

To Fight Better: A Biography of J. Oswald Sanders by Ron and Gwen Roberts, Highland Books/OMF, Crowborough, East Sussex: 1989. (22 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. Desired to be Like R.A. Torrey

... he wanted to be like Dr. R. A. Torrey. It began in the days following the Pounawea 'cataclysm' when *What the Bible Teaches* and other books by Torrey thrilled and built up his heart and mind. Searching for reasons why he found those writings particularly helpful, he discovered that Torrey seemed to have two special abilities. First, he could penetrate to the heart of a biblical passage and secure a clear grasp of the truths it contained. Secondly, he had such a facility with words that he could then make those truths crystal clear to others. Clarity was the Torrey distinctive and it was in that sense that he wanted to be like him. It is a desire that has persisted all through his life. In all his preaching, teaching and writing, every other consideration has been subjugated to his primary concern for clarity. [Page 59]

2. Look to the Lord for Adequacy

'A sense of inadequacy can be devastating: It can be a crippling liability or it can be an asset. I've always had a sense of inadequacy and a certain inferiority complex, on both accounts justified! But it has caused me to look to the Lord to compensate for the inadequacy. It has not turned me back on myself it has turned me to the Lord. It all depends on your attitude to it. I've found that when the Lord has asked me to do some new thing for which I've not had the qualifications; when in conscious inadequacy I've turned to the Lord and said, "Well, Lord, You're calling me to do it and I'm looking to You to provide." then, in every case He's seen me through. That's one of the lessons of inadequacy. It's not something that the Lord takes away. He doesn't necessarily make you feel adequate, but He does see you through. [J. Oswald Sanders] [Page 61]

3. Developed Gifts and Capacities

Behind this expanding ministry, however, was not just abounding energy, but personal growth. His walk with God, his biblical insights, and his spiritual discernment were all deepening. Side by side with that growth came continuing development of his gifts and capacities. All this, he maintained, was due to three factors; the godly influence of a number of close friends, the intercession of certain people who had undertaken to pray regularly for him, but, above all, the sovereign blessing of God. That was true. But it was also true that part of God's blessing was the ability to discipline himself, for that as both spur and bridle to all the other gifts and powers God had bestowed. The iron discipline he had clamped on himself after his conversion was rarely relaxed. [Page 78]

4. Growing in the Lord

And as Bishop Houghton later told Oswald: 'When I am considering inviting a man to take on a position like this, one of the first things I ask is. Is he growing? I could see that you were growing.' [Page 82]

5. Passion to Preach, Help Christians, and Missions

I have three passions; one is to preach the gospel, another is the passion for helping Christians into the fullness of life that there is for them in Christ, and the third passion is to help forward by every means in my power the missionary enterprise. [Page 84]

6. God Can Move a Mission If He Desires

While acknowledging that for the present at least it was impossible to consider advance in the China field, some conference members were hesitant about looking at other areas for possible advance, lest that should prejudice care and support for the more than 600 members of the Mission still in China. Oswald and others, however, could see that once the Mission family began to move, it was going to be imperative that their leaders should be ready to offer new directions. Using a metaphor from the recent world conflict, he urged upon his fellow-directors the need to keep up the momentum of this active missionary force. 'We are a fighting force,' he maintained, 'and our Commander has the right to withdraw His forces from one area and deploy them in another, and to open a "second front" by means of which to attack from another angle.' [Page 100]

7. New Fields Thailand to Japan

A cabled communiqué was sent to all Mission centres: 'Lengthen cords, strengthen stakes. While emphasizing prayer for China conference unanimously convinced Mission should explore unmet need preparatory to entering new fields from Thailand to Japan.' [Page 100]

8. Obedience to God's Will

'When God has spoken, to hold back is not humility, but unbelief,' and, 'Obedience is the one condition of blessing.' 'Nothing so clears the vision as obedience to the revealed will of God.' [Page 108]

