice sounded kinda imperious or something, but I meant business. Because it was my business!

Well, dear reader, some very interesting things happened. The next morning there the four sat, overdosed on Pepto Bismol! Their eyes were, at the same time, beady and bleary. Never saw it before. But I stood up, got in my full parental mode---that’s the same as “imperious”--- and said to the children, “Here’s how we’re going to advance the Kirkendorff Shoe Kingdom! We’re going to focus on doing one thing and doing it right. We’re not going to get side-tracked. We’re going to make the best shoes this side of Chicago! (I didn’t know if they made shoes this side of Chicago or not, but it sounded like a long ways away and besides, I knew nobody would call my hand on it. And, too, I was sailing smooth, approaching preaching, and not thinking very much about what I was saying except about the “one thing” thing.)

Everybody’s got feet, I pontificated, and we’re going to put Kirkendorffs on ‘em! We’re going to be proud of making ‘em and they’re going to be proud of wearing ‘em!” (Eyes popped out, eye-brows raised everywhere at “wearing ‘em”!) And we’re not going to do anything else but seek first the Kirkendorff Shoe Kingdom!” And some other stuff like that. I felt exhilarated and even Addie Sue told me later that it was really inspirational, like the speech I made when we were thirteen points behind at halftime in the Woodsville basketball game when I was a junior---in which game, by the way, we came back and beat ‘em!

Then I stopped and asked for questions. Surprisingly, Joe Johnson said something when the stun factor subsided a bit. He’d been at Stimsons since nearly forever, but he was a good man and had, somewhere in his past, longed for Stimson to join the current century. “Why don’t we take that motto apart and see if we really understand what those words mean?” His aunt had once been an English teacher in Bossier City, Louisiana, and he was big on word meanings. “I mean,” he began, “what does ‘seek’ really mean? And that word ‘kingdom;’ it’s used in a lotta ways, you know. And if we say ‘first,’ well, that runs out there a long ways in different directions.” Things like that. Now, Joe wasn’t showing off. And he wasn’t mad. Or trying to slow the train down. He really wanted to know. And to take our new motto seriously. His idea made me think a little stronger about the whole matter, too.

And then, the miracle mood sorta took over the entire room. John Nordan got into the discussion. And then Sylvester Gratiano, who had, he always said, Italian shoe-making in his blood, and wished we could do it right a little while before he died. Hard to believe, but Miss Maude McPherson talked too. Strange, because (a) she really didn’t like Stimsons. In fact, she didn’t like life; was severely allergic to it. And besides, (b) , since a mule kicked her in the head at the annual rodeo (she was messing around with the single-tree on his wagon) when she was twelve, when she did talk you always had the idea that between what her mind told her to say and what her mouth actually said, well, how shall we say it: there was a slight disconnect. Her synapses didn’t quite synapse. But the talking was interesting to hear.

From those early days, our focus was simply this: how are we going to “seek first the Kirkendorff Shoe kingdom?” Everything else was put aside. One purpose. Up front. No outside stuff. Sylvester said a thing one

day that sorta chyrstalized the discussion---and every one ever since: all of a sudden he looked as if he had swallowed a two-hundred-watt light bulb and said he remembered an Italian sculptor being asked the secret of his skill. The sculptor replied, "Well, I take a piece of granite and I chip away everything that doesn't look like a horse!" I call that story our Prime Parable. From that day on we chipped away everything that didn't look like a shoe factory. Even if we liked what we were chipping away. And found ourselves standing knee-deep in wierd stuff that didn't come within three counties of making and selling shoes!

Back to the word thing: we took the word "seek" and wrung it out, everybody taking notes on what "seek" meant to us. And what it did not mean. The biggest thing was that it spoke of energy, passion, force, direction, purpose. Stuff like that. And then the same with "first." We combed it back and forth until "first" was groaning under the scrutiny. We knew that "FIRST" had to do with priorities, staying away from trivia, not getting distracted, forgetting for a moment what might be thirty-eighth on our priority list. Or even second. Etc. And the same with "kingdom," which, we figured out, is the territory ruled by a king. Now, I wasn't a king, of course, but they got the idea. Somebody has to sit in the big chair. Somebody has to be the "go-to" guy. Somebody has to become responsible. And help others become responsible. I mean, we saw that a king, no matter how responsible or smart or willing he is, he can't do everything a kingdom needs! For crying out loud!

Nuances kept popping up, running all over the place, making connections we had never thought of. (I like the word "nuance;" I got it from my favorite English teacher in our school, Miss Mary Michaelangelo. She loved it. Rolled it gently off her tongue when she said it. A lot. Wasn't enough that it was a noun. She made it into a verb---"Let's nuance that," and even a predicate adjective, "Shakespeare's just so incredibly nuance-cive!" When she got to be a city commissioner, I was afraid we'd become "Nuance City." Or that she'd get married and have a girl one day and name her "Nuance." "Nuance Michaelangelo!" Wow.)

But you get the idea. We gathered facts until there were only sixteen facts left within the city limits. Made a run on them. Used up 500 pine trees worth of the paper writing down them all down and cataloguing them. Well, one day we came to a crisis: JoJohn (Joe Johnson) made a sage observation: if facts produced shoes, Stimson could have put shoes on all of Santa Anna's troops when the came up from Mexico to take San Antonio back in '36 (18, not 19). But, he observed shrewdly, *facts don't make shoes. The practice of facts make shoes.* So from then on, we didn't call "Seek First The Kirkendorff Shoe Kingdom" the *First Fact* anymore. We took down a huge banner in the factory which said that. It had cost a bundle to get it painted and hung, too. But we didn't want to focus on facts anymore. We wanted to focus on practicing facts. So we got a new banner and called our "Seek First the Kirkendorff Kingdom" objective our *Primary Practice*. And that became of the focus of everything we discussed. And did after we discussed it.

Now it was time to begin to make changes on the basis of the Primary Practice. I learned this like I'd never learned it before: it's one thing to talk and it's another thing to tackle! Most folk would vote, if it was only voting, to build the Leaning Tower of Pisa in the back yard, but when it comes to stacking bricks at an angle, well that's another deal.

Here's how we started: we pooled our personal resources (there being no corporate resources) , and borrowed \$16,000. Which showed how willing our employees were to personally ante up for the sake of the Kingdom. Their kingdom! One thing to spend Kirdendorff money, but totally another to spend theirs! Our discussions had made some things very clear: we had to change our ways in more ways that we could have ever imagined at the outset. We took the money and did the obvious: we cleaned up the building, and painted it, inside and out. It hadn't felt new paint in so long that it went into an imitation of old Tyler when he has the DT's.

We had already begun changing the shoe-making operation: new and up-to-date styles, new materials, killed a lot of brown with new dyes of various hues, studied about how to package shoes appealingly (the first time the building had ever experienced that, as well), set up three kiosks in the big new mall up on the highway. Went on a Seek First The Kirkendorff Shoe Kingdom binge! And presto blinko (yeah, I know: that's enough for this whole story), we began to sell shoes! Get this: after the first full year we had sold more Stimsons than had been sold in the last five years altogether! Even had some out-of-town people buying them because of an ad we ran in the Redford County Record. And we had paid off the entire loan. Never thought of getting an "early pay-off" clause; nobody in our kingdom or anybody else's kingdom around here thought that'd happen! Strangest thing was, even though we couldn't compete with some of the big shoe guys, people began to choose what home-towners had made even though they cost a bit more because, I guess, they knew for sure who had made them and how they were made.

And a lot of good things followed: we felt better about, even proud of, our product, were more focused on what we were doing, we were saving an immense amount of energy, even knew we were telling the truth when we began to say we had a good product. That was truly a new thing around Stimson. Nothing nuan-cive about it, either; hit-you-over-the-head-with-a-pole-axe deal!

Yeah, we had to stop some stuff. Had to chip some non-shoe-factory debris away. For one thing, we stopped the "Daughters of the Royal Order of We Shall Arise" from taking over our building on Tuesday afternoons. Didn't make much difference earlier because nothing much was hap-pening on Tuesday afternoons anyway. (Anyhow, the women talked a lot about arising but I watched them closely and they did extremely little arising about anything except to visit the ladies room.) Or Wednesday afternoons. Truth be told, nothing much was happening morning, noon, or night, Monday through Saturday. Except whatever roaches and termites do. But after the changes, the strangest thing began to happen: customers got to getting in the way of the "Daughters," and they sniffed---the "Daughters" did--- and walked out. And you know what: the earth went right on turning on its axis!

