

Way Forward

by George Verwer

George Verwer's sermon emphasizes the importance of truth, unity, and proactive engagement in ministry as the Church approaches a new millennium.

Duration: 1:12:05

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 14:6, 1 John 2:18

Topics: "Vision"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of unity within the Christian community. He emphasizes the need to avoid 'friendly fire,' which refers to conflicts and divisions within the body of Christ. The speaker encourages the audience to reexamine their doctrinal beliefs and to beware of negative reports that can hinder unity. He also highlights the early emphasis on love and unity in the movement and warns against deception and forces of darkness that seek to divide the body of Christ. The speaker concludes by urging Christians to hold onto the message they heard from the beginning and to trust in Christ's promise of eternal life.

Transcript

1997 has been a very, very exciting year. I'm not going to go into detail. There's not time, but I think we should before we're just totally swamped in 98.

And yet the first time together in 98. Thank God for what he did last year. The great events here in South Africa.

The great events in your country. It's impossible. I don't know if you can imagine how many hours a day I spend reading and praying.

And it's impossible to keep up with what God is doing, even through OM. And we are only a tiny part of God's great work. I think I pray for almost every one of you in this room.

Some of you regularly. I go through thousands, literally thousands of e-mails and prayer letters in the course of every few months. And I feel very linked with you and your work.

And I want to thank you for your faithfulness. You may not think you're doing that well. I often don't think I'm doing that well, but I give thanks to God for each one of you, including those that I'm only getting to meet here for the first time.

I thank God that OM is a team-led movement. I'm only a part of that team. And that's great.

This has been one of the best years for ICT. I speak especially for Forrest Hill, though I believe it's been a great year for Carlisle, because we finally, after many years, have moved into a more team-led situation where I meet with my four executives. We don't really like that word.

Almost every single week. And none of us have the gifts to lead that complicated, challenging team. Chaco, Mary Brinkley, John Wilkins, and Pam, our chief financial person, usually sits in, and Ron Goodenough, our chief counselor, usually sits in.

And we don't feel we're the greatest leaders on the team. Far better leaders aren't in those meetings. We're trying to serve them.

But God had been doing something new there in Forrest Hill, and as you know, also giving us what is almost like a new building in an amazing way there. I had 420 meetings in 1997. My efforts to cut back were not so successful, but I'm already way ahead this year in cutting back, because I'm often more motivated to talk to one person on the telephone than I am to speak maybe to a hundred, perhaps because I've been taking those kind of meetings for the last 40-some years.

But I've been having some new kinds of phone calls with very amazing results, really more in the past decade. Thank you for your prayers. My wife and I are still a team.

We just had our 38th wedding anniversary. We have four grandchildren. Charlie's birthday was yesterday.

If you didn't get our family letter, forgive us. My wife is the one behind that. Not that you didn't get it, but in putting it together, a lot of people I don't think realize that my wife is completely full-time, plus in the actual work of OM.

We know not every woman has that privilege. She keeps a database fully up-to-date of 9,500 addresses, emails, phone numbers that continually change. She's more likely to go somewhere without me than without her computer.

This has been a little bit of cause of tension, but God has overruled. We pushed a few buttons some weeks ago just to see how many former OMers. We have 1,600 former OMers on our own.

This is just our own personal mailing list. One of our commitments as we go forward is to our former OMers. I'm sure all of you are wondering what I have in this bag.

I want to keep the book reviews minimal because we're lacking time, but if I didn't give any, some of you would think that I were ill. I want to say that South Africa is one of the most proactive countries in the whole of the OM world for literature. They're also the most proactive country that I know of in the Acts 13 vision.

They even have on the literature table, I think it's a South African edition of the leaflet, and the questions and answers that go with that in case any of you are new and you haven't seen that. Acts 13 Breakthrough 2000 is certainly, to be honest, not taking off like one would dream, but it is encouraging, and it's not something that we ever planned to sort of finish at the year 2000. Something like this may go very slow for a while and then just have lift-off as different shakers and movers take hold of that simple concept.

Here's a great book you may want to pick up. I love this kind of book, *The Ten Top Mistakes That Leaders Make*. I learn so much when I read these kind of books.

Here's one of the books that might bring some balance to *Grace Awakening*. Some of you feel *Grace Awakening* is not totally in balance. *The Discipline of Grace by a Leader of the Navigators Movement*.

Perhaps a little more emphasis on discipline. Let's see if you can all read together out loud what it says on my T-shirt. Can you read that together? One, two, three.

Amen. That's a good sub-theme for tonight, isn't it? I've just come actually in from Minneapolis speaking to 500 pastors. One of the more unusual minister meetings in my life, really.

It was one of the few meetings when I had to answer the tough question, are you a Calvinist? John Piper wrote to me this long letter. He's from Bethlehem Baptist Church. This is their T-shirt.

I don't even know where I got it. I had it for one or two years, I think. But he wrote to me.

I think he may have been a little embarrassed by that question, but he said these men were mainly of the Reformed Elk. He wanted to know if I was Reformed like other friends of mine. He quoted and mentioned Greg Livingstone.

I guess I didn't realize that about Greg. I finally told him on the phone during the interview that I was Reformed, but I had a strong Arminian streak. I didn't hear for a long time, but I did eventually get invited.

It was a very challenging time. I think we'll be seeing a lot more of John Piper. Frontier has already had him as their main speaker there in Dubrone just before we rolled in one year.

This is his book that I've been especially pushing since Urbana. It's there on the table. *Let the Nations Be Glad, the Supremacy of God in Missions*.