9. With a New Burden, New Grace Is Given

Oswald found that with every fresh burden there was fresh grace given for whatever the day might hold. While he never ceased to be keenly conscious of his own inadequacy,

he was entirely satisfied with the sufficiency of Christ, longing only that he might be able to appropriate to the full, all the grace there was for him in Christ. [Page 117]

10. Every Missionary Should Dig for Own Food from the Word of God

A veteran field leader was at first surprised at Oswald's response when one day he remarked how much he would like to sit back and enjoy some good Bible teaching. Oswald looked at him: 'Well, you're old enough to forage for yourself, aren't you?' was all he said. Did he not understand the man's need? A need common to all who are called upon to be constantly giving out physically, mentally and emotionally. Of course he understood and deeply sympathized. But he also knew that it was an essential prerequisite that every missionary should be able to dig for his own daily food from the Word of God. Moreover, he knew his man, he knew him as one who had within himself deep spiritual resources upon which he could draw as leader and encourage of others. Certainly Percy Moore never forgot that bracing reminder that nerved him to years of fresh endeavor.

Nor did he ever forget Oswald's encouragement on another occasion when he was hesitating about taking a difficult decision that concerned another missionary: 'Grasp the nettle and get on with it! It's the only way!' was Oswald's salutary advice. And it was advice that not only Percy Moore but other field leaders gratefully followed. [Page 118-119]

11. Sanders Was Shy

Certainly it is very doubtful if any guessed at his underlying shyness, any more than those who served under Winston Churchill could have guessed that under his bombast lay an essentially shy nature. Most of us do not expect leaders to be shy. [Page 119]

12. Remembered Faces and Names

He has always been remarkable for his ability to remember faces and names, and such detailed concern is certainly not born of detachment, especially when his general dislike of detail is remembered. [Page 120]

13. A Welcomed Guest

A quiet, helpful guest, it was obvious to all that he looked for no red carpet treatment, and small children responded happily to his gentle approach. He was welcomed wherever he went and especially when Edith accompanied him. [Page 121]

14. Appreciated the Value of Money

'The policy I have believed and adhered to is that finance should not be the deciding factor in any decision regarding spiritual work. It should be a factor but it should not be

the deciding factor. I have never been money-hungry, believing that we should be just as willing to receive less as more.' He learned to appreciate the value of money, especially during the great depression of the thirties. As far as he is concerned, having 'more' means not just greater comfort for himself, but also a greater capacity to enjoy the pleasure of sharing with others. [Page 131]

15. Made Decisions

'I feel that one of his great contributions to the Mission,' says Arnold Lea, 'was this ability to get things on paper then challenge people to face up to the implications and make a decision. Things could not be left in the air as far as Oswald was concerned.' And on that occasion he brought his final challenge: 'If we could see the way through, it would not be a step of faith. Did Hudson Taylor see the way through when he took that first mighty step of faith? His eyes were on the Lord, not on the way stretching at his feet... God is calling us to go forward, what is your response?' [Page 133]

16. Leadership Decision Making

Many years later Oswald talked informally of one aspect of those years of leadership, the decisions concerning other people:

"Those are the most difficult of all decisions, because the people concerned are your friends. You must weigh up the interests of the work against your natural feelings for your friends, although the two are not to be entirely dissociated. But I found all decisions relating to people's lives, and in particular any disciplinary decision, very hard; I had to screw myself up to do it. If only those people who feel you are being tough on them could know the genuine agony of heart you go through before you come to a decision, they'd have a different viewpoint on it. I found that very, very costly. You can't divulge confidences and give all the reasons, you just have to take the knock. Well, that's what you're there for! But it doesn't make it any easier. It's hard when your motivation is misunderstood; when you're really acting in the best interests of the individual and they can't see it. They can only see administrative toughness, But I found this-- the situation doesn't improve with age. The longer you leave it, the more difficult it becomes. Once you've done your homework; made thorough inquiries into both sides; and got all the facts that are relevant so that you can get an objective appraisal of the situation, then deal with it at once.