We changed other things. We threw out old Mrs. Stimson's walnut chest. Sounds like a little thing, but do you know what an icon is? Stimsonites knew, without saying anything, that big and bad undefined--and permanent--things would happen if the chest ever went. And woe betide him or her by whom it went! But it was in the way, didn't fit the decor (loose use of the word), blocked two aisles, and looked a little like something dredged up---a long time ago---from the bottom of the Ganges. We tossed it. (Actually, I per-

sonally tossed it one night, without telling anybody, and then stayed home from work two days hoping the undefined cosmic “bad” wouldn’t befall me.) But of course, they knew I had had something to do with its absence. For six weeks I thought I’d be like the preacher down the road whose entire ministry was identified with the fact that, during his pastorate, The Mesquite (note the caps) tree in the church-yard died. Didn’t matter that the church doubled in attendance under his ministrations, and that offerings tripled: “Oh, that guy? He’s the one who was our pastor when the old Mesquite died!” The mark of Cain!

We did something else: we quit collecting newspapers to pay for the annual company picnic. It wasn’t because collecting newspapers is ontologically (I don’t know, but it means something like “big time”) a bad thing, it’s just that it took about 16% of our total corporate energy to do it. And caused an average of 22 arguments a week. Which means, of course, more expenditure of energy. Hard to sew a good seam on a shoe-sole when you’re being badgered about your department’s newspaper-collecting shortcomings! (Did you know that some arguments are designed never to get settled? That’s their entire reason for existence. As it is for their initiators and abettors. Or that the smaller the issue the bigger and more intense and lengthy the argument?)

On changes, if I had to state the one thing that marked Stimson’s employees, it would be the DPYFOFIMS disease, that is, “Don’t Put Your Foot Or Face In My Space!” When they put the word “turfism” in the dictionary, they shoulda put a picture of our employees in the margin! The historians are always using that word “balkanized.” Guess who the people in the Balkans learned balkanizing from? You got it! From the Stimsons! We did it before they did it, and better than they did it. With more lethal results. You were taking your life into your own hands when you walked across certain invisible lines around here. It was a veritable mine-field. Which was one of the reasons Stimson never hired; the new hires would have lost their lives before noon!

We made a rule: if you work at Stimsons, you gotta *join* Stimson! And Stimson is one thing, not four! In fact, the four employees had divided the place, not into four parts, but 21 or 22 Balkanized fiefdoms, different language, ordinances (and ordnances!) rules, regulations, and religions operating in each one. Nobody but old Mrs. Stimson could decode the place. And she’d been dead two decades! Ben Franklin once said that to get the constitution ratified among the original colonies was like trying to make thirteen clocks chime at the same time. It wasn’t much easier with our four clocks. But it was a lot more fun (to suddenly change a metaphor, which is one of our innate abilities embedded deep in our DNA in Redford) to get on the same page. In fact, when we got in the same library, things improved measurably.

Another change: we made the following rule: we will no longer post newspaper clippings reporting on the latest signs of the coming recession. Instead, we will set about trying to stave the thing off by producing and selling shoes! And if recession does comes, we have chosen not to participate. As King Kirkendorff, I was unanimous about that.

We discovered, of course, that it was not always easy to know how to change (or what, or who, or when,

or to what extent to change!) even if we agreed that something needed to be changed. It's OK, we saw, if we differ, and we can't all agree about everything immediately. In fact, I found out that even a king doesn't always agree with himself! I differed with myself on several memorable occasions! And the QUEEN (total caps) did, too! I came down to this: it is not always easy to draw the lines between "frozen" and "faith" and "foolhardiness." But believe me, Stimson had sinned, severely, on the "frozen" side. We coulda made an arctic ice-cap out of the last twenty years. But I also learned this: (a) the king must lead the kingdom, (b) he must act, and (c) he must act decisively.

I once heard a famous pole-vaulter say that his success was based on this act: first, he threw his heart over the bar and everything else followed. *The king's heart leads*, I learned. Big-time important. He's simply gotta do it. Lead, I mean. A vacuum draws bad things into itself sometimes, so Stimson and every other business on earth cries for leadership. And the leader must like to lead, envision himself as a leader, and get comfortable with the idea. To subtly change the metaphor again: you have little chance of leading an NFL football team to victory in the Super Bowl if you think you look funny in cleats! Or (certainly!) if you're afraid to wear them where you simply have to wear them---onto the playing field where some people like him and others severely don't! The Kirkendorff King has to like wearing his shoes (pun intended), and in the place where he's gotta wear them.

I need to stop and tell you something else I left out: we began doing something that hadn't been done at Stimson in a generation. The motto had always been, "Dear Lord, bless us four and no more!" But things got to hopping and we had to put on our first two new people. We put on Joe Bootler and Jesse Wilson. Two good guys. Joe was a high school grad who worked down at Boone's Burger Barn and Jesse was doing odd jobs at the near-by ranches. They thing they had in common is that they were healthy young specimens and were looking for good steady jobs. Whatever else Stimson had been, it had been steady! But here's the crease: the First Four had historically---as in "forever"---demanded that they interview all prospective employees, which is why no new ones had been hired in a decade. They changed their position (actually I did it for them and made them think they had done it) and said I should begin interviewing all new help to be sure they fit our factory philosophy. Now, they didn't say I was the king and the king ought to have a strong say in his kingdom, but that's kinda what they thought, I reckon (it's hard not to say "rekkin" like everybody else around here says it). So I interviewed them, and, after going through the Primary Practice thing as thoroughly as I could, I made them swear they'd give it their best shot.

I remember a football practice session one hot day and an unusual event that happened on that long-ago hot practice day. A young boy, a freshman, has missed an assignment. A local businessman (Blinkie Herdman) was watching practice and, although his only exercise was jumping to conclusions, shouted at the coach, "Get that coward off the field!" My coach, in one of the defining moments of my life, turned and, with all the players listening, said, in a strong calling-the-steers-in voice, "Sometimes a boy acts cowardly because he doesn't know what to do. That's my fault and not his." Shazam! What a line! Same is true in business, of course. How in the name of common (or any other kind of) sense can an employee know what to do if it hasn't been made clear---in plain middle-american---by the person whose responsibility it

is to make such things clear? (Before you read another word, if you're really interested in leading a group of team-members to success, get that last sentence down into your bone-marrow.)

Well, one of the best things the two kids had going for them is that they are both bona-fide simple. About as complex as ball-bearings. In fact, they were so simple they didn't know there was a problem. And our Practice Principle, well, it's not all that complex. If a man can get his shoes on the proper feet and has a driver's license, he probably qualifies for Kirkendorffs.

Assuming he buys into to our Primary Practice. And these guys, who posed no real threat to the Phi Beta Kappa crowd, came on with us and did famously. (Remember: it's not what you know that makes and sells good shoes; it's what you practice that makes and sells good shoes. Mountains are not moved by dreams, but by bull-dozers, and leather does not become shoes by somebody having ideas about shoes, even if Aristotle had them---the ideas, but by leather-transforming-work-by-human-beings.

The First Four did another thing: they also had me doing the basic training to be sure and certain that we didn't just talk Primary Practice but did it. By the end of the first full year, we had a workforce of a whopping dozen! More than Stimson had ever had since the last war when they got a military contract for brown shoes. (Which is why they stayed with them so long; they never could bring themselves to admit that the war was over.) And all happy and well-paid. Because of another very, very important piece of our basic philosophy: if you take care of the king, the king will take care of you. I mean, in kingdoms that are run right, servants (we called them Kingdom Krafters, but it was a lot like servants in a good kingdom) have stuff to do and kings have stuff to do. The servant makes the king successful and the king takes care of the servants. They really liked the idea, especially when they saw I meant business about it, being unanimous about that, too. Why else would they fork over \$16,000? It became the thing to do to work at Stimsons! Even for those working there!

Lest I forget: remember The Famous First Four? And them having me hire and train all newcomers? Well, it didn't stay that way. In about six months, one of them was gone---no shoe genes in his DNA, one proved himself to be a very good drone-worker and so stayed in the shoe-boxing department (actually, he now heads the department up), and the other two became excellent at hiring and training new employees---and doing it the KSK way. Further, they are now training six others in what we now call "Human Resources," which means that we're actually getting a little up-town. Which is also one reason why the Junior College over at Victavia now sends their business students over to observe a lean, mean, productive small business operation operating!