This is my theme. In some ways I'm probably not worthy to speak on that theme, but this is where my heart is. This was the really key book for me at the end of 1997, and I hope that that theme will run not just through this conference but through the whole of OM because it just helps us.

I think our morning prayer time was along that line to really get our priorities right. There's another interesting book, *Making Christ Known*. It's a summary of all the various documents, Lausanne document, all kinds of documents that have come out of the evangelical church over the past decades, put together by John Stott.

It's certainly a book you'll want to have in your library as *Real Way OM* and also *Jokowi 82,000* builds on that. I've had more feedback last year from giving away this book than any other book. I gave away a lot more of other books, but this is the one that brought me the big feedback, the autobiography of Billy Graham.

It came out in paperback this week, but we've got this hardback. Believe me, somebody is losing money every time you sell this at half price, and I hardly think it's South Africa. I would urge you to take advantage of this, and then when you get your paperback, you can give this away.

If you need some suggestions as to who you should give this kind of book to, you could perhaps contact Peter Maiden or Mike Light or someone else in the know on these things. But I have to confess I have not

finished it. What I have read of it is very, very powerful because this man in many ways is an ordinary apple pie American who made lots of mistakes.

He's highly esteemed now, but I will tell you, he probably has more arrows in his back than maybe all of us combined in this room. That's what he went through, especially in 1957. So I look at these books and I get excited.

We have been greatly blessed in OM, receiving books at very low prices. My book for 1998, I don't even have a copy left, is called *When Good Men Are Tempted* by Bill Perkins, the father of a young man just back from OM. I think Gary Dean's part of OM.

And I met him in the airport in Portland. He gave me this book, and I knew as I started to read it, the most raw, straight-to-the-cut book for men on the subject of sex that I've seen in quite a while. I offered it on the radio free the other day at Moody, and I think Tyrone had 250 phone calls in 24 hours.

They had 40 on their answering machine. I want to publicly apologize for that, not giving enough warning. I did emphasize to write in.

I don't know why all these people phoned in in the land of telephones. Emails came in from Hong Kong and other places requesting *When Good Men Are Tempted*. And I managed to have a phone call with a publisher shortly before this.

It's a \$12 book, which does not warm my heart. And I pulled off a deal to get 5,000 copies at \$1.33. I would have preferred a dollar, but we have to be willing to compromise in this kind of ministry. Other books have been coming to us free of charge.

There's one of them, the CEV, Full Bible Called *The Promise*. We've been given a gift of 40,000 copies. If it's worth \$10 each, figure the value of that gift.

It cannot be distributed in the United States or the UK. We're supposed to be a little careful in terms of bookshops. It's more for everything, every other kind of distribution.

If you let your creative juices flow and send an email to Vera or Don Velboom, who I don't think has been able to arrive yet, all we ask you to do is pay a little bit of the free. We're even willing to negotiate on that. About that time, I was trying to negotiate to get copies of this book.

This is another outstanding book that came into my hands because the author phoned me to use a quotation from one of my books. This is a *Promise Keeper's* book. I told him it was not for me to get permission to use this because I got it from someone else, and I don't know who that was.

It's clear in my book that it's not me. But in this amazing book, that song about backward Christian soldiers fleeing from the fight now is written by George Brewer. Peter Conlon, do you know who wrote that? Did you write that? We can try to settle out of court.

When I negotiated to get copies of this, it was in early stages. When I found out it was \$17 or \$18 a copy, since I'm always involved in many hundreds of projects, I dropped it. Just to forget it for a while.

And in this quantity of literature we recently were given free were over 10,000 copies of this amazing book. It's a \$17 hardback book, which will be focused on in my meeting tonight. It's my prayer that everybody in the future that comes near an OM person anywhere on the planet will get a free book.

I know that's a dream. Some of you may not like the way that sounds. But I believe that God has been so gracious to us in supplying literature at the most incredible prices, and sometimes free, should we not try to bless the body of Christ by giving books, as well as selling them and giving them for a donation.

My book tables now, the first book generally is always free, and the amount of money coming in has continued to climb. And the amount of literature is three to four times as much as my old-fashioned pre-paradigm shift book tables. Turn with me now in your Bibles of a number of scriptures.

I have so many notes up here. I really need your patience. But I want you to turn in your Bibles first of all to John 14, 6, or maybe I could just quote that.

Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me. We're especially going to be talking about truth, love, and unity.

Because of the tremendous emphasis on love and grace in previous years, and messages all of you have, I'm mainly going to be focusing on truth and unity. Let's look at 1 John 2, 18. I've got my Spanish, English New Testament here.

Let's just try to find that real quick. I just let my marker slip out of the page. 1 John 2, 18.

There are so many verses on the subject of truth, I had difficulty making a choice. My children, the end is near. You were told that the enemy of Christ would come.

And now many enemies of Christ have already appeared. This is 2,000 years ago. Approximately many enemies of Christ had already appeared.

By the way, in my life this is a neglected scripture. I've never spoken on this scripture that I can remember. And so we know that the end is near.

These people really did not belong to our fellowship. And that is why they left us. If they had belonged to our fellowship, they would have stayed with us, but they left.

So that it might be clear that none of them really belonged to us. But you have had the Holy Spirit poured out on you by Christ. That's beautiful, isn't it? And so all of you know the truth.

I write you then, not because you do not know the truth. Instead, it is because you do know it. And you also know that no lie ever comes from the truth.

Who then is the liar? It is anyone who says that Jesus is not the Messiah. Such a person is the enemy of Christ. He rejects both the Father and the Son.

For whoever rejects the Son rejects also the Father. Whoever accepts the Son has the Father also. Be sure then to keep in your hearts the message you heard from the beginning.

