



# Being Himself

by Rodolpho Carrasco

*ences, but said it in a way that each group could hear.* I never got an answer. Well, not one that scratched me where I itched. I wanted insights, a personal word just for me. Instead, he mumbled something in reply, and then insisted that we get back to work.

He was my boss, and I was his personal assistant. He was a 60-year-old African American legend. I was a 23-year-old Mexican American fresh out of college. My job was to do whatever he said. But I wanted a mentor, a spiritual guide, even a father figure for me who had no father. I left that conversation unsatisfied.

For years, I thought Dr. Perkins had failed me as a mentor. I had fixed opinions about what a proper mentor did.

close—very close. At home, he'd wash his white undershirts in the kitchen sink. In the office, he would dive for the phone when it rang, at times ahead of the receptionist—something about answering every phone call was very important to him. On the road, he'd talk to employees at fast food restaurants, complete strangers, like they were old high school friends.

Once, I and another assistant were with him helping him write a book. He suddenly burst out crying about the old Black folks in Mississippi who helped him get started. They'd made sacrifices for him because they believed he was serving the Lord. He worried he hadn't done enough to validate their sacrifices.

The Apostle John says (John 21:25) that Jesus did many more deeds than those recorded in John's gospel. I could say something similar about how Dr. Perkins shared

his life with me. It's true—values are caught, not taught. Dr. Perkins mentored me by being himself, trusting that the Holy Spirit in him would shine through, believing that the Holy Spirit in me would discern the difference between his flesh and the Spirit.

Once last year I spoke five times in an 18-hour period. The topic: Effective ministry among the poor. A young leader asked me how I did it—five times in such a short amount of time!

Next time, I said, you can come and see.

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**“Dr. Perkins mentored me by being himself, trusting that the Holy Spirit in him would shine through ...”**

I thought we should have had weekly one-on-one meetings. He should've listened to my problems and counseled me. He should've been more interested in my personal story. In my judgment, he would've failed a test of mentoring best practices.

Later, I understood that Dr. Perkins indeed mentored me. But he did it his own way—by being himself and letting me see him in action.

I used to travel with him. During my first year with him, he took me once a month on speaking engagements. New York. Charlotte. Mexico City. I carried his books, manned the book table and sat in the back of the room as he taught a wide variety of Christians about loving the poor.

He let me see his personal life up

I once saw Dr. John Perkins, a pioneer in community ministry, do something unique. In one day, he preached the same message in four different ways to four very unique groups.

The year: 1991. The location: New York City. The topic: Uplifting the poor. At 7 a.m., Perkins stood in front of investors near Wall Street and read Old Testament scriptures. In the late morning, he met Christian leaders in Harlem, and moved briskly from biblical exposition to community ministry application. In the afternoon, he fielded questions from the multiethnic and multilingual staff at a Baptist church in Queens.

At 7 p.m. we arrived at Primitive Christian Church on Manhattan's lower east side. The place was jumping. A couple hundred Puerto Rican youth and adults were having a revival. Perkins didn't speak until 11:10 p.m. It was a church that listened—and responded—to the move of the Spirit. Perkins knew this. So when a 15-year-old new convert gave an unscheduled 15-minute testimony, he went right to sleep, slumped over in the front row. It had been a long day. But when it came time to preach, he was ready, encouraging in his call to these youth to live out the Gospel in both word and deed.

Back at our shared hotel room, at 6 a.m. the next morning, I asked him how he did it. *You gave the same message to four radically different audi-*