I remember those first Wednesday meetings. We met on Wednesdays because I wanted that first Woeful Wednesday to turn into a bunch of Wonderful Wednesdays. And, when the mood changed, I razzed them a bunch about that first Wednesday. One of my lasting regrets is that I didn't secretly tape it! We'd have lunch---freshly prepared from scratch---and then we'd talk about the implications of our motto. Addie Sue would stand at the chalk board and I'd throw out the question (in fact, it is still our question every week, in

one form or another): “If I were truly going to seek first the Kirkendorff Shoe Kingdom, what, *specifically*, would I do? Not think or plan or write about or sing a song about or cogitate on, but do?” And the answers would come, slowly during the first weeks, and then faster and more insightfully. And a new hire, Sandy Huddleston, took notes, which were transformed into factory memos and displayed in various places away from the customers:

- We’d wear Stimsons.
- We’d brag on Stimsons.
- We’d be sure Stimsons were made of the best materials, and in the most desirable styles.
- We’d advertise Stimsons.
- We’d keep looking for new customers.
- We would be kind and considerate of all customers.
- Even if somebody didn’t buy our shoes, we’d smile and thank them for coming in.
- We’d clean up and brighten up the store; that became a fetish. There might have been cleaner rest facilities in our town, but we dared anybody to compete with us. We wanted a roach to skid when he ran across our floor and tried to stop. And a fly’s feet to slip out from under him and fall on his belly when he lit on our counter.
- We’d keep the store open longer hours.
- We’d make special arrangements for people with small children.
- We’d offer good shoes, of excellent quality, at good prices.
- We’d seek testimonials of happy customers.
- We’d give customers price breaks if they bought multiple pairs.
- We wouldn’t personally buy the shoes from the competition, of course, but we wouldn’t criticize them.
- We offered free-shoe shines on Stimsons every Saturday from 8-12 AM. First-come-first-serve, until the clock ran out. (That little inexpensive service was literally worth its weight in gold.)
- We would give a certain portion of our profits to community projects. (And brag about it!)
- We would not indulge human nature’s natural tendency to argue and gripe at each other or at the corporation, but we would---and did---establish well-defined processes for settling grievances. Which was mostly the king establishing a rather simple job-security program: “If you’d like to keep your job, get over your pout. While I stand here and watch.” But, of course, true grievances did occur. The large majority of grievances simply vanished because we got a little over-dosed on pride about how good things were going. Have you ever noticed: winning football teams high-five and drink champagne and losing football teams sit around whining and reading the rule book and criticizing each other and crying about the refs? The most problems solved? Those which never came up because we produced a problem-killing atmosphere before they--- the problems---were ever born! *It’s vastly easier to deal with a problem in its fetal state than in its final state!*
- If we saw two employees not getting along, we’d do whatever it took to bring about reconciliation. That would, we agreed, truly be an expression of seeking the welfare of the Kirkendorff Kingdom. I mean, a kingdom fighting inside its own walls was not a kingdom but a chaos. And we talked to and

with each other. We came to this: if you live in this kingdom you're going to learn, and use, the language and the behavior of this kingdom. You don't talk to and with us, you don't stay. Punte Finale! (That's from our hispanic population; it means "final point," as in "end of sentence, end of discussion!")

- We would not tolerate in ourselves or others stealing from the Kingdom. I read somewhere how many billions are stolen every year by employees, and sat in a puddle of stun for a week. How stupid is that! To drink one's own life blood! If you get a kingdom concept you have to be a true nit-wit to steal from yourself! That would be like your right hand stealing from your left hand and tee-heeing all the way to the hospital! To quote a local 13-year-old philosopher: "Gimme a break, Dude!"
- We would recognize and affirm excellence.
- We would help each other. Everybody talks about being "team players," but we learned something very important about that: when it comes right down to it, team players are a rarity. And then we uncovered this largely unknown fact: if you're really a team player you're giving up something precious for the team once in a while. *The question then became, what, precisely and specifically, in middle American, am I giving up for the team?* Actually, kingdom.
- We would do whatever it took to succeed. There were no little jobs and no big jobs, just opportunities to advance the kingdom. (Joe said he and some buddies once started a club in his treehouse. Their motto was, "Nobody act big. Nobody act little. Everybody act medium." We sort of adopted that as a guide.)
- We would work in any place in the kingdom culture, from production to plumbing, purchaser to painter, from president to parker-of-cars, just so we could advance the kingdom. Honestly, what difference does "where" make if you know "why?"
- We would be especially sensitive to advance the Kirkendorff Shoe Kingdom when things went wrong. That, we discovered, is a fundamental and foundational thing. It's easy enough to advance the kingdom when everything's coming up roses, but when the unexpected painful thing happens---a pair of shoes weren't done right, the computer went down, we over-charged a customer, somebody got a fender-bender in one of our parking spaces, somebody wanted to sue us, the plumbing went bad, etc., etc.---well, it's a different peck of pickles! We found that you can really make points when you handle trouble right. Quickly! And, we found out, you get lots of chances to prove that!
- We would simply remember that we were, at all times and in all places, Ambassadors Plenipotentiary for the Kingdom of Kirkendorff! (My high school civics teacher, Mr. Geebon, said that that's somebody who represents a government and has all the power necessary to make peace between two countries.)

And on and on. Endlessly. But excitedly. And then we would emphasize practice, not preaching.

It was even greater fun to take the thing from the negative side: "If I were not seeking first the Kirkendorff Shoe Kingdom---*but trying to destroy it*--- what would I be doing?" We went down that road, too, on Wednesdays.

- We wouldn't wear Stimsons.
- We wouldn't have anything good to say about Stimsons.
- We'd produce shoddy shoes.
- We'd only sell a two sizes and two styles. All in one color.
- We'd hard-sell the customers and talk down to them. manipulate them.
- We'd open at our convenience, not that of the customer. ("Well, of course we don't open during the daytime; that's inconvenient for the employees; how about 2 AM until 4 AM. Ain't no big deal finding a parking place then!")
- We'd act as if the world owed us something, and practice saying it with a sneer. Sneer practice is really fun. We found that some people have an innate ability in that area. They can sneer singing the National Anthem! (Maybe the chief illness of the "average" corporation---how about home and church and school, too!---is the spirit of entitlement: this place owes me, and everybody in this place owes me_____---fill in the blank!)
- We'd offend the customer if we felt like it, and especially if the customer asked any questions.
- We'd never advertise; "Let the suckers find us if they want us!"
- We'd engage in in-fighting all the time. In fact, we'd be engaged in a constant civil war. Nothing is so sure to kill the life of a shoe-factory than that! (Why do they call it "civil" when it's so uncivil, anyhow?)
- We'd become known as the biggest rumor mill in the world. Try to start three dozen or so a day. All of them bad.
- We'd have a dimly-lit and dingy store; that attracts roaches and people who look like roaches.
- We'd promise one thing and then deliver another. And become famous for it! Win awards for it!

And on and on it went with people coming up with tremendous ideas out of their own perceptions and experience. Seems we never ran out of either positive or negative suggestions. It got to be fun. We'd even role-play sometimes. And give prizes for the best stunts. "Whatya mean, lady; of course we don't have shoes your size; that'd take two round-ups. Go down to the Army-Navy and buy two pup tents!"

At some point along the way, we discovered this, as we worked on the negative side: many operations are designed to fail! I mean, our list of negatives looked like operational procedures for a lot of places. And, honestly, a lot like the old Stimson store!

And this: all good businesses do a lot of things alike and all bad businesses to a lot of things alike. And this, as Sylvester said they said in Italy, "If you serve great food, they'll find the restaurant." And this: the work-force can change the way a company operates. It really can happen. Some factories need a rejuvenation; Stimson needed a resurrection. And we got it. Simply because we focused on what our real task was and practiced the Primary Practice till the cows came home. And we didn't make a lot of noise in the beginning. Call the Press Corp or something like that. We just started doing it. And kept on, endlessly, doing it. Through thick and thin. Winning people one at a time. We learned this: if you keep doing things right, with a right motive, in the right context, to enough people, the sun of success will rise on you. Infallibly.

