

A Speech Based on Error

When William Gladstone was Chancellor of the Exchequer in England, he once requested that the Treasury send him certain statistics upon which he might base his budget proposals. The statistician made a mistake. But Gladstone was so certain of this man's concern for accuracy that he didn't take the time to verify the figures.

As a result, he went before the House of Commons and made a speech based upon the incorrect figures given him. His speech was no sooner published than the inaccuracies were exposed and Gladstone became the brunt of public ridicule.

The chancellor sent for the statistician who had given him the erroneous information. The man arrived full of fear and shame, certain he was going to be let go. Instead, Gladstone said, "I know how much you must be disturbed over what has happened, and I have sent for you to put you at ease. For a long time you have been engaged in handling the intricacies of the national accounts, and this is the first mistake that you have made. I want to congratulate you, and to express to you my deep appreciation."

It takes a big person to extend mercy, a big person to listen rather than talk, a big person to think before jumping into action. As you go about your routines today, consider what an understanding heart and a spirit of mercy can do for your relationships.

--Beecher Hunter