If you keep that message, then you will always live in union with the Son and the Father. And this is what Christ Himself promised to give us eternal life. I am writing this to you about those who are trying to deceive you.

I feel, and I'm sure most of you agree, that there are many, many forces of darkness that are trying to bring deception into the body of Christ. I think one of the hardest things for the average Christian today is

to accept unpleasant verses. To be quite honest, I found the video quite unpleasant.

It's very hard for me to think of what's going on in my human way of thinking that this is some kind of judgment on the people of Afghanistan. And believe me, if you talk to some people that way, you will get in deep difficulty. And sometimes things like this, in discernment, we keep them in our hearts and share them carefully.

You may not even believe that that which was portrayed in the video is true. But certainly I know in my life I have tried to run away from the message concerning the judgment of God. I have been deeply confused at times by passages concerning God's judgment in the Old Testament.

But I don't believe we can believe the Bible is God's Word and not accept that the judgment factor, the wrath of God, all of that side of things which we don't hear many messages about, including hell and eternal separation from God, is clearly in His Word. Now I know that's hard. Maybe it isn't hard for you.

But I believe that's what the Word of God teaches. Not necessarily this particular situation about Afghanistan, but certainly that is a real possibility. Some things in the Word of God that show horrendous judgment upon people in this world don't seem to be possibilities.

They are clearly recorded in God's Word. I personally believe there is no other name given among men whereby anybody in this world can be saved. Maybe I'm wrong.

Maybe the Bible's all wrong. Then we surely have a major problem in operational mobilization. It makes our other problems look fairly insignificant.

I say this because I believe as we move into a new millennium and face the challenges of a new millennium, that one of the fiery darts that will continue to hit the Church and therefore hit us is the fiery dart of unbelief, which is combined with the tendency to compromise concerning the truth of God's Word. And I've been amazed in my ten visits to the United States in 1997, nine or ten, of the tremendous infiltration into the Church by New Age philosophy, by liberalism. We used to fight against liberalism.

Now we have liberalism often among evangelical people. And we often find that in our desire for unity, it is no longer even acceptable to talk about doctrine in certain circles in which we have many friends and supporters. This is, I guess, one of the reasons I'm pushing this Promise Keepers book, which is a bit of a paradox because they're one of the main groups that's being criticized for doctrinal compromise.

I'm a great defender of the Promise Keepers because as a movement of that kind, I don't believe they can fine-tune doctrine, neither to the degree of a local church or to the degree of a missions movement, a church-planting missions movement like us. So their policy probably about Catholics won't be the same as ours. Their policy about other things may not be the same as ours.

But they are our brothers and sisters. It is basically an evangelical movement. Most of you have heard my tape about Promise Keepers.

And this book is clearly an evangelical book. Some of you who read things more carefully, be sure to send me something you find that you feel is not accurate. And the plea of Glenn Wagner, the author of this book, is not basic old-fashioned ecumenicalism.

It is unity. It is relational unity. Brothers and sisters loving one another.

And we've learned, I think, already from Charles Swindoll and his brilliant book, something that we already taught ourselves, that that unity has to be in the midst of diversity. I want to now read something from this book, *The Awesome Power of Shared Belief*, realizing this is not perhaps totally culturally appropriate, not necessarily for South Africa, but other cultures represented here. It goes back to the war in the Gulf.

It goes back to a story about an LAV. And when I read that, I wondered what that was. It's a light armored vehicle.

It's a vehicle like a tank, but much lighter, and cruises across the desert at 50 miles an hour. If you remember over the years, I don't read much out of books. I usually give you a quote, but bear with me to read this.

It happened during the war in the Persian or Arabian Gulf. It was the night of January 29, 1991, in Saudi Arabia. Lance Corporal Ron Tully was part of the eight-man crew that manned a light armored vehicle, LAV, in Delta Company.

It has nothing to do with Delta Airline. Twelve other LAVs were a part of this light armored infantry group that established a camp 37 miles west of Kaffi, a coastal town. About 10 p.m., the silence of the desert was rudely interrupted by an excited voice over the radio, LAI, LAI, this is recon.

30 Iraqi tanks are coming over the berm. Corporal Tully, better known to his friends as Tully, knew this was it. He and his crew climbed into the LAV and Tully settled in behind the wheel.

His assignment was to keep vehicle in formation, avoid collision with other LAVs, and watch out for tanks. What made this job especially challenging was that it was to be accomplished while the LAV was speeding across the desert at a clip of 50 miles an hour. Suddenly, a missile from another LAV exploded into an Iraqi tank 30 yards to the left.

Just put yourself in that situation. Just moments later, a second tank was hit 70 yards ahead. Fighting this close was unnerving, but Tully's crew swallowed hard and continued to move on with their mission.

No one in Tully's LAV saw the USA Air Force A-10 fighter swoop out of the sky behind them in an attack dive. The pilot aimed a heat-seeking missile at an Iraqi tank, but heat radiating from the LAV, guns, and rear exhaust confused the missile's guidance system. It altered course abruptly and fired into the left rear of Tully's LAV.

The explosion blew the gun turret off and threw the LAV into the air like a tin can, hit with a shotgun blast. Tully felt bomb fragments penetrate his back. The force of the explosion slammed him into the steering wheel and then throwing him out of the vehicle into the desert sand.

His face black with burns, his back fractured in three places, Tully miraculously stumbled 15 yards from the vehicle before collapsing face down in the sand. When he came to in the hospital, he was informed that he was the only one of his crew to survive. The other seven Marines in the rear of the LAV were killed instantly by their own comrades.