We came to see another something that changed us forever: the words “seek first the Kirkendorff Shoe Kingdom” didn’t have much bite to them because they were sorta academic. One guy said “metaphysical.” I guess so. Sounded like our resident Pythagorean philosopher, Mr. Chuson; he’d know, for sure. You could go on spouting our motto for generations but until it became concrete or hard or biting--got under your skin--or something like that; until it grabbed you by your throat and shut off your wind-pipe like a calf at a snubbing post--until that, well, nothing much changed.

I still love what one of our newer employees, a young black man named Blocker, said one day about all that. He said that on the Sunday previous, his pastor had said about some hard-to-understand preachers: “Too many of us metaphysicians don’t know how to tangibilitate!” It took us a little while, but when we unpacked that box, we fully agreed. And knew it didn’t just happen in black churches! Been there! Had that done to me in all-lilly-white churches!

I probably ought to put a big thing in right here. We came to a very defining conclusion, rather gradually, I guess, but it dawned on us, with increasing intensity that *we can’t do everything all shoe manufacturers / sellers on the planet do*. We just had to find our niche. Which is much harder than it sounds. And even after you find it, define, it, draw lines around, and pursue it, then the boundaries keep shifting with changing conditions and situations. But it made sense.

Look, there have to be a lot of shoe kingdoms, and we don’t have to conquer them all. I mean if we were multi-billionaires and had egos bigger’n Dallas (sounds like “Dalliss” here), well, we could have fun cornering the world shoe market. And probably lose a bundle. I remember from history (I had to take a survey course in European history at junior college) that a lotta guys like some of the Pharaohs in Egypt and Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan tried to manage kingdoms which were just too big. Couldn’t get their arms around them. And rule peoples with very different histories and traditions, and languages and cultures and stuff like that. So, we had to get comfortable, make our own shoes fit us, so to speak. And do the very best we could right there. I guess it’s like boxing (catch that metaphor jump?): you have to find your place no matter whether you’re a bantam-weight, or a middle-weight, or a heavy-weight. But when you find it, *be a champion*. Find your niche and punch the other guy’s lights out. And let the others do the same in their weight-class.

Somewhere along the way, another something happened, a huge some- thing: *we began to see that it is not enough for the corporation to act on the Primary Practice but the individuals in the corporation must do the same!* Now, that’s big. Huge. Tectonic. Yea, verily, cosmic. Nothing, we learned, becomes dynamic until it becomes specific. And nothing becomes powerful until it becomes personal.

See: a corporation can do good things, make and sell good stuff, follow first principles, and do well. But that really only affects the surface culture of the corporation and leaves untouched the well-springs of true power: the individual heart and mind. It’s hard to put into words but very obvious when you think it through. And see it happening before your eyes. It was another one of those nuance things, but a nuance may look

like a little thing and yet be a large thing. I mean, there's a lotta difference between a horse and a horse-fly. And it ain't nuancive! Because whatever's on the inside will show up on the outside. And after all, is it even possible for a company to have a corporate soul which doesn't arise from individual souls? You can't just vote a soul in at a board meeting. Or proclaim a soul out of thin air. Or write it down on paper and think that because it's written it automatically operates inside somebody's heart.

(Time out: I do sincerely believe this: a leader has to believe all that, and drive toward it, push toward it, lead toward it, but most of all, I guess, is *the leader has to be it* before he can really facilitate it in those he's leading. If I don't have the disease---actually, if the disease doesn't have me---how can I infect you with it?)

All that drove us to focus on this pin-point of reality: what am I personally, as a single human being, doing to seek first the Kirkendorff Shoe Kingdom? And, of course, I had to seriously ask myself, as king of the deal, the same question. And it wasn't all that easy to answer. Or do! I read somewhere that if a leader wants his followers to bleed, he has to hemorrhage. I'm not all that familiar with medical terminology, but I got the idea.

We didn't make the thing into a religion, and we certainly didn't believe, or insinuate, that one's ultimate identity had to do with making and selling shoes. Like it was the Holy Grail or something. Even Stimsons. But we did learn that people need to know what they are doing and why. And they need to know that personally. And get their heart into it. Believe it and feel it and act it out. From down in their own personal city hall. If one's vocation is not all of one's identity, it is a significant part of it. And what he or she does in a personal vocation is dramatically affected by the location of the heart.

Now, we didn't make people say that sorta thing out loud. Didn't give them tests and publicize their scores. Write it on chalk-boards and have them sign it. Have each person eat a little sack full of "Seek-First-The-Kirken-dorff-Shoe-Kingdom" cookies and think, therefore, it was assimilated into their blood and bones. Or pull of some crazy stuff like that. But we talked a lot about how what was in our hearts as individuals--good or bad--would show up on the outside. And we had longer-term employees teach the newcomers about it. Made up their own illustrations and applications. Think about it: to teach somebody else a truth means the truth has to work its way through one's own soul. It's not a sure-fire guarantee that the truth becomes personalized, but it does often help.

In the whole matter, we observed the obvious: a symbol---a song, ring, pendant, key-ring, etc.---can be a very important witness to reality, *but when the symbol becomes the reality, as they sometimes do---think of some wedding rings!---you can hear the hearse-wheels in the gravel.* Death sets in, whether one sees it or not.

To put it another way: maybe a shoe, in some mystical way, has an uncanny way of knowing what is in the heart of its creator! And that faking it is really hard. Look: love and hate, like and dislike, are a lot easier to do when they arise out of one's inner being. Faking anything is a huge drain of emotional energy. We really saw some progress when we focused on that.

Did it all go well? Of course not. I mean, the millennium hasn't happened yet. There were some tough times. On the road to a miracle, there's always a mess or two! (That was one of our original thoughts, I think. Made it easier to deal with the inevitable messes. I mean, which famous person didn't go through messes getting wherever it was he was going!) But, and here's the biggest thing about a single focus: if everybody agrees on the most basic principles and practices, *you can use those very basic principles as a leverage to solve problems.*

If your stated operational basis is known and understood, if it has been adopted by everybody in the place, then holding people in line with those fundamentals is a lot easier. Not perfect, but a lot easier. "No, we can't do that because it violates our Primary Practice, and the Primary Practice is not up for discussion. We've settled that." "No, we're not going to begin selling shaving stuff instead of shoes because our deal isn't shaving stuff but shoes." "Yes, we need to discuss that because it may help us pursue our Primary Practice." You get the idea. So the big question simply is this: is what you are doing, is what we as a corporation are doing, advancing the Kirkendorff Kingdom or is it not? Punto finale!

But back to my main point: if you have a well-defined and well-thought-out Primary Practice, then you can use that to judge all other matters. All of them! It's not really that complex. Of course, there are rules and regulations which various governmental agencies superimpose on us, some good and some bad, some unpleasant and some unpleasant raised to the tenth power. And you can't always show a direct and quantifiable (Addie Sue, with her math coming out, gave me that one) relationship between a proposed action and selling more Stimsons, but you just got stay as close to your own big rules as you can. Takes more time than you want at times, but you can't lose sight of why you really exist. And if you think that it takes too much time to inculcate that in the work-force, try administrating by flying by the seat of your pants, making up rules as you go without a strong consensus about who you are and what you're doing, and then you can write a big book on the subject of wasting time! I remember that I heard the politician Dr. Kissinger say on television one night, "If you think responsibility is hard to bear, you should try bearing irresponsibility." That's one of those "let-me-sit-down-and-soak-that-up" lines.

The first flap (I don't capitalize the words because it wasn't much flap, actually) involved Miss Maude McPherson. She never really got the big picture about our single focus. Maybe after the horse kick she couldn't count to one or something. She actually didn't like the idea of anybody being a king. In any sense. Said that everybody had a mind (which was, in her circumstance, debatable, but I didn't interrupt her because I knew bigger stuff was coming) and so ought to just be trusted to do whatever they wished. When they wished. For as long as they wished. With whomever they wished. Whether it had to with shoes or sugar tarts. On company time.

In that course I took at the junior college I didn't learn a whole lot but I do remember learning what an anarchist is. He is a guy who doesn't like government of any kind. I thought only philosophers could be anarchists, but Maude was a bona-fide anarchist. And she couldn't, for sure and certain, even spell philosopher. So she had to go. But, thankfully, it wasn't that bad at all. She came in one day and made an anar-

chist speech---I thought it was pretty good, actually, for an anarchist--and I had my mouth fixed to make a kingdom speech when she got through with her anarchist speech, but I didn't have to because she ended by assuming a bit of a haughty air, tilting her head back and, showing a little nostril, said, "I just think it's time for me to move on so I can truly find myself, so you have my resignation, if you give me my whole vacation." I couldn't figure out why she couldn't find herself at 242 pounds. But I'd have given her six months in Tahiti if that's what it took to be rid of her. Only problem is, like watching dogs chase cars---I couldn't figure out what she would have done with herself had she ever succeeded in catching up with herself.

