

True Stories: The Defective Garage

"There ought to be a rule," thought Pastor Munson, "against church members doing business with one another. Something always goes wrong, and then the pastor gets pulled into the mess."

Bill Hinton was sitting in Pastor Munson's office, fuming over the fact that Stan Jones was refusing to finish paying him for building a new garage.

"That cheapskate is holding back \$3,000 to cover a bunch of imaginary repairs he thinks I need to make. I can't pay my subcontractors, and they're screaming for their money. If he doesn't pay by tomorrow, I'm going to hire an attorney and make him wish he never dreamed of having a garage in the first place."

Bill calmed down after Pastor Munson promised to look into the matter. When he later called Stan, he heard a very different story. "Imaginary repairs!" Stan exclaimed. "The overhead door has such big cracks in it that I can see daylight through them! I'm not paying for that kind of work."

Pastor Munson listened to Bill's story and then assured him that he would do what he could to solve the problem. *Help me, Lord, he prayed as he hung up the phone. I'd like to stay out of this, but I know I've got to help them. Please show me what to do.*

After a moment's reflection, he decided to call one of his deacons, who was a respected building contractor and leader in the church. "Tom, I need some help. Two of our men are involved in a dispute over a building project. I'd like to put together a mediation team as quickly as possible."

"You must be talking about Bill and Stan," said Tom. "I've already heard the rumors. What can I do?" After hearing more details, he said, "I suggest asking Nancy Wilson and Ron Tripp to work with us. Their business experience and spiritual maturity would add a lot of wisdom and credibility to the effort."

"Good!" responded Pastor Munson. "You contact them, and I'll tell Bill and Stan what we're planning."

It took some coaxing, but the following Saturday the two men met with Tom, Nancy, and Ron. Tom guided them through two hours of initial story-telling. To diffuse their arguing and get firsthand information, he suggested that the group drive over to see the garage for themselves. In less than an hour, they learned enough to start guiding the two men toward a solution.

When they returned to the church, the mediators met privately with Bill first. Gently but firmly they helped him to face up to the fact that the garage did have several major defects. "You're right," he finally conceded, "I know there are a few things I need to finish. I would have done it right away if Stan hadn't gotten so self-righteous about the whole thing."

Shifting their focus to Stan, the mediators talked privately with him about his contribution to the problem. Since they were dealing with his heart rather than with visible construction defects, it was not easy to get him to see how he had blown a simple problem into a consuming dispute.

Finally, they urged him to read Matthew 7:12, James 4:11-12, and Ephesians 4:29, and to ask God to show him whether he had properly lived out these passages toward Bill.

A second meeting was scheduled, but it never happened. The day before they were supposed to meet again, Bill called Tom to cancel the meeting. At first Tom thought that Bill was backing out of the conciliation process, but he could not have been more wrong.

"No, you don't understand," Bill said, "Yesterday I realized that it was up to Stan and me to solve this. So I called him and asked if we could meet for a cup of coffee. When we got together I admitted that I had failed to complete the garage properly. He interrupted and said he was wrong for being such a perfectionist! After that, it didn't take long to work things out. I agreed to put in a new garage door and fix the other things within two weeks. I said I'd wait until then for final payment, but Stan gave me a \$3,000 check. I just paid the subs, and I think they were pretty surprised when I told them how we worked out our differences."

"What a great testimony!" Tom exclaimed.

"We sure didn't do it on our own," responded Bill. "Stan and I needed to hear what you said to us last week. We're both pretty stubborn, and the Lord used you to get us back on the right track."

Tom laughed. "It was a privilege to work with you, Bill, and I'm glad to hear about your meeting. I'll pass the news on to Ron and Nancy, and I'll let Pastor Munson know what's happened."

"I think I'll call him too," said Bill. "I want to thank him for arranging for you folks to meet with us."

Thank you, God! thought Tom as he said goodbye and dialed the church's number. *You gave us a wise pastor to guide us through these problems.* And then, as the pastor answered the phone, Tom said, "Pastor Munson, I've got some good news for you"