It's called friendly fire. The body of Christ is in tremendous pain in the world today. People in some places are even leaving the church by the thousands and some becoming agnostics, including an interesting number of ministers, theological students, and even former missionaries.

The church is suffering in many ways and we don't have time to go into detail. But one of the things I think that hurts us the most as we work very closely with the churches, and much of my work is with the churches, is what they call in this book friendly fire. It has a number of other names that are less friendly.

It happened a number of times in the Gulf War. It's perhaps happened in every war. As I try to think on the subject of unity, the future of OM, I have this heart cry that somehow we would beware of shooting one another.

I could give you specific examples of where negative things stated by a brother or a sister in OM have been an enormous hindrance to another brother or his field or his ministry. Gossip can go around the OM world almost as fast as an email. We now have a number of books on the subject of shooting the wounded, so I'm not speaking something just totally original.

We're all vulnerable. We're all weak. And I'm sure I at times have engaged in friendly fire without realizing it, trying to point out some truth, trying to defend some situation.

I said something negative maybe about a field, about a brother or a sister, and that has been used by the devil as a hindrance. Maybe someone else picked that up, I don't know of a specific case, and decided not to go to that field on the basis of that generalization that I may have made, that friendly fire that I may have engaged in. Brothers and sisters, we are hurting one another in this movement.

If you don't believe that ever happens, I'd be happy to receive your correspondence. I'm not interested in giving a bunch of details. The Spirit of God has to convict us.

But as we go forward, we realize with the movement now this size, with quite a few of us moving into our senior years and eventually moving out of our leadership, people outside of OM, I talk to many of them, they will tell us, your more difficult days are ahead. Someone came to me at Prairie Bible Institute, which has gone through tremendous struggle in their period of transition. And they sort of challenged me to make sure I have my successor in place, Peter Maiden's successor in place.

People even ask me, people outside of the OM, ask more bold questions often than people inside OM. As we face the next decade, it's going to take everything we have, from God's Word and the power of the Holy Spirit, to maintain our unity. And I think of that exhortation, to maintain our unity in the bond of peace.

We are committed to truth. There are many other verses from 2 John and from the book of Jude I wanted to read, encouraging us to defend the faith, to stick to the truth. Some people no longer want to be called evangelicals.

It's quite interesting because at the same time, many other people, including many people who have been called charismatic, want to be called charismatic evangelicals. Some of you may be charismatic evangelical. Some of you may not like that term, but we are all in this movement, just for the sake of some degree of definition, evangelicals.

We believe the Bible is God's Word. We believe the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. There are situations that I'm in where I don't use the word evangelical.

In the prayer movement, that's behind the prayer breakfast, they tend to always just talk about Jesus. I'm still wrestling to figure out this movement, but Doug Coe, one of the founders, was one of the very first speakers at one of the conferences similar to this in 1961 in Madrid, Spain. Doug Coe, I'm sure, could see

how we were the kind of movement with our extremism that could get into tangents, and he gave a message, though that's a long time ago, 1961, that I'll never forget.

He said, focus on the Lord Jesus. Focus on the Lord Jesus. I believe that should be our focus, but at the same time, if someone tries to emphasize that to the degree that we have to leave our other precious and major truths of God's Word, then I cannot accept that, though I'll be happy to love him or her as a brother.

If you study the history of OM, and I brought some old tapes with me, not to give away. We don't have many. I got these put together in an album by my old friend John Wright.

Tapes for leaders. I think many of you have seen these. Hans Strohm leading a small team.

I listened to that recently. This is all vintage from the 70s. Pitfalls of Leaders, that's by me.

Personality Conflict, George Miley. Somehow John Wright seemed to put the rest of the tapes by me, but there's another series in which you get a wider range of speakers. If you'd like one of those vintage leadership series, request it by email to Vera or maybe a big piece of paper.

I think one of the things that marked our movement from the earliest days until now is the emphasis on love and unity. That always in our conferences superseded emphasis on evangelism, even prayer, discipline, many other things that we became known for. In fact, in the very first conference for the summer campaign of people going into Mexico, 1960, a few months after Dreena and I were married, Greg Livingstone was just passing through.

Every night, many of you have heard this, I say it again, every night of that conference we spoke only about the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes when people say off-the-wall things about the early days of OM, and there are off-the-wall things, you might remind them that love was always our greatest aim. I believe that's one of the reasons we've held together for 40-some years.

In fact, I think in the original orientation series, something I've been listening to lately, as part of the 40th anniversary, I didn't quite get through it. Listening to my own voice was almost like listening to another person because they are very, very old. But it is amazing the strong emphasis on unity.

We sort of take this for granted in OM. This movement would have split. We've dealt with many potential earthquakes in this movement over these 40 years that could have split.

Dale and I could have split. We were close to it at one point. But this emphasis on unity, combined with brokenness, combined with the mercy of God and the grace of God, kept us together.

And I hope that as we go into a new millennium with far more people, far more complexity, far more problems, let's be honest, friends, we are going to have to work at maintaining the unity. It will not come just through nice prayer meetings. It will not come just through an occasional time of fellowship with a brother and a prayer.

We will have to work harder on unity in the next 10 years than in the previous 10 years. The OM that exists today is not the OM of the 60s or the 70s. The OM today is more the OM of the 80s, the 90s, and, of course, with roots going back.

And so when I defend certain things or speak about certain things, I'm not speaking about the original George Berwer OM. That's easier for me, actually. I'm speaking about the consensus OM.