In any case, Miss Maude was gone soon and we all sighed a sigh of genuine relief. And the IQ of the kingdom rose by six points. While the kindness quotient rose by sixteen points! But hear this: one way or the other she would have gone. Or I would have had the junior college hire her as a prime example of some weird psychological distortion and have the kids study her. We learned this: everybody on the planet is not fitted to work productively at the Kirkendorff Shoe Kingdom! (And, by the way: the last time I checked, she was still looking. For herself, I mean.)

The only person we had to dismiss was Wayne Broom; just could not or would not join the team. We tried to find some place where he might fit, but we went o-for-five. Honestly, I think he's o-for-life, but I sincerely hope not. I did learn this: I know that sometimes, with employees---as with athletes---they're just in the wrong place or on the wrong team, but I also know this: when you move an empty bottle from one place to the other, the contents don't change!

We became some sort of a phenomenon, as they say. Shoe sales sky-rocketed. Company, er, kingdom, morale was excellent. People didn't want to miss work. Difference between a morgue and a melee! We had to expand everything. But it was not just for expansion's sake: we let the business drive everything. We learned if kingdoms are done properly, well, it's a lot more pleasurable, and almost always (I guess there are exceptions) profitable. Not a bad combination. And we're still at it---the Wonderful Wednesdays (and that's not just a motto; that's a reality):the essential question, the focus on advancing the kingdom, and how we might kill the kingdom, and so on. Where will it end? I guess nobody knows. Maybe it won't ever end. Does it have to? I mean, when a new king takes over and has a new set of subjects, don't the same essential realities exist? And the same essential rules apply? And the same processes function? And even though unimaginable changes will be introduced, aren't the basics still the same? At least, throughout what we call "time" exists. I bet you this: the next generation is not going to go barefooted. All of them, anyhow. But, all that's for another generation, I guess. And a generation which will, I am sure, learn things about kingdom reality which we never dreamed of. And that's all good. But for the moment, we're on a roll.

Thanks for listening. And I hope that whatever your kingdom is, you're passionately and purposefully seeking its advancement. Or that you'll go look for a kingdom worth all your best if your current one is not. As you will discover, your precise role in your kingdom won't matter much; your pursuit of its welfare will matter a whole lot. But get into the best kingdom you can, because if you choose the right kingdom and give it your very best, three big things will infallibly happen: (a) God will be pleased, (b) The world will be a

better place, and (c) You will be personally fulfilled.

EXCURSUS

Buff did a super job, did he not! And what he did, of course, whether he knew it or not, reminds all students of the Bible of Jesus' words in Matthew 6, where, in my view, the Lord said the most profound thing He ever said about how to live the truly great life. And how to do so in and through a local church. Listen, as if you never heard it before, to what He said there. Since I learned it in the King James Version, I give it to you that way. Now, really listen! Taste each word.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed. (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Two of my life-defining experiences have caused me, almost for the entire duration of my fifty-plus year walk with the Lord, to focus on what Jesus said in that passage. *This excursus simply applies the kingdom-seeking principle in one's personal life. In this case, my own.*

THE MONEY MATTER

The first event occurred in November, 1963, when I was in my earliest years as a pastor. I was married, had three young children, and was commuting over 200 miles every day to seminary. Money was a serious problem. I was not making a living, I was eking out a living on what I made. We had no financial help from either of our sets of parents, or anybody else, outside the meager pay-check from our little church. My wife and I were not panic-stricken about the matter, but we were under constant financial pressure. We lived from pay-check to pay-check and, while not in poverty, we certainly lived abstemiously. Joyously, but abstemiously. The loss of a tire on our VW Beetle put a huge dent in what was left of a month's salary.

One day I was studying in my little office that was so small that (as the famed preacher/pastor R. G. Lee once said about his first study) I had to step outside to change my mind. I was poring over the aforementioned passage, Matthew's chapter 6, verses 19 and following. I wasn't reading looking for sermon material, but just absorbed in the text which I had picked (at the human level) for no particular reason.

I thought about Jesus' "For where your treasure is there will your heart be also." I recalled having read Kierkegaard's "Purity of heart is to will one thing," but I tried to put all I had ever heard---good as it was, or bad as it was---aside and to hear Jesus for myself. In my own "language," as it were. (A little Welch girl once said, hearing a discussion about what language Jesus spoke, 'I don't know about all that; I only know that when He speaks to me, it's always in Welch.'). Now I knew that He was my treasure, but it was occurring to me that money had been allowed to occupy too large a place in my mental processes. I wasn't attempting to be super-spiritual; I was simply attempting to be honest about the matter. (In passing, I realized that most young couples in our situation were---and are---experiencing similar challenges; I didn't think we were especially cursed, or even very different from the norm.)

Then came v24, "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. *Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" I am sure that every serious Christian has, at some point, moneyed or moneyless, struggled with that passage. *When am I serving money-making, and when am I making money-making serve me?* Of course, I didn't exhaust the meaning of the sentence, but I did make some progress in understanding what Jesus was saying. And how it contradicted a lot of my behaviour.

Then I noticed that Jesus warned us six times from vs 25 to the end of the chapter about “taking thought” about possessions. I knew, by that time, that the verb He used was the Greek word *merimnao*, a word that literally means “to split the mind.” And I knew that that was precisely what worry was doing to me---I was living with a divided mind, and found it very difficult at times to concentrate on the duty (or joy!) at hand, whatever it was, because of worry about money-matters.

I read somewhere, at about that time, that in early European pictographics, worry was depicted as a wolf, with fangs bared, at a man’s throat. I had felt the wolf’s breath and seen his fangs! So I pondered and puzzled over what Jesus was saying, amazed again at the relevance of it all. (Gabriel Marcel once said that the Bible was the only book that read him while he was reading it. I was being read!)

And then vs 32: “For after all these things do the Gentiles seek.” I knew “seek” was that intense word *dioko* and that the eminent authority on New Testament Greek, William Barclay, said it was the picture of a ravenous lion pursuing a gazelle. And I knew, of course, that “gentiles” did pursue those things (food, drink, clothing, etc.) with great avidity. And that the “gentile” part of me did, too. And too much so.

Then this: “For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” I remembered that a precious man, Horace Rowell, in the first days of my walk with the Lord (I was seventeen) quizzed me one day with this---as he discipled me in the faith: “Bill, if God already knows what you need, why ask Him?” I only knew to say, “Because He told us to.” And I still think that’s the essential answer.

Then Mt. Everest passage loomed up before me: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

I remember, vividly (as one does defining moments) letting my mind run riot over those words. I fairly drank them, gulping them down as a famished man gulps food. I am sure God had brought me to the point of knowing I had to deal with some key issues of my life, and had caused me to have that study time that morning, and had chosen this specific passage for my perusal. I did not think those thoughts that morning, but I have ever since. I looked at “seek” again, and understood that, *in contrast to what the “gentiles” sought*, I should seek something else. Just as avidly. We were both seeking, but I should seek something different. And then: “the kingdom of God.”

That, I knew, simply meant whatever pertains to Him and His purposes in the earth (or, for that fact, the universe). That was about all I could think of, and, in retrospect, the idea was a bit amorphous and not much more defined than that.

And then “his righteousness.” That, in some basic sense, I knew to be extremely important. I give myself rather high marks for being serious about pursuing His righteousness during those days. In fact, I was rather severe on myself on that subject, and at times was probably guilty of attempting to take heaven by violence.

By sheer will power. Of course, however, I was to learn that pursuing His righteousness is easy with regard to the “big” sins, but thoroughly challenging with the “small” sins---those of attitude and disposition, the sins of the heart and mind and spirit and soul, the sins of the inner man. And omission as opposed to commission! (Modern work-force lingo is “hard” skills vs “soft skills; spiritually, we’re talking about “hard” sins vs “soft” sins, I presume!)