Get it over with! Otherwise you will have days and nights of fruitless agony, and still you will have to do it. And--if you do reach a decision and then go back on it, you're generally wrong. Not always, but generally. Once allow your heart to rule your head, and give the person the benefit of the doubt, it very seldom works out. You can try to inject some comfort into the decision, you can deal with it as gently as possible and make your reasons as clear as possible, but generally they are not able to listen to those things; they can only hear the decision.

That was one of the reasons why I didn't want to take on the job. I knew too well what it would involve; what I would have to carry because by the time a decision reaches your desk, the buck stops. And it wouldn't get to your desk unless it was a difficult decision. It takes real moral courage to make such decisions, and again and again I found it hard to summon up that courage." [Pages 136-137]

17. Growth Comes through Sorrow

Godly growth comes through personal sorrow. 'Why should I start at the plough of my Lord, that maketh deep furrows in my soul? I know He is no idle husbandman. He purposeth a crop,' wrote Samuel Rutherford. More than 300 years later Oswald echoed the thought of the rugged old Scot, when he talked of the succession of bereavements he had suffered:

"I've no doubt that, looking back, those experiences were part of the price of the ministry. I think the Lord works something into you that doesn't come otherwise. I've always felt that it is not purposeless although it is not what you would choose. It's part of the unfurling of the plan. I know that something has been worked into me through those things, because I've had to work my way through and get on top each time. It affects you in your deepest parts but I've never been tempted to question the Lord on it because of the example my sister had set as a young widow." [Page 172]

18. Trust in God Whether You Understand or Not

Trust in God whether you understand or not. "It suggests a lack of confidence in Him if we find it necessary to understand all He does. Will it not bring greater joy to tell Him that we need no explanation because we know Him? 'As for God, his way is perfect,' said the psalmist. If His way is perfect, we need no explanations. [Frank Houghton, *Amy Wilson Carmichael* London SPCK, 1952]

Writing on what God had taught him through bereavement and other difficult experiences, Oswald said, "I know one thing it has done is to give me a line of ministry that has become more prominent latterly. I take the Disciplines that produce maturity, the Discipline of Disturbance; the Disciple of Darkness; the Discipline of Disappointment; the Discipline of Discrimination (the ways of the Lord are not equal) and the Discipline of Delay. All of these have been experiences I have known, and through which God has worked something into me that meets the need of other people. It is not something one is conscious of, but it works its way into the ministry without being conscious of it. It is there, and it does something." [Page 173]

20. Maturity Comes through Discipline

God's discipline produces maturity. 'All fruitfulness is touched with the Cross.' [Page 174]

21. No Desire for Recognition

Godly living and leadership does not have to be recognized. Some may be surprised that during a life of worldwide public ministry Oswald Sanders has received no honorary degrees. At the end of his service at the Bible College of New Zealand it was suggested that he should allow his name to be submitted for ordination in the Baptist church. He declined for no other reason than that he had not earned it! He was not academically qualified. Later, during his years as OMF General Director, he was offered an honorary doctorate by a Christian University in the USA. Again he declined on the grounds of lacking academic qualifications.

'They were hurt,' he said, 'but I felt I had not earned it. I don't know whether it would have been better for OMF if I had accepted it. But it did not seem to be right for me. I had no academic qualifications. I'm quite happy to be plain "Mr".' [Pages 178-179]

22. Lived by God's Grace Every Day

It is equally possible to read the story of Oswald Sanders and to dismiss him as being 'out of our league'. To do so is to miss the fact that it, too, is essentially a story of divine sovereignty at work in the life of one man, shaping and preparing him for service.

It is the story of a man who, from that moment at the Pounawea Convention, placed himself and all his concerns under God's control. It is not only the story of what God could do with a man of exceptional gifts and above average energy and drive. Rather is it the story of what God can do with any life, at any level, no matter how ordinary it may seem, that is prepared to allow God to take the controls through all the checkered ways of life.

Again and again over the years, and particularly during the stressful years of OMF leadership, Oswald Sanders came to the place of saying: 'Lord, I can't take one more pressure!' But the pressures continued to come and he had learned to live by God's 'all grace' for every day and every circumstance. Results he left to the Great Shepherd; they were His concern. [Pages 190-191]