I'm speaking in the light of the policy manual that you put together and that I believe you should attempt to follow. I'm now part of the OM that belongs to the General Council, not to you, not to me, not to your little nationalistic group, whatever flag you may fly, but belongs to the General Council, the people. The OM in the 80s became a movement of people.

And the ordinary person who is just as important as any of you, and may God forgive us as leaders of our arrogance, because sometimes we have been arrogant. And I, at times, have been arrogant. May God forgive me.

There's outward arrogance and there's very subtle arrogance. But whatever is never from God. In an amazing way, God gave us unity in intensive, long meetings to put together a policy manual, which, of course, will continue to be changed and ratified, but by the people of the movement, as complicated as that may be.

When we think of unity, we tend to think of unity between brothers and sisters, unity between one team and the other, and unity on a personal level. But I wanted to attempt to talk about something a little bit different that I hope will help continue to lay the foundation for the future. And I must be honest, that for the first time in my life, I'm speaking mainly thinking of the day when I no longer will hold this leadership position.

I don't know when that is. Maybe the Lord can take me at any time. And we have written into our notes what to do.

Area leaders brought this into our discussion. What do we do if Burwer goes? What do we do then if Maiden and Burwer go together? We ended up in the same plane with Hicks. The twin hits, the two Hicks.

This was an exciting flight. All the Americans got bumped up to business class. Peter Maiden was in the smoking department.

He eventually got out of that, but he couldn't sit with his own wife. I think Pam was back in there sucking up smoke. My wife and I were in discount seats.

We were mighty happy. I'd rather be with my wife in the economy class than in the business class as a lonely bachelor any day. But that was an exciting flight.

We're so thrilled they got upgraded. They even let me come up there and feel the air. But I wanted to let them get on and watch the film, so I didn't bother them.

So this message tonight is a little unusual for me. And if there's some Burwer straw in it, you'll forgive me because I'm finding my way. But I have so many people talking to me about this.

Most of you know Dale Roton is a lot older than me. I just became 60 a few days ago. And, yes.

July 3rd is my day. Send all contributions to special projects. They'll be matched.

But people outside of OM, including godly people, including donors, they want to know what are we going to do. Is Burwer going to do a Billy Graham? He's still running the Billy Graham organization at 79. Since I esteemed him, since I converted through him, since he's one of my members, mentors, I've wrestled through a few things.

And I just want to say with all my heart, I am not going to lead Operation Mobilization at that age or anything near that age. We are a totally different movement from the Billy Graham Association. And I know others that have hung on.

And Billy Graham, I'm sure, does it in a very gracious way. And he delegates. But I felt, and I've shared this with the area leaders, that most of us should consider serious change in ministry at least when we get to what is the retirement age in most countries, somewhere in the mid-60s.

You know, that's changing. You know, in India, we got that miracle number 59. And so I guess, you know, tonight, if I were an Indian, I'd have given my resignation.

But they'd open up a new ministry for me tomorrow. We're not talking about necessarily leaving OM, though some will prefer to do that. That would not be my choice.

But I do believe God wants us to think and plan ahead. I believe we not only should have team leadership on the running levels of OM teams, fields, but I believe we have put together, without realizing it, a structure of team leaders on an international level. Let me introduce them to you.

You probably already know them. The first one I'd like to introduce to you is Mr. and Mrs. Board Member. Mr. and Mrs. Board Member will have to play a more increasing role in the movement.

I would challenge you to get your board in place in your country unless you have a special situation of which there are plenty. So you contextualize what I say, hey, into your situation. I don't think the history of OM's boards have probably been told.

I wish I had time to tell you. The movement was born in 57. By 58, we had a fairly solid board in position, starting to move, certainly in control of the money, that I was responsible to, by 1958.

Within three months after arriving in Britain, we had perhaps an even more disciplined, committed board in place in the British Isles that I was subject to. Some of them are with us today, to this day. Well, Valgrave came just a few months later, but very early days.

Mr. Dalley came also in the very early days. I think the original ones have gone on to be with the Lord except Mr. Steele. I can remember the very moment when these men from Manchester challenged me to get my act together and get a board.

More time probably of you as a field leader needs to be given to board members. But many people would say that you are not the one that should actually exclusively choose them. That itself must be really a board decision.

You can recommend, but I would urge field leaders not to be heavy-handed in just recommending their personal friends into the board, and to even be willing to have on the board people who have the courage to disagree with you. At the same time, brothers and sisters, I would beg of you to try to get board members, men or women, we've had both from the earliest days in Canada, men or women who understand something of the ethos of what this movement is about. Our greatest blessing can come from godly board members, but greatest problems can also come from board members who may not believe the Bible is God's Word, who may be universalists or masons.

We cannot just bring anybody because they look nice or they have something to contribute into our boards. And I believe that is going to be one of the toughest challenges facing us, especially, I believe, after some of us older founder members move off the scene. We have an authority.

The movement has an ethos because we are around, which causes quite a few people who might cause difficulty to just be a little quiet. Part of my team, not in necessarily order of importance, Mr. and Mrs. Field Leader, you will always be, as far as I can understand in OM's ethos, the key people to make it happen in your nation. And we on the international side for 30 to 40 years have always tried to back our field leaders, believe the best, stand with them, going back to Valdemar Aguilar in difficult days in Mexico.

I mean, I back Valdemar in ways that would, I'm sure, surprise some people. There's a loyalty between the international side of OM and the field side of OM that is something we can only give thanks to God for. That must continue.

It will not get any easier. Mr. and Mrs. Field Leader, you have a lot of authority. But if you are wise, you will be a team player.

You will not make decisions just on your own. And it's encouraging to see so many little sort of teams on a field level operating effectively. The third part of our group, Mr. and Mrs. Area Leader, all of you are fairly new.

