

From 'Burned Out' to 'On Fire'

Dale Pierce has a hard time saying "no."

Back in 1998, that characteristic had resulted in a pretty impressive job description for this worship pastor. He led a 65-voice choir and full orchestra that performed at two services each Sunday. He also led the large church's Sunday evening worship.

But that was just the beginning. Dale also taught music and led the chapel service at the church's Christian school. He was active in the men's ministry, helped with the singles group and directed the church's small group ministry.

He was, to the say the least, engaged



Dale Pierce with his wife and three children

God stepped in.

Somehow, Dale stumbled upon Cedarly Pastors Retreat. Today he can't

is a God anymore. And I certainly don't know who I am."

Over the next five days, God gently remolded Dale's heart. He and Jenny spent hours talking over important matters they had long neglected.

Gradually, their true goals for themselves, their children and their ministry began to take shape. By Thursday, they were committed to making whatever changes were necessary for God to work in and through their lives.

What lay ahead was a journey they could never have predicted: closing the door on Dale's work at one church ... a searching time both in and out of full-time ministry ... and a move, 11 months ago, to Kettle Moraine Evangelical Free Church in Delafield, WI.

Dale is happy to talk today about the healthier heart he now carries inside. But the best way to understand the change inside is to observe the changes outside.

FAMILY FOCUS

"Dale enjoys hanging with his three kids (Kaitlyn, 12; Megan, 10; and Derrick, 8), dating his wife and camping with his family."

Dale candidly admits that this sentence, found on his current church's Web site (www.kmefc.org) wouldn't have been accurate a few years ago. The family activities he so enjoyed had become more the exception than the rule. The "work" of ministry had crowded out his family life. No longer.

"I was as broken as a 36-year-old man can be." That's how Dale Pierce describes the state of his heart back in the spring of 2003. Then something dramatic happened. That "something" was the week he and his wife, Jenny, spent at Cedarly Pastors Retreat in Delafield, Wisconsin.

in lots of work for the Kingdom. But in the process, Dale was not taking care of his heart. Consumed by his responsibilities, his personal prayer life dwindled. He rarely saw his family. He lost his sense of excitement and purpose in ministry.

A NEW VIEW

By April 2003, Dale had literally reached his breaking point. That's when

even remember how—but he soon found himself talking on the phone with Cedarly hosts Andy and Nancy Hagen. And one week later, he and Jenny embarked on a life-changing spiritual retreat in Delafield, Wis.

Dale vividly recalls the first community meal of the week. As the table-full of pastors introduced themselves, he broke down and said, "I'm not even sure there

With their newfound conviction that family comes first, the Pierces almost never miss a family dinner. Dale makes a point to take his days off. The fun is back. And Dale and Jenny actively involve their children in major family decisions. The family of five is truly together, in every sense of that word.

For example, Dale fondly recalls one eight-month stretch in 2004—when he was installing stoves for \$12 an hour—as an amazingly happy time. Living in a small apartment, while still paying the mortgage on a home that hadn't sold, the young family's love and commitment thrived as they faced what most people would consider a very difficult time.

HIM, NOT US ...

With his newer, healthier heart, Dale now takes more seriously than ever the meaning of his job title. He is the "Worship minister." It's not about the

“It's not about the quality of performance. It's not about people. It's about God, Himself.”

quality of the performance. It's not about people. It's about God Himself. Dale says his intent is always “to make God a little bigger so that the worshippers can hear and respond.”

The question isn't “how well the worship team does,” but rather whether God is pleased with what they offer. That crucial difference is both freeing and inspiring. Dale knows more clearly than

ever before that he is working for God, not for man.

And he stresses this perspective with the other members of the worship team. Week after week, the words of Isaiah 26:8b are before them: “We wait for You; Your name and renown are the desire of our hearts.”



A view of Cedarly Pastors Retreat

CARING VS. EXPECTING

In 2003 if you had asked a member of Dale's worship team to describe his leadership, you might have heard something like, “He expects a lot.” Three years later, Dale hopes that sentence is: “He cares a lot.”

As he works with Kettle Moraine's singers, musicians and assorted volunteers, his first concern is not raising the level of their musicianship. He's much more concerned about providing healthy ministry opportunities.

To prevent burnout and encourage family worship, four teams rotate monthly, with no team serving more than one or two weekends per month. Amazingly, the teams practice only once a month. And since all the worship services are identical, members can easily switch teams when necessary. It's a very flexible, family-friendly structure.

In short, Dale is 100 percent committed to fighting for the spiritual health of his worship team members. He'll never again “suck the life out of a ministry team,” induce guilt or otherwise make unreasonable demands. That's a price he's not willing to pay—and, he now knows, a price that God does not ask.

KEEP THE FIRE BURNING

As a result of what he learned at Cedarly, Dale is more sensitive to spiritual danger signs and more committed to spiritual disciplines.

Interestingly, the church he now serves is just a few miles from Cedarly. That proximity allows for regular visits to the retreat center's Woodshed Prayer House. In fact, this small outbuilding has become a special place to Dale over the last 11 months. On the last Tuesday of every month, Dale devotes six to eight hours to prayer and meditation alone—with God—at the Prayer House.

Some months, Dale comes to seek the Lord's help with a specific problem. Other times, it's just an opportunity to rest in His presence, listen to His urgings and reflect on His love. But each time Dale comes, the blessings of reconnecting to Jesus are real and powerful.

The lessons that God planted in Dale Pierce's heart at Cedarly Pastors Retreat have truly blossomed. And the results are profound. A family is closer than ever before ... a worship team is honored and respected ... and a congregation truly experiences the reality and glory of God. Yes, Dale has come a long way. And the changes in his life and in his ministry are here to stay. As Dale says, “I can still smell the burn from those old days. And I'm not going back.” 🌸