Rev. Dr. Levi Benjamin Baldwin, Jr.---A Man Of Valor

By CONNIE CAMERON

The mother and father of a 10-year-old boy laugh when they hear their son imitate a man he some day hopes to "preach like." They laugh because their son for the most part is a timid little boy, and the thought of him wanting to take on the role of such a dynamic man thrills them.

Though timid he may be, the boy is emphatic when he says, "I want to preach just like Rev. Baldwin." And he proceeds to imitate him.

The Rev. Dr. Levi Benjamin Baldwin, Jr. was invited to a non-denominational church anniversary earlier this year just to mix and mingle with the flock. Quipped one lady, "Isn't that Rev. Baldwin? That man sure can preach!"

Every Sunday morning at 8 a.m. KRIZ Radio airs a delayed broadcast from the Goodwill Missionary Baptist Church on 15th and Fir where Baldwin preaches. The message is so clear and powerful even the "most unsavable" of the unsaved grab hold of their emotions and dash off to Goodwill to hear more at the 11 a.m. service.

Sometimes the spirit is so moving and the people are so "high on the Lord," Baldwin steps back and lets the "Holy Ghost do his thing." The congregation is so moved, so touched, so enfired.

Baldwin, cloaked in the traditional long dark robe symbolic of many in the ministry, steps forth with Bible in hand, singing as he approaches the podium. "God bless your hearts," he says, and by then the church is relatively quiet as he prepares to deliver a message from God they all can understand. Just as Jesus taught in parables, Baldwin also uses examples to make his point. The audience Amens and nods in agreement. They understand the spoken interpretation of God's written word.

Baldwin has a special gift for getting the attention of his audience, and he holds it until the message is finished. Perhaps it's his voice that first grabs you. Then you become captivated to listen to what he has to say. And what he says makes sense, a lot of sense.

Sometimes it takes courage to say what Baldwin says. As indirect as the message may seem, for some it may seem very direct. But Baldwin preaches from within, being led of the spirit, and that makes a difference. Even if he does step on your toes, he does it with such compassion and conviction, you don't have a chance to say "ouch." You don't care to.

Baldwin preaches straight from the Bible and is guided by the Holy Spirit. "God's word does not go out void," he says, and it reaches those God intended it to reach. The throng of people at the altar at the end of service suggests his message was well received, and is only partial evidence of Baldwin's growing popularity in his spirit-filled method of preaching.

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Who is this man of God? Where did he come from? There's something different about him. What is it?

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Baldwin was born in a small southern town called Ozark, Alabama in 1943, where his 76-year-old father has been pastoring for 57 years. Though still a pastor's pastor, the elder Baldwin has slowed down somewhat because of a continuing struggle with colon cancer.

The younger Baldwin's call to preach makes him a fourth generation pastor. But Baldwin's earlier plans did not include the ministry. After seeing what his father went through as a pastor, Baldwin decided early on he did not want to go in that direction.

His ultimate goal was to become president of a Black college. But at the youthful age of 16, Baldwin discovered an "inescapable awareness" that would not leave him.

"That awareness never left me," says Baldwin. "And I was not at peace with myself until I finally said yes." At the age of 19, he gave his trial sermon.

Baldwin was encouraged by Dr. King to attend the Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania where he received a master's of divinity degree. He received a bachelor's degree from Knoxville College in Knoxville, Tennessee, and eventually a doctor of divinity degree from Virginia Seminary and College in Lynchburg, Virginia.

Rev. Dr. Levi Benjamin Baldwin, Jr.

Etta Baldwin

Baldwin also received a bachelor's degree from Selma University in Selma, Alabama where he became a staunch supporter of Dr. King and the civil rights movement. He was president of the college's Student Government Association, and participated in many of the marches, including the historical march from Selma to Montgomery.

Baldwin has many memories of those days. The days when Blacks were not allowed to drink from the same water fountains as Whites, or use the same restrooms, or sit in the same doctors' offices. He remembers the times Blacks were not allowed to sleep in motels and hotels along the highways during long rugged trips, the times Blacks could not eat at the same restaurants, or attend the same schools as Whites.