Some people wonder why I don't visit their field like I used to. I gave that job to the Area Leader. I did it for 25 years.

I visited every outpost in this massive spread-out movement. And maybe after I give this job that I have right now to someone else, I'll go on a worldwide trip. It would be great to see how many countries at 66 years of age I could fit into a one-year trip.

My wife would not be too enthusiastic about this at present. Mr. and Mrs. Area Leader are somewhat new. We're still learning how that works out.

It's really over a decade, though, isn't it? So saying new is a bit of a wrong statement. Quite a few of the Area Leaders, however, are only in this job a couple of years. They are not people that are ruling over God's heritage.

They are coaches. They are lovers of people. Has anybody ever been punched in the nose by Tony Kirk, huh? You know, take a picture.

One of God's teddy bears. Praise the Lord. There's probably a side of Tony I haven't seen yet, but I'll stick around a little bit longer.

I thank God for every one of these Area Leaders, and they will work in partnership with the field leaders and the boards and carry on a large amount of the load in the future. And then there's Mr. and Mrs. International Coordinators, just two of us at present. What a miracle that God could put together the likes of Peter and myself and our wives.

We, of course, have our teams. Area Leaders have their small teams. Field Leaders have their small teams.

And so that leads me to the fourth group to make up this little oversight structure. I don't have the best words. And that's Mr. and Mrs. Member of the General Council.

A missionary movement in which people raise their own money is completely distinct from any organization where people are paid salaries. Almost any salaried organization, people are hired and fired almost at whim. Two hundred people from the Promise Keepers Movement were fired not long after they were hired, including founder members.

I talked with one of them personally. I don't think he was fired. I think he negotiated his way out.

And I am not saying that's wrong. I'm not pointing any judgmental finger at them. And I am far more grace-awakened about the many different ways that Christian movements work.

But we, over the last ten years, have more or less decided how we are going to go forward. And I beg of you not to think we have to go back over all this ground again. We can make adjustments.

But I believe we should go forward with these adjustments. Of course, praying. Of course, discussing.

But accepting this basic structure that God has given to us. Sometimes in OM we have de-emphasized structure. But without the right structure, our unity will be hindered.

We will be thrown into confusion and disunity on many fronts. It is not easy to get strong-minded people to agree. It took us years to get to this level.

Phenomenal change in many of us, mentally, emotionally, the way we think, the way we listen, the way we function. And so we would hope that somehow this would be accepted as the way forward and that somehow we would work at this. Perhaps the greatest amount of discussion these days settles more around the General Council and whether we should even have a General Council.

But when that was put to a vote at a recent General Council, there was a sense they wanted to continue to carry this load, which will have to be modified, and we will continue to think through that. And the next General Council is going to be one of the great councils in the history of OM. There's also considerable discussion about the international side, especially as we think of globalization, especially as we think about many other factors.

I even, in an off moment, sort of reacting to something, said, maybe we could dismantle the whole thing, internationally. Just let everybody go, every field, go do your own thing. I was sort of sorry I ever said that because it was a denial of all that God had been leading and saying up before that.

But as I wrestled over the months, I just realized God has given us a tremendous team in the international side of this fellowship. And if in the future, try to bear with me for these moments more, if in the future we are going to continue to see large sums of money go from one country to another, there must be international coordination. If we are going to continue to see so many people go from one country to another, such a rapid increase of international marriages, and all kinds of international things, then we desperately need strong international leadership.

If we're going to maintain our testimony, which at this time on an international level, it just overwhelms me to hear what other Christian leaders say, the open doors that are given to us. Do you think you're going to bring this ship into some city if the testimony of Operation Mobilization is brought into disrepute? If there's

major immorality in the movement? If the ship ministry has been known for doing something in another country that's wrong or evil? We are very naive at times in OM about the real problems that can hit Christian ministry. Most of the problems we've had for 40 years have been relatively solvable.

And one of the reasons is such a united foundation to fight almost anything the devil can try to bring against us. I'm convinced, just as we need strong board members, strong field leaders, strong area leaders, all in different ways, we need a strong international coordinating team. Long after I disappear from the scene or pass on my role to someone else, at this point I think I want to shoot a little mythology straight in the head.

It is a false idea that no one could walk in my shoes. Missions have shown that the second director of major movements have done better than the first. Hallelujah! Should be, surely with a character like me being the first.

They will not be the same. We cannot reproduce the founding of OM. We cannot reproduce the pioneer days in Mexico or even the pioneering of a ship project.

The person who steps into my shoes and in Peter's shoes, and even the way they approach it, even where they live, could be, probably will be, completely different. But if we are not able to find those people, I'm not talking in the next year or two years, but at God's timing, that will be discussed, then I believe we will not hold together. I'm a student of missions.

I could tell you stories about other missions when they have fractured internationally. We're talking of hundreds of people hurt. We're talking of people giving up their faith.

We're talking about missionaries returning from the field, angry and confused about their mission society. We've already had people angry and confused at times about OM, so we're not making any claim to fame. But I am saying that we need to at least start praying and thinking as we go into a new millennium about who will be God's people to step into my shoes and Peter's shoes and probably most of the area leaders who are here, probably many.

Some of you field leaders are very young, but how long do you want to stick on the hot seat? And there's some that feel field leaders should go for so many years and move on. Others feel they should stay longer. I believe a lot depends on the individual, the country, and more than anything else, the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Let's beware of just comparing one country with another or comparing what God is doing between one leader and another. There's a great difference between a very visionary, pioneering kind of start many new things leader, praise God for them, and someone that may come along later and carry that vision for a few more years. Michael Griffiths who came, what, third or fourth in succession in OMF, one of the groups that's influenced us, he only carried it for a few years.