And then this: “...and all these things shall be added unto you.” I swallowed that clause and the wolf slinked away! I mean: this was Jesus, God in the flesh, telling me, Bill Anderson, that He would see to it that I had everything I needed to cover what I called “the vegetative processes” for me and my family if I pursued His kingdom. He was saying He was going to take care of my little kingdom if I’d take care of His. I had His personal word on it. Which means, of course, I had Him on it, because He is His word! And it wasn’t rhetoric. Or poetry. Or a philosophical disquisition. Or a metaphysical maybe. Or psychobabble. It was a solid promise, just as solid as the promise of my sins being forgiven and being saved from hell to heaven and of being His own child---none of which I doubted since the day I was saved. To quote Buff: Shazam! What He said had blasted through the doors of my own personal City Hall and taken a seat in the big chair behind the big desk.

And then, the *coupe de grace* (which is Latin for “the shot that got me!”) came in v34: “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” That is to say, separate the days one from another and don’t let trouble cross the today-line from the front-end or the back-end, from yesterday or tomorrow. Put all trouble in a finite box labeled “today,” get a good look at it and know that Jesus can handle whatever today puts in the box. I was a trouble-collector of the first order. I don’t think I was psychologically aberrant or something; I think I was somewhere in the “normal” range, but I do know that I wasn’t limiting my worry to today, for sure and certain, as Buff would say. And I knew that it was sapping my energies, young and strong as I was. In fact, at times, maybe my energies were not being sapped; maybe I was hemorrhaging!

At some point I slid out of my chair and put my knees on that rough concrete floor in that little six-by-eight office lined with my few-but-treasured books and when I arose, I stood up as a different man. I told Jesus, simply, as I recall, something like this: “Lord Jesus, I have just discovered that I have been a stupid man. You promised me some things that I have read before but I didn’t believe before. I apologize for not taking you seriously. And from this day until the day you take me home, by your grace, I will. I’ll try to take care of your kingdom if you’ll take care of me and my family. And I thoroughly trust you about that. I’m not going to worry about it anymore. And I love you for showing me what you showed me this morning.” And I got up and walked down to B. W. Atkinson’s general mercantile store for a Coke-break as I did every day in mid-morning when I was not in school.

From that day forward there was a spring in my step I had never known before. My honest confession is this: that was half-a-century ago (!) and, yes, I have worried about those “things” from time to time---all of us think about all of them all of the time!-- but it’s been the exception and not the rule. And I have, only

very rarely, felt the wolf's breath and seen his fangs since that morning! (Let every man know this: the wolf may go away at times, but he never dies! He will be back! The length of his stay will be determined by the extent to which you digest Jesus' words in this passage!) And this final word, as I look back over the decades now: the financial numbers simply don't compute arithmetically. My wife and I accomplished things of a financial sort which still astound us. Including putting four kids through a major Baptist university! That will test your theology! In a lot of different ways!

THE MENTORING MATTER

I said that there were two things that have caused a life-time focus on what Jesus said in our text. The first was a *money* matter and the second one was a *mentoring* matter. Since the early days of my ministry, I have engaged in person-to-person mentoring of young men. I came to that because, as I thought about the early days of my walk with the Lord, I saw that my early mentors---Bill and Bonnie Jenkins, Horace and Peggy Rowell, Billy Bond, my girl-friend-to-become-my-wife, Addie Williams, Robert and Roberta Green (seriously), and others---got me off on the right foot. They laid a foundation in my life for all the ministry to come. And I was bugged almost to Bedlam about the matter by a man named Chuck Featherston who was working for the Billy Graham film ministry in those early days of my ministry. His mantra was: "Bill, you're going to have more effect on the kingdom of God through those few men you pour your life into than through your 'public' ministry." Every time I saw him he whacked me with that. And harangued me about how the New Testament taught it. I dodged him every time I could, but he was persistent, and, anyway, I had that gut feeling that he was right.

So, early on, in order to disciple young men, I worked diligently on biblical materials which I began to share with men. The process evolved, of course, and with the passage of time, I moved to a setting on Saturday mornings, from 7 to 7:50 AM, with eight to ten men, mostly young and new converts. We'd do several things: pray about a few key needs (it is altogether a healthy thing for men to pray in small groups, I believe, only we didn't call it praying; we called it talking with God because a majority of them were new converts and I didn't want to scare them with the word "prayer" early on). Then I'd share with them a "home secret," some way to show love and respect and helpfulness to their wives and kids. A new idea every Saturday. (Hint Sixteen: "When you walk out of the bathroom, always leave it cleaner than when you entered." Erudite stuff like that.)

And the rule was that you couldn't tell your wife, just do it. No speeches. Women are notoriously---and justifiably---leery of orations from their husbands. Heard 'em all, anyway! But it wasn't unusual to get a call from a wife that went something like this: "Pastor, I don't know what you guys are talking about on Saturday mornings, but keep it up!" And the wives and kids liked it because dad was home on Saturday by 8 AM (we left sharply at 7:55) wide awake and gently instructed as to how to express courtesy (which is love in little things) to wives and kids. We met, for the last several years, almost all of a school year. Discipling doesn't happen in a hurry! Even men who have a hurry-up gear about everything else don't have one about spiritual

matters. (And did you ever consider this interesting fact: you can rise spiritually only slowly, but you can fall spiritually very rapidly! I heard that out of the mouth of John Wooden, the great UCLA basketball coach.)

A funny story about being sensitive: we talked one day, in the “Home Hint” segment, about what to do when your wife comes home with a new hair-do. Or hair-don’t. We all agreed that the famous, “That’s interesting, honey” simply doesn’t cut it. A lot of other responses were discussed, all of them unnatural to men, but, of course, we came to the conclusion that, in any case, one had best notice! Not to notice was an automatic three demerits. Permanent demerits. Until a “day of lesser judgment,” at which time, after due punishment, and mercy on the part of the judge, you get a new page. And then, in an attempt to prove my point, I went around the room and had the guys talk about their experiences in those new-hair-do situations. Actually, to show their scars from handling such situations poorly, so we could lick our wounds together. After several had confessed, and we had had several good laughs, one guy says this: “You think that’s bad? My wife dyed her hair red and I didn’t notice it for three days! Honestly!” “ Five demerits. Permanent type.

Anyway, in the process of disciplining those men, I was disciplined, too, as is always the case. I learned a lot about men and how they learn. And how they don’t learn. If talking / teaching / preaching could produce strong men for Christ, the world would be over-run with them. It’s in the application of truth, as Buff and his First Four learned, that really changes things.

Just last night I was reading an old English text-book and came across a paragraph from the famous English essayist Thomas Babington Macaulay which is appropriate here. In an essay comparing the result of *pragmatic* pursuits and the more *academic* approaches (in the world of philosophy), he has this to say:

We know that guns, cutlery, spy-glasses, clocks, are better in our time than they were in the time of our fathers, and were better in the time of our fathers than they were in the time of our grandfathers. We might, therefore, be inclined to think that, when a philosophy which boasted that *its object was the elevation and purification of the mind* (the more academic approaches), *and for which this object neglected the sordid office of ministering to the comforts of the body* (the more pragmatic approaches), had flourished in the highest honor during many hundreds of years (as had been the thought of the classic philosophers), *a vast moral amelioration must have taken place.*

Was it so? (That is, did a “vast moral amelioration” of life’s problems occur because of the philosophical approach?)

Macaulay gives the answer---a resounding no. Their philosophic flights into the world of metaphysics had not bettered men’s lives in any measurable and practical way. Or so Macaulay argued. The point is obvious: *what good is any philosophy that does not issue in the measurable betterment of man’s lot and life on earth?* Perhaps the resident Kirkendorff philosopher’s word applies here: “Some of us metaphysicians don’t know how to tangibilitate!” (Macaulay’s quote may be seen in “British Prose and Poetry,” Third Edition, Vol II, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1950, p. 391; parentheses and italics mine. And remember: Macaulay

wrote his essay in 1837!)

In the early years of discipling men, I'd run them through a hand-book I had written and which I'd show you if I wasn't embarrassed by it. Disciplined, grade-conscious seminarians would have had a tough time working through it in a semester. Far, far, too much material! Our manual lost weight until I came, in the last years, to take my Bible along and nothing else. Well, except some notes on "Home Hints." (Couldn't remember which ones we'd dealt with earlier.) And from all those original scriptures, we got down to four. I came to see that if I could teach men to know four passages like the back of their hand, and use them with dexterity with the other side of their hand in life's crises and challenges, they'd be far better prepared than if I gave them sixty and left them with wonderful (but unused or unusable) weapons. (The four? Matthew 6: 33-34, Proverbs 3:5-6, Mark 4:13-20, focusing strongly on v19, and Matthew 18:15-15, in that order. The last passage is exceptionally important because it teaches believers how to solve interpersonal problems, and---as you know---to find a man who can do that, either in his personal life or in a church setting, is exceptionally rare. We typically spent six or eight weeks on that one text, and did a lot of role-playing. We also had the men report on the results of its application.)

