

# WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

March, 2008, #21



Jerrie Barber and John Parker



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## The Instructive Story of Lot by John H. Parker

The story of Lot (Genesis 13 and 19), the nephew of Abraham, is a sad one, but it offers valuable lessons.

When their possessions and herds grew so great as to require separation, Abraham allowed Lot to choose where he would settle, and Lot chose the Jordan valley, so rich that it is compared to “the garden of the Lord.” This seems understandable, but in his exuberance over living in prime territory Lot seems to ignore the accompanying dangers of the area. The valley contains the city of Sodom, and the scripture adds forebodingly: “Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord.” Lot at first moves only near there, but soon he is living in the city (14:12).



Genesis 19 records the horrifying events leading to the destruction of Sodom and the ruin of Lot's family and fortunes. God, intending to destroy Sodom, sends two angels to evacuate Lot, who receives them hospitably. But when the homosexual men of the city try to abuse them, incredibly he offers them his virgin daughters instead. The angels intervene, but the story reveals that the girls have become engaged to two men of the town whose attitude clearly shows they know or care nothing about God; their refusal to leave leads to their own deaths.

Lot flees to the small town of Zoar, and then to a cave in the mountains. His predilection for Sodom has led to loss of his once vast fortune. The worst occurs when the older daughter, all prospect of marriage seemingly gone, determines to become pregnant by her own father in order to preserve the family, and she convinces her younger sister to do likewise. Evidently growing up in Sodom has led her to reject her family's religious heritage. This disgraceful scene is the last we have in the life of Lot.

In fairness to Lot, we should recognize that the word "righteous" is applied to him by the apostle Peter:

and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds) (2 Peter 2:7-8).

Nonetheless, Lot's decision to live on attractive real estate among degenerate people led to his daughters becoming engaged to ungodly and profane men; to his offering them up to a mob violation; to the loss of his honor, well-being, and fortune; and to his older daughter's vile act and her enlistment of her younger sister in sin. Let us remember that a righteous man can choose to put himself into a situation where his soul is vexed by the behavior of those around him, but nonetheless he and his family are compromised. "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals'" (1 Cor. 15:33). Let us, then, choose wisely ourselves.

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## The How and Why of an Eldership Funeral

by Jerrie Barber



After our elders had been serving at Berry's Chapel a little more than two years, the congregation was in the process of selecting additional shepherds. At our February meeting, I asked, "Are you going to have a funeral for the present eldership?". I was asked to explain.

It has been my observation that when a church appoints new elders, there is not just one or more in the group but a new eldership, a new group that is different from the one that preceded it. I thought it might be appropriate to have a

“funeral” for the old eldership – to recognize the death of that leadership group and to anticipate the “resurrection” of a new group.

After a brief discussion, I did not hear any more until our March leadership meeting. Our elders, Dennis Crowder, Ron Gambill, and