Then there was someone else. Then OMF went to the outside and brought in James Hudson Taylor III. It would be an exciting day, the year 2040, maybe 2050.

We introduce Charles Verwer Levine, the new International Coordinator of Operation Mobilization. He was two yesterday. Somebody told us to use our imagination, so let's relax.

That almost surely with our kind of ethos would never happen. We need strong leadership at every level because when we say strong in OM, we mean weak. We're not talking about anyone usurping authority.

The beautiful relationship for 40 years between myself and boards, field leaders and boards, area leaders and boards, is a testimony that can continue and it can improve. It certainly has been improving. I am excited about the future.

I'm not the kind of person that can mainly talk about the past. I want to believe that 1998 will be one of the greatest years ever. Some people have misunderstood because of the way Peter, Maiden and I operate that actually much of what I've been doing over, say, the last 10 years has not been really international coordination of the work.

And I've hardly ever said anything about it. Some very ridiculous things have been said at times. But I can just tell you that 70% of everything I do, day and night, 14 hours a day, 7 days a week, is my job of international coordination, working with Peter, Maiden, working with you, working with people, praying, serving, caring, confronting, strategizing, thinking, attending meetings, bonding, exhorting, recruiting, peacemaking, building loyalty.

In a sense, for the future, maybe the word coordinator isn't the best word. And in thinking about our present leadership style, perhaps coordinator is better for Peter and just spiritual leadership would be better for me. But let me just say this, and this is the only reason I'm saying this, there is a big job and somebody has got to do it.

It's just work. It doesn't mean you're going to get extra points in heaven. Endless relationships that often need the international touch.

It's not time to go into detail. I want to try to wind this up by just sharing a few other ways how we can perhaps work harder at our unity. Number one is that we would avoid friendly fire.

And if you catch me at any time, especially Peter or my team members, because I'm part of a community, I rejoice that I'm part of a community that lives at Forest Hill and Bromley, that function together with much struggle and much weakness. Quite a few of us in that community have been together for over a quarter of a century. It's a miracle.

How can we work harder at this unity? I think perhaps rereading our doctrinal statement and just saying, do I really believe this? And if you can't believe it, and we allow for struggle and doubts, then I believe you are in the wrong movement. We have basic shared beliefs. That includes the basic doctrines of the faith.

That doesn't mean that's all we believe. Secondly, I would urge you to beware of listening to negative reports. There are so many negative reports flowing around.

Perhaps less than some years ago. But beware of listening to a negative report about a brother or a sister. Very hard to get facts about what's going on.

My greatest struggles in 1997 have been with exaggerations that have come from the body of Christ. I discover again and again phenomenal exaggeration about what God supposedly is doing. Like when I was in America recently and someone came up and said, please tell us about the massive revival that has broken out in Great Britain where you live.

We have a tendency to exaggerate. Numbers double so fast and nobody much wants to confront anybody about it. We're in that day where we want to be optimistic.

We want to be proactive. We all have our little statements about guys like John MacArthur, much less David Hunt and Hank Hanegraaff. But does not the body of Christ need a few people, maybe not those guys, who are willing to warn us if they see us diving over a doctrinal precipice into some hot, fat brood in the kitchens of hell? I hope so.

Let's somehow work hard at this. Let us guard our tongues. Let us work harder to understand people.

Let us work harder to study and understand God. I'm still convinced that some of you have not taken seriously enough the heart chapters of that book, Grace Awakening, so tied in with 1 Corinthians 13. I believe also we've got to learn more about forgiveness.

Churches are coming unglued right now in a big way because of moral failure. Most churches do not know how to handle moral failure when it comes. One leading mission society took a survey recently.

They were amazed the number of their missionaries that were hooked into pornography on the Internet. We have people confessing that in our midst. That is going to increase.

We have case after case of churches not knowing how to restore people to ministry. I don't believe a man should be removed from ministry because in a weak moment he may have put his arm around a girl or maybe even kissed her. That is not the same as having sex with her.

Maybe he needs a few months off. Maybe that should be dealt with in a smaller group. But once these things happen, especially if there's a contrarian, an opposition person in the church, they can split that church wide open.

With a message of holiness, we must have the message of forgiveness and of mercy. How are we going to handle the homosexual challenge facing the church at this time? With some kind of homophobic reaction? Or with compassion? In one of the most complex problems that's ever hit the body of Jesus Christ. We are a movement that has demonstrated balance.

That has not come automatically. That has come because there are some of us who play that tune day in and day out in almost every shape and form because we believe the word of God and we believe that one scripture is often brought into balance by other scriptures. There's lots of, by the way, little things we can do to build unity.

Maybe a gift or a note. I want to thank some of you for sending me notes of encouragement. I want to especially thank those of you who have phoned me.

Thank you, Brother Fritz. Thank you, a number of others. But there seems to be a law.

I guess somebody got up and announced it when I was in the toilet. Whatever you do, don't phone George Verwer on his mobile phone. Or maybe it's budget cuts.

But I get very few phone calls from any of you sitting in this room. I think you are afraid it may interrupt with a major call with a donor and you'd rather have the money than a conversation with George Verwer any day. I'm sure you don't believe that, but that communication does sometimes come.

I am not too busy to speak to anybody here. It is five times harder for me to initiate a call, and I initiated a few thousand last year. You wouldn't want to see my phone bill.

But it's five times harder to initiate a call than receive one. Among other things, when the phone rings, you don't have too much of a choice. Even if my initial reaction at three in the morning is not overwhelmingly positive, just hang in there for a couple of minutes or seconds.

