

THE LAST DANCE

Whenever you attend an event where there is dancing, as the evening comes to a close, an announcement comes across the speaker saying, “this is the last dance.” Those that had been sitting most of the night, quickly found partners as the music played and hips swayed. Usually, you would see the same crowd next week, but no matter how many two steps or cha cha’s are done, there is always a last dance.

After working 23 years in the corporate world, and 30 years in ministry, it is time for the last dance. Not in the sense of no longer serving God, but what you have done over the course of time. As I look back, I can see so many things I would do differently, however, I don’t know how that would have altered God’s plan. Somehow, we always think we know better, but I can testify, that I would do it all over again. My moves aren’t as smooth as they used to be, but my journey has been fulfilling. I learned along the way, that wherever God sent me to shepherd, I was the one being shepherded. Every assignment was a steppingstone to the next position, and every job strengthened me for the next. So, over the course of my life, I have learned some things that I pray will be of value to you.

God will make room for your gifts. In all my years, I have never asked to be moved or promoted. I made a promise to God that I would go wherever He sent me and do whatever He asked. The Bible tells us, *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything bring all of your requests to God in prayer, along with giving thanks.”* (Philippians 4:6-8). Whenever we are in obedience to God, He will bless your work. God always sent me to churches that only had a few people and little or no money. I learned the power of prayer and over and over watched how God eliminated debt, brought increase numerically, financially, and spiritually. Remove self and allow God to use you according to His purpose and plan.

Never allow money to overshadow ministry. When God told me to quit my job and work for Him full-time, I was making six figures. God told me He would bless me more than any man’s job, and to walk by faith and not by sight. Scripture says, *“God is a man that does not lie.”* Everything I needed God provided over and beyond. He has been faithful to His promise. Too many want to move up quickly or get caught up in wanting to make more money. Every year they want to move, and they plot and scheme just to move up. My mother used to say, *“everything that glitters is not gold.”* Build the ministry where you are. When God has an opportunity for you, He will open all the right doors. I encourage you to wait on the Lord! What God has for you is for you.

Be transparent. One of the best ways to build trust with your flock is transparency. Make sure your board receives a full financial report every month. This should align with the budget the church approved. In addition, use your own credit card. Pastors often make the mistake of getting a credit card in the churches name. Somehow temptation gets the best of you, and personal expenses get charged to the card which can bring about chaos and division amongst the members. The best practice is to keep receipts for trips and church related expenses, then submit to be reimbursed. Again transparency! Never, never use money slated for a particular purpose

to be used for something else without holding a church conference to discuss and voted. Transparency!

Spend time with God daily. Serving God is one of the most challenging positions you will ever have. Remember, Satan came to kill and destroy you, and your ministry. You are his number one threat. Every decision you make, must be God led. Every step you take must be God led. The success of your ministry is not dependent on you, but God. In John 10:27-30 Jesus said, *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand, I and the Father are one.”*

Before the phone rings or distractions take place, rise-up early and have a special place to commune with God. Let Him reveal mysteries beyond your comprehension. Let God impart the vision He has for you and your ministry. If you want a God blessed ministry, you want Gods hands on you to lead and guide you. Just as you make time to bathe, eat, and run errands, the best time you can spend is with God. Make it your daily practice and you will be all the richer.

Lastly, don’t forget self-care. If you read your Bible, you know Jesus often spent time alone or visited friends. It is called self-care. Work hard and play hard! Remember you are human and to be effective in your personal life, and ministry, it is important to practice self-care. Spend quality time with family. Take vacations and learn to relax. Many clergy are so centered on the church, years later realize they really don’t know their children and left them resenting God and the ministry. God is the author or marriage, so make it a priority and enjoy living. Balance is the key, so being effective means nurturing all aspects of your life. Work hard and play hard!

God bless you and keep you,
Peace and love,
The Last Dance!
Elder Fran T. Cary