

Chapter 1

R.B. and *The Antidote*

R. B. dominated Wildwood Church. He stood almost 6' 6" tall, weighing well over 350 pounds. Every inch of his large physique was muscle. He was a champion wrestler in college, and almost made the Olympic wrestling team. He had won every possible high school accolade in athletics. He was not only a champion wrestler; he had also been the best lineman on the football team and the center who brought a state championship to his high school basketball team. Now, he was the key leader of his hometown church, The Church in the Wildwood. Everything he said eventually overruled every other leader's ideas. His name was an abbreviation that his high school football team gave him: R. B. stood for Raging Bull! His name not only described his physique and his football prowess; it described everything about his behavior. His will was extremely difficult to resist. He controlled Wildwood Church.

Wildwood had been a strong, small-town church. The senior board of eight members was not only dominated by R. B., but several of the other members of the board were his close friends or family members. One of the members was his son, Bryan. Bryan looked very little like his father. He was just as tall as his father, but he was quite lean. In fact, he looked more like a human beanpole than a raging bull. The other members with the exception of three were dutifully obedient to everything R. B. suggested.

Then, a major conflict began to brew. The pastor of Wildwood, Pastor Harry, had been at the church for eight years. He was sixty years old. The church had not grown at all during Pastor Harry's tenure and a problem was looming. The average attendance had dropped from 250 to 125 in the eight years of Pastor Harry's leadership. It was evident to R. B. and several other key members of the board

that Pastor Harry was doing as little as possible. It seemed that he would stay on as the pastor until his retirement. But the question was: Would the church survive another five or six years with Pastor Harry? Another factor was at work. The average age of the adults at Wildwood Church was between sixty-five and seventy. The number of funerals far exceeded the number of conversions. In fact, the baptismal tank hadn't been used for years for any purpose other than the baptism of those who had grown up in the church. Wildwood Church had a bleak future. Anyone could see that slow death was now in process at Wildwood.

It was time for R. B. to act. Through his tenacious efforts and the pressure he placed on the members of the board, Pastor Harry was asked to resign. However, Pastor Harry was dearly loved by many within the church, particularly the older members whom he constantly coddled. In fact, it appeared that the only thing Pastor Harry had ever done besides the obligatory preaching was to sit with the old folks and make them happy. Many of the members of the church were outraged, particularly the older ones. They called meeting after meeting where they stated their objections. They were to no avail. R. B. dug in his heels. Eventually, the meetings became more and more ugly. Some even stated that they hated R. B. and his "crew." Eventually, well over half of the members of the church left. Three members of the board also left the church.

The Church in the Wildwood became an empty shell of what it had been. Forty to fifty attenders were all that remained. R. B. had won, but the Church in the Wildwood had lost. Offerings dropped dramatically. There was no way the church could continue. There were barely enough funds to pay for building maintenance much less a new pastor.

My wife and I were called by a denominational leader to determine if there was anything we could do. We had the advantage of a highly trained and experienced interim pastor who was a professional counselor with over twenty-five years of pastoral experience. He had primed the church leaders for our possible interaction with them. We met with the five remaining members of the board. We noticed that two of the five questioned the decision to fire Pastor Harry. We suggested the only thing we could. We asked if they would meet with

us for a ten-day period which would include eight evenings and all-day Saturday and half a day on Sunday. We described the program we would conduct. We would do something of an autopsy of the situation with recommendations to follow. They were open. The church was near death and even the board was questioning itself. There was no opposition, even from R. B. They were desperate. They knew they needed help.

We conducted our usual routine of lectures and small group meetings. I met with the members of the board for the small group meetings. All of them were male. My wife met with the wives of the board members for the same purpose. In the course of the small group meetings, we led these ten individuals into a program of self-discovery as to why they behaved the way they did and how this had affected the church. We eventually came to the time in which we began the process of exploring "The Antidote." It was at that time something very special happened. The small Sunday school room where I was meeting with the men suddenly changed. We could feel, in a palpable way, the presence of the Holy Spirit. As Bryan began to process The Antidote, he suddenly broke down into tears. At first, he sobbed. But, the sobs turned into something like a wail. He could barely talk. All he could do was call on the Lord for help! Then, it happened again, this time with another member of the board, Joe, who had been Bryan's close friend. Joe also began to sob. No voice was heard in the room for what seemed almost half an hour. Then, the dam broke. R. B. began to sob and weep like a baby. He began confessing sins—some of which were unknown by anyone in the room. Completing the exercises around The Antidote was unnecessary. The Holy Spirit had been there. He had changed everything. Wildwood was about to see a major revival.

The following Sunday worship service witnessed a dramatic healing. R. B. stood and began to confess publicly the sins of his life, including the sins that he had done which had destroyed Wildwood Church. He resigned from the board! Everyone was shocked. But, all around the room, individuals slowly stood to confess their own complicity in the problems of Wildwood Church. There was a new spirit within the church. All that remained was to seek what the Lord would ask the church to do to regain His blessing.

The Antidote

The story I have shared with you is true. Of course, I have changed the circumstances enough so that it is impossible to identify the church or its members. My wife and I really saw this happen. Today, Wildwood Church is again a strong church. Every Sunday the attendance grows. It may soon be a church of 150 again. The offerings are large enough to pay for the expenses including those needed for a pastor. Many of those who left Wildwood have returned. But new, young families are also beginning to attend. Conversions now occur and the baptismal tank is now being used again. The work of the interim pastor continues the process of the complete revitalization of Wildwood Church. He understands the concept of The Antidote and has made certain the concept is steadfastly promoted. R. B. is not a member of the board and may not ever be a board member again, but he is faithful! He attends; He gives financially and, he constantly demonstrates a servant heart. Most importantly, R. B. is being disciplined by the interim pastor. R. B. is seeing the restoration of his life and ministry.

My wife and I have been blessed to see how the Lord used the simple, Biblical principle of The Antidote repeatedly, many, many times, both in the US and in many countries in Asia. The results have been remarkable. It is a not a complicated Biblical principle. But it is a principle which is overlooked and poorly applied over and over again. The result is that many Christians are prisoners to the problems which are programmed into their lives by the powers of evil. It is a remarkable lesson; for once this lesson has been learned, many of the problems and pains of this life cease to have any effect. Often, the way that God directs the life of the Christian through individual experiences is then understood. Often, why a Christian's hopes are fulfilled or remain unfulfilled is also understood. Often, why prayers are answered positively or negatively becomes clear. And often, the Christian who learns this lesson amazingly begins to understand the very nature of emotional pain; why it is there; and how much, if not all of it, can be eliminated. It is not too strong a statement to say that once the lesson of The Antidote is learned, many of the secrets of the truly abundant Christian life are realized. And, this lesson has one other, very positive effect: Once this lesson is understood there is a potential that all conflict will be eliminated within the life and the

ministry of the individual Christian. In this sense, it is a true antidote to the poison of toxicity. It has the power to eliminate toxicity in relationships within every Christian ministry and within the life of every Christian.