He remembers the times Blacks were not given permits to march peacefully to protest these injustices in a nonviolent fashion. He remembers those double-standard segregated laws all too well. And he remembers the times he marched against them — despite the potential consequences, because they were unfair and unrighteous.

"I'm a firm believer in the Bible," says Baldwin. "What they were doing to Blacks was contrary to what the Bible teaches. Jesus always taught against injustices. He was an involved person, always challenging the status quo. He has always been concerned with the downtrodden. When we marched against man's laws, we were marching for what Jesus stood for and what he was against."

Baldwin recalled the times police used tear gas, electric cattle prods and dogs to thwart the efforts of the marchers. He even remembers the death of Jimmy Lee Jackson who was beaten to death while trying to defend his mother as police beat her during one of the marches. When young Jimmy Lee jumped in to help his mother, police tore into him and beat him to death.

It was that incident, and others following like the bombing of a Birmingham church that left four little girls dead, that made many of the marchers think twice about Dr. King's nonviolent approach, says Baldwin. They couldn't take anymore. They became angry and wanted to fight back.

However, it was ministers like Dr. King, Rev. Ralph Abernathy and young Baldwin who stood steadfast on the principles of faith that God would deliver Blacks from these injustices. Says Baldwin, "Nothing is so powerful as an idea whose time has come."

Baldwin himself was arrested eight times. He was tested time and time again. Memories became nightmares, and nightmares became horror stories. While in jail, he saw even more beatings and injustices. He dreaded these actions, but there was nothing he could do but pray.

Not only that, Baldwin had a painful experience that literally scared him to death. During one of the marches he participated in, a sheriff put a gun to his head, and said, "Nigger, I oughta kill you. I oughta blow your head off." A frightened Baldwin remembers the handgun appearing much larger than it actually was. "I was scared to death, but I've never been scared since."

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Baldwin came to Goodwill in 1983. Prior to that he pastored at a church in Jackson, Mississippi where many of the parishioners worked at nearby predominantly Black Jackson State University.

Since Baldwin has been at Goodwill, the church has grown both physically and spiritually. "There's more of a hunger for the word, a tremendous hunger, in all age categories," says Baldwin. "We put great emphasis on it. You can't have faith without the word, and you can't please God without faith."

Baldwin admits he has also grown spiritually. Last summer, he became a spirit-filled believer, acknowledging all the Gifts of the Spirit. "I've grown more in the last six months than in the first two years I've been here. The Gifts of the Spirit are moving more freely now," he says. "Jesus said to teach to end the unbelief. The unbelief has hindered the works of the Lord in terms of the greater Seattle area churches."

On that note, Baldwin is planning a "Power Week of Prayer and Praise" May 12-16 at Goodwill, and a church-wide convocation May 19-23 "to assess where the church is spiritually and to discuss the things we must do to receive God's full blessings." He also plans to share with them the vision God has given him for the church.

In furthering their own studies, Baldwin and his wife, Etta, visited the nationally famous Crenshaw Christian Center Church in Los Angeles, California earlier this month. Crenshaw is the largest Black church in the country with 16,000 members. The non-denominational church is only 16-years-old, and is pastored by another dynamic Black man of God, Frederick K. C. Price.

The Baldwins were extremely impressed with Price's emphasis on the word and his unique ability to teach. So impressed, Baldwin told the 57-year-old Price, "I'm going to make you my mentor."

And according to Etta Baldwin, Price was equally impressed with her husband. "I'd love to have a son like you," said Price.

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The spiritual and spiritually political side of Baldwin is intriguing. But his family life is equally intriguing.

Baldwin married his college sweetheart, Etta. "Two weeks after I met her, I told her I was going to marry her, and she laughed at me. Now, some 19 years and two kids later, here we are."