I experienced a memorable illustration of the importance of mastering a few passages as contrasted with knowing, in a surface way, a lot of them. I had worked with wood-working tools a lot through my late teens, but got so busy with other things, that I didn't have time to enjoy it anymore. In fact, for many years, I didn't own anything but the simplest tools. One Christmas my wife bought me a table saw. I let it sit there for six months or so, I guess, until one day one of my sons-in-law, an excellent wood-worker, made me a deal: he'd buy the wood and I'd provide the tools, and be a gofer for him, and we'd build his wife, my daughter, some furniture. My problem was that that table saw was about all I had and I knew that all you could do with a table saw was either rip or cross-cut lumber. Maybe make a groove or two. That sort of thing. I began buying other tools, but, as you know if you're a wood-worker, that's a life-long project! One never has enough.

On another Christmas, one of the kids bought me a book describing, and depicting, all the things you could do on a table saw. I was amazed. And knew the author to be a liar when he said I could actually cut circles with it. A squared-up table saw! Geranium-level IQ people know better than that. And to prove it, I bought the little circle-cutting jig, attached it to my table saw, put a piece of waste plywood on it, and proceeded to cut out a perfect circle. What's the point? That one tool, understood and used properly, may perform many and varied (and sometimes unimaginable) tasks. Same with the "tool" God gave us, His word. And each sentence in His word! So that became my focus and things became a lot more simplified. And functional.

We would work through each of these four passages, taking as long as needed to deal with every implication we could think of. We squeezed them, massaged them, strained them, wrung them out, stretched them, churned charred and chewed them in an attempt to digest them. I wanted the men to be able to quote them forward, backward, and sideways. I wanted those four passages to become tools in their Master Carpenter's bag. (Amazingly, on a couple of pages following the aforementioned quote, I came across one of

Francis Bacon's most famous lines---he is the subject of Macauley's essay---about reading: "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." I am certain he would say, since he was a knowledgeable and committed Christian, that the Bible was in his last category. (Ibid. p. 398)

I often had the guys role-play them, then I'd take the role of the devil's advocate, tried to prove that the passage was not relevant and would not work today, and so on. And every week, at random, I'd call on the men to quote them.

Of course, we referred to many other passages, but we made the four our essential focus.

Remember, these men were just average, middle of the road, mostly married-with-kids, nine-to-five, church-going guys---the kind out of which Jesus wants to build great churches. Nothing fancy. No preachers allowed (except to get ideas for mentoring their men). That sort of thing.

Now, the essential fact that I learned about men during those years is this: they may love God and be determined to follow Him and do what He wants, but they don't get a lot of things which are said in scripture. They are, for the most part, not hugely creative (except in their own business!) or literarily inclined (except for the sport's page!) and not readily able to tangibilitate (except about football!). When I'd ask, "What does 'acknowledge' mean in Proverbs 3: 6 mean," I'd get that "the-lights-are-on-but-nobody's-home" look. Good guys but they don't go around parsing the word "acknowledge." Just like I was when I first became a Christian! (I have noticed this: the older one gets in the Lord, the more his personal devotional life is centered around the pursuit of the meaning of individual words.)

And the same happened, clearly, when I asked questions about Matthew 6:33. "What does 'seek' mean?" "What does the word 'first' imply?" And what does "...and his righteousness" mean? And especially this one: what does "the kingdom of God" mean? Of course, they were sharp guys and would have some ideas, but the last one regarding the kingdom of God, and how'd we go about advancing His kingdom, was, at first, really mysterious to them. At least, in regard to how they could, in their everyday life and relationships, advance it.

My goal was to lead them to a solid understanding of what it meant, and then to apply it to all the activities of their lives. To see the vastness of the possibilities of how they could do it. In big and little ways. In known and unknown ways. To truly be an ambassador for their Saviour's kingdom. As a lifestyle. As a Primary Practice. Everywhere. At all times. In all places. In all circumstances, pleasant or painful. And I did it because I knew they wanted, truly, to be good representatives of their King. And I knew, further, that they'd be fulfilled when they saw things---and lived their lives---from that perspective. After all, the church is full of bored-to-death guys because they don't have a handle on how to serve Christ effectively. *Where they live, and not where the preacher or the seminary prof lives.*

Jean Hardy walked out of a morning worship session many years ago and said to me, not meanly but kind-

ly, “You preachers are always telling us what to do but you never tell us how to do it.” Did you ever hear a sentence that you knew was true before it all got all the way out of the speaker’s mouth? Her sentence did not bring blood---she wasn’t that kind of person---but it did resonate, big-time, in my “knower,” and from then on I tried to put a lot of “how to” in every sermon. I learned later that Charles Spurgeon had a theory about preaching: he said that the sermon begins where the application begins. According to his formula far too many of my sermons had never begun!

I don’t know who it was, but a pastor had a church member who pumped gasoline for a living. No too bright, but a great guy and committed to the Lord. The pastor said that, in attempting to ascertain whether his sermons were accomplishing anything or not, he would ask this question of his message for the day: “Will it help Homer pump gas?” In fact, had that question posted on his desk. “WILL IT HELP HOMER PUMP GAS?” That’s the idea! And that’s God’s idea! Honestly and truly: are we really interested in Homer doing a better job pumping gas? And, thereby, somehow advancing Christ’s kingdom? And do we understand that if we are not, we are not truly interested in his spiritual development, no matter what we say. And we’re not interested in his being a change agent for God. And we’re denying him the greatest thing in his life: that for which he was created in the first place! What if every single person pumping gas in this country were Christians and each had a consuming burden to be a kingdom-man while pumping gas! Imagine the effect!

Martin Luther often told his preacher-students that, after Sunday’s sermons, he’d ask his maid what his essential message had been that morning in order to assess his effectiveness as a communicator. Dangerous! A pastor friend of mine said his wife once asked him, on the way home from church, “Honey, just what was it, exactly, that you were trying to get at this morning?”

PARABOLIC PRACTICES

Everyone who reads Buff's story will know that, wonderful as they are, parables have limitations. They can't be made to answer all questions, and must not be pressed out of their proper use, be made to "walk on all fours." I find it interesting that (a) Jesus spoke constantly in parables, ("All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; *and without a parable He did not speak to them.*" Matthew 13:34), and (b) that He very often had to explain His parables to His followers, had to say what they meant and what they did not mean ("And without a parable He did not speak to them. *And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.*" Mark 4:34). "Explain" is *epiloo*, "to unloose, to untie, to explain what is obscure and difficult to understand." All things! Wish with me that we had all that down in print!

The verbal form of the word "parable" in the Greek New Testament means "to throw alongside," i.e., to throw an earthly story or illustration alongside a spiritual truth in order to clarify and interpret the truth. To tangibilize the intangible. Shakespeare has a line (which I have modified to make his sentiment clearer for us mortals!) in which he says of a writer of poetry, "He gave an airy abstraction a local habitation." I love that! "Truth," let us say, is but an "airy abstraction," but his friend gave it a local habitation, i.e., lived it out. That's a beautiful picture, and one that all Christ's servants ought to emulate.

As an aside, I suggest a sobering practice: produce a list of the "airy abstractions" which represent authentic New Testament Christianity and ask, "Which of these virtues are finding a local habitation in my life? Which of these virtues could the man giving the eulogy at my funeral service legitimately say manifested themselves in my life?" To put it all another way: we ought to, in Paul's language, "adorn the doctrine of God," to dress up in God's doctrine and wear it about in our world. (Titus 2:10)

All that to encourage this: take the parable of Buff's shoe kingdom as but a parable; it sheds light on our Lord's kingdom and our relationship to it, but, obviously, it is an imperfect one. For instance, Buff's responsibility was to take care of his "subjects," but he could never do so in any cosmic sense as our King does. And, of course, we are Christ's subjects in a way that one could never be a subject to any earthly king. And so on. *Ad infinitum.*

What is this little book about? It is about challenging every believer in Christ, both in his individual and corporate Christian existence, to pursue, avidly, the Kingdom of God. To carefully think through what that means, and to live out the Primary Practice of seeking His kingdom. To treasure every line of the Bible, but not to become frustrated by its depth and distance. To practice, with passion and persistence, Matthew 6:33. To focus on kingdom truth, and to flesh it out in an authentic New Testament incarnational theology remembering:

1. Many theologians believe that Jesus' essential message had to do with God's kingdom.
2. All believers have been "translated" from the "kingdom of darkness" into the "kingdom of the Son of (God's) love. We are now His subjects. (Colossians 1:13).