I repent very quick, you can ask my wife. A phone call, a note, a meal out together, and I'm not speaking of myself now, I'm speaking generally, and a dozen other small things that I know you can make a list of because I know most of you already have a Ministry of Encouragement, can help build the body and unity in the body. And that's why much of the blessing here will come even behind the scenes as we eat together, and as we fellowship together, and maybe swim together.

And this point, I'm almost to the end, thank you for your patience, don't let areas of disagreement bring a breach in your personal relationship. I think some cultures are ahead of other cultures in this area, or maybe they're just more dedicated to Christ. But there are certain cultures where when they don't agree with you anymore, they break fellowship.

I just had a person break fellowship with me because they feel I'm promoting contemporary Christian music. A 30-year relationship. I've gone out of the way for this brother, he went through divorce.

He's a brother with quite a few difficulties. And myself, didn't necessarily want to necessarily maintain that friendship, but I loved it, and I knew he was going through difficulties in his life, so I would phone him, I'd go out of the way to see him, and in one letter, he ended it. Well, I'll go back for some more innings when I recover.

You don't break fellowship with people because you're into different music. You don't break fellowship because you don't agree with the strategy that that country has, or how he's handling his dog. I don't think, in O.N., any longer will it be possible for us to read even a great book like this, and all be on exactly the same page.

If Thomas and I have been together for many years in the world, but I'm sure sometimes we're not exactly on the same page. We just turn a few pages and read on, and get back on the same page, because our personal relationship goes beyond these other things. And I want to ask forgiveness, though it would be more in the past than perhaps recently, if I had communicated any rejection of you because of some area where you didn't agree with me, because I didn't mean that, and that's not really my bottom line.

And then we're going to have to go the extra mile in a lot of ways. Have we really become mature in living in a movement of 2,800 staff, with thousands of others joining us in the course of a summer or a year? Have we really come face to face with the sheer amount of work and toil it takes to keep your field and to keep this whole movement going in the complex Christian world that is so divided with 26,000 denominations? I hope we have. I read, think of the words in Philippians 2, that we preach from the earliest days of O.M., esteeming others better than yourself.

I read it in two different translations, three in preparation for tonight. It says different, puts it in different ways in different translations, but I love it. And I want to tell you, I esteem every one of you very highly in Jesus Christ.

And I know that all of you esteem me in a varying levels. I have no hang-up about that. I haven't discovered in my deceitful heart, and the heart is deceitful.

And I want you to feel free to share your burdens with your area leader, just as if I were that area leader. For some of you, you prefer that. Fine.

Others, maybe not. We know that quite a few men in O.M. are struggling with pornography. We know that. We talk about a higher level of accountability. I'm not sure we have that. I hope so.

But I pray to God, as the fiery darts of impurity, combined with disunity, combined with many other things at once, for Satan seldom has a one-point program. He has multi-headed missiles. I pray that you will find the necessary accountability, and that you also will learn how to be more approachable, something I continue to learn, so that people will feel free to share with you.

We can pray together, and we can go forward together. Pornography on television is hitting quite a few in O.M. at this time. Pornography on the Internet is hitting.

And really, pornography is not our big problem. It never will be. Pride is far bigger.

Probably impatience. And ten other sins that I could list. But you know, all of them, somehow, somewhere, have to be dealt with.

Recently I heard of a couple on O.M. that came unglued in their marriage during their time on O.M. It has seldom happened in forty years. I have nothing but mercy and love for those people. I don't know them well.

All of you know things happening in your field that I do not know. Do not presume I have a hotline. If you don't tell me, I probably will not find out.

Peter tells me some things, and sometimes I call him about something hot, and he hasn't heard about it either. We're not interested in just gathering up information and gossip. We're interested in restoring people.

We're interested in restoring marriages. And sometimes one phone call, one letter, from someone like Peter, from someone like myself, or an area leader, can mean more to a person or a couple than we could ever measure. All of us have been on the receiving end of that experience.

Let us guard our marriages with a Holy Ghost jealousy. Let us walk that road of holiness and purity with greater strength than ever before. If not, I predict in ten years this movement will be in a mess beyond comprehension.

Let us pray. Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you that even though it's scary, your treasure is in earthen vessels, and whenever I share, there's always some Berwer wheat, or some, well, I hope some Berwer wheat, but also some Berwer straw together with your wheat.

And I just pray that each one of us not react to some little thing we don't understand, but try to contextualize this into our situation, our family, our field, our nation. We thank you for the miracle of the unity, not imperfection, not without some real heartbreaks of disunity, not perhaps without things that even tonight are not totally healed. Sometimes we're not sure what totally healed means in a lost world.

And Father, if we do even receive friendly fire in our sort of blown out of our spiritual vehicle, we want to forgive that person who may have launched that missile. For so often they didn't really mean it. We thank you, God, for forty-plus miraculous years, and we have no reason to doubt that unless you return, you will give us forty more, with men and women who love you more than I ever have, and who will build on these core values, and who will build on these great principles of your holy word, that we could see the Church in every people's group planted, and we could see the gospel go to every person in the world, working in partnership with all the great Bible-believing evangelical community across the whole world.

Lord, give us the privilege of training thousands more and sending them into every major mission in the world. Give us the privilege of birthing another one hundred different organizations, or at least helping in a tiny way in their birth, so that the gospel may even go quicker in places that we may not be ready to go into. And keep us, O Lord, from all the various extremes that seem to surround us on every side, that we may build on the solid foundation of truth, and know the reality of unity, and grace, and love.

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