A very strong and independent woman, Etta says, "I've always loved the Lord. I've always let him govern the things in my life. And he's always been there for me."

She says her husband is her very best friend. "He's my partner. We're a team. God has ordained us to be a team." And Levi Baldwin agrees. They're like two peas in a pod.

Baldwin has always supported his wife in whatever she set out to do, and she has stood by him. Etta recently made an important but tough decision in her life. Though only a heartbeat away from earning her doctorate degree, she has decided to put that on hold until the "Lord tells me to do otherwise."

But she's doing it willingly, and she's more excited than ever. "I really enjoy doing what I'm doing now. My calling is to minister to families, women, children. I just love it. It's right in line with what I was studying. The Lord uses people's secular and spiritual knowledge and he doesn't force it (his will) on you. I wanted a degree so I could share knowledge with others. I'm excited when I can share. I'm able to do that spiritually and I love it!"

The Baldwins are a happy and exciting team, bubbling with wisdom, joy and love that only God could provide. And to add even more joy to the team are daughters Melanie, 15, and Kimberly, 11. Together, the four of them form a powerful spirit-filled team, giving life to the old saying, "The family that prays together, stays together."

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The Rev. Dr. Levi Benjamin Baldwin, Jr. — the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. — both names give a resounding sound with a certain rhythmic pattern. One is synonymous with the other and the other with the one. There are certain similarities and likenesses in more ways than one. There are certain similarities that perhaps many never realized. Perhaps not even Baldwin himself.

For just as Dr. King went down in history for trying to free his people from the denial of basic human rights, Levi Baldwin will take on a similar stand by setting his people free from the denial of basic spiritual blessings God has promised them.

Baldwin says the seven last words of the Black church are, "It ain't been done that way before." He plans to change that — for the better.

KRIZ 1420·AM

SOUL RADIO 24-HOURS

The Soul of The Pacific Northwest

TOP 40
April 28-May 4

1. I Can't Wait	Nu Shooz	26. After You	Bernard Wright
2. Crush On You	The Jets	27. Thinking About You	Tamara & The Seen
3. I've Learned To Respect Love	Stephanie Mills	28. There'll Be Sad Songs	Billy Ocean
4. Going In Circles	Gap Band	29. Unselfish Lover	Full Force
5. The Finest	SOS Band	30. I'm Not Gonna Let	Colonel Abrams
6. I Think It's Love	Jermaine Jackson	31. Stay	Controllers
7. Kiss	Prince & Revolution	32. State Of The Heart	Philip Bailey
8. A Little Bit Of Love	New Edition	33. Sleepless Nights	Smokey Robinson
9. Never As Good As The First Time	Sade	34. Firestarter	Tease
10. On My Own	Patti LaBelle/Michael McDonald	35. Lady Is Love	Maurice White
11. Heat Of Heat	Patti Austin	36. Special	Stylistics
12. What's Missing	Alexander O'Neil	37. Programmed For Love	Roy Ayers
13. No More	Shirley Murdock	38. Turn Me Out	Julian Flenoy
14. High Horse	Evelyn King	39. Style	Grandmaster Flash
15. Do Fries Go With That Shake	George Clinton	40. You Don't Have To Cry	Rene & Angela
16. Restless	Starpoint		
17. Greatest Love Of All	Whitney Houston	SONG TO SHOOT	
18. Do You Still Love Me	Meli'sa Morgan	I Wouldn't Lie	Yarbrough & Peoples
19. Character	Morris Day	ALBUM OF THE WEEK	
20. If Your Heart Isn't In It	Atlantic Starr	Winner In You	Patti LaBelle
21. We Don't Have To	Jermaine Stewart	NEW ADDITIONS	
22. Love Take Over	Five Star	Headlines	Midnight Star
23. Nasty	Janet Jackson	Who's Johnny	El DeBarge
24. Here I Go Again	Force MD's	100 MPH	Mazarati
25. Do It To Me Good	Michael Henderson	Ain't Nobody Ever Loved You	Aretha Franklin

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