3. Jesus is now on His throne, “exalted to the right hand of God..” and ruling His kingdom. (Acts 2:33; Of course, there are many other expressions of His rule--the millennium, for instance--but that does not disallow His present rule.)
4. We have been taught by Jesus to pray, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10; that specific request has boundless implications for your life and mine! To begin with, it means we should be living out kingdom truth here and now, even though the prayer will find its complete fulfillment on earth during the millennium.)

All of Christ’s subjects could well, and wisely, begin every morning with a conversation with the King, a part of which might go something like this: “Dear Lord, I am thrilled that I have been translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of your own dear Son, and to be kin to all others who were, are, or ever will be, members of that kingdom. I desire passionately, today, to represent you well, as a citizen of your kingdom. To advance your kingdom any way I can, and any way you choose. I’m not going to worry about it, or try to figure it all out, but guide me and make me sensitive, in little and large ways, to the fact that I am your servant. And that my chief business is to advance your kingdom. I don’t care if I’m conscious of how you use me or not, but I do care that you use me somehow. And if, at the end of the day, I have moved my world a millimeter closer to you by advancing your kingdom, it will be a day well spent! And, dear Lord, let me do it all with joy and a winsome spirit. And, finally, thank you for your promise if I take care of your kingdom, you’ll take care of my needs. “

I know a pastor who prayed, daily, for many, many years this prayer: “Lord, let me do three things today; let me help somebody in some down-to-earth, mundane way, let me encourage some discouraged saint, and let me introduce somebody to your son Jesus. And if I can do any of that, for your sake, I’ll count it a very good day.” He found, of course, that God had unusual, and sometimes humorous, ways of answering his prayer! That “mundane” covers a large territory. And that the world is full of discouraged saints! And that some days brought that inestimable favor: the privilege of introducing someone to Christ.

After all, what is the alternative? To walk out into the world every morning totally oblivious to Christ and His kingdom. Yes, I know I’m saved. I know my sins are forgiven. I know that when I die I’ll go to heaven. But here’s the question: *is that all there is to it?* The theologians talk about an “incarnational theology,” that is, a theology that takes on flesh. As you know, the Bible is full of that idea. Not only did Jesus do that very thing, but He taught His followers to do the same. What else could He have meant when He talked about letting our lights shine in a darkened world? Or being salt in a putrifying world? Or about people seeing our good works and glorifying God in heaven? Or of being His representatives? And what of Paul who calls us God’s ambassadors (even, as an English author holds, Ambassadors Plenipotentiary!)? And what else could Peter have meant when he commanded us to “*shew forth* the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light?” (Italics mine.) Or Peter with this: “Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, *by your good works* which they observe glorify God in the day of their visitation?” (Italics mine.) And a hundred more!

For many Christians it is worse than simply not living out kingdom truth, it is positively hurting Christ's kingdom. There was once a king who had missed one of his leading military men for several weeks. One night, the man appeared in the banquet hall and the king asked him where he'd been. He replied: "Fighting your enemies on the western front." To which the king said, "I don't have any enemies on the western front." The warrior quietly responded, "Well, you do now." Tell it not in Gath!

And then, this book is a call to focus on what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33 in Bible study groups, discipleship groups, prayer groups, deacon meetings, church strategy sessions, staff retreats, mission committee strategy conferences, and (maybe especially) denominational conclaves of every conceivable sort and size. It is difficult to imagine a setting in which Buff and his First Four could not effectively be our mentors. After all, if you and I are doing anything, anywhere, at any time, in thought or deed, which does not advance Christ's kingdom, we ought not be doing it. Or, to put it another way: to apply the truth of Matthew 6:33 properly and persistently is to engage in the most profitable time-and-energy-and-money-saving activity on earth.

Listen to a story, which I sincerely hope is apocryphal, but which would be on any short list of poignant parables:

When I lived in Atlanta, several years ago, I noticed in the Yellow Pages, in the listing of restaurants, an entry for a place called Church of God Grill. The peculiar name aroused my curiosity and I dialed the number. A man answered with a cheery, "Hello! Church of God Grill!" I asked how his restaurant had been given such an unusual name, and he told me: "Well, we had a little mission down here, and we started selling chicken dinners after church on Sunday to help pay the bills. Well, people liked the chicken, and we did such a good business, that eventually we cut back on the church service. After a while we just closed down the church altogether and kept on serving the chicken dinners. We kept the name we started with, and that's Church of God Grill. (Quoted in "Dropping Your Guard," Charles Swindoll, Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1983, p. 53)

Could it happen? To ask is to answer. And that wouldn't be the first time when some organizational goal had plummeted from church to chicken!

An unnecessary caveat: obviously, to focus so intensely on one passage in the Bible is not to say it is more important, or more inspired, or more helpful to the believer, than is another passage. His every word is life to us. "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4, italics mine) *And anyway, the practice of truth, wherever observed in His word, in the final analysis, looks much like the practice of any other part.* Our focal passage has, however, been especially helpful to many of God's people. It certainly was, and is, and will be---I devoutly hope---to me.

In the practice of that word, as with all His word, as Buff told us, three things will inevitably occur: (a) God will be pleased, (b) The world will be blessed, and (c) We will be fulfilled personally. If, indeed, every man is on a search for significance, the pursuit of His kingdom is where such a search begins and ends.

A FINAL WORD TO PASTORS

You have already guessed, of course, that the Kirkendorf story is not about shoes at all, but the Kirk, as the Germans call the church. The proof that you sensed as much is that, early on, your stomach was in knots when you read the first pages of Buff's story describing the miscreant which lurked at the corner of 4th Avenue and Jones Street in our town under the name of "Stimson Shoes." An uneducated brother in our town had the habit of confusing the words "ambulance" and "avalanche." We purposefully engaged him in conversations, and led the conversations, to a point at which he would make reference to an "avalanche" headed toward the hospital with its siren on. (He also confused "condominium" with "pandemonium!") Alas, whatever one calls our churches, some of them---while they move a bit more slowly than do avalanches---are sometimes as disorderly and, in the long haul, as damaging as well.

Tens of thousands of churches are, as we speak, looking for new pastors. The first sentence out of their collective mouth when interviewing a candidate runs like this: "What our church *really* needs is a" well, what? A leader, of course. A *leader!* The passing of time often demonstrates that a leader is precisely what they don't want, but, platitudes aside, a leader *really* is what every church needs.

It would be a waste of time to devise a list of qualities all pastors need (and every church deserves!), but every pastor could benefit by carefully studying Buff's facilitating (operative word!) process in moving his company from the miscreant stage to the ministry stage. I am certainly not suggesting that a pastor is in any sense a "king." Despotic and tyrannical religious leaders do exist, even in Christian garb, but their existence only serves to demonstrate that they either do not know, or do not choose to emulate, the New Testament pattern of a true undershepherd. Nor are they sufficiently aware of the loss of the Shepherd's Crown (I Peter 5:1-4) which might otherwise have been theirs. *Nor are they aware of their impending, and eternal, loss of other rewards at the bema judgment which they are facing!* (I Corinthians 3:1-15) It is always to be remembered that Pastoral Potentates would never label themselves as such. You and I are not what our friends say we are, we are not what our enemies say we are, we are not what we say we are; we are what God the Almighty knows we are! All of that is a cautionary tale against transporting Buff in our Kirkish parable to the pulpit without serious overhaul!

It is true, however, that every effective church has to go through (and always remain in!) a pruning process as to what the character and conduct of a redemptive association of believers---a church---must be in its own ever-changing context but never-changing call to *current* obedience to the Lord of the church. And it is also true that you, as the pastor, have been entrusted to lead the process. Get with it! Passionately and persistently! I sincerely hope Buff's experience encourages---and perhaps even enlightens---you in that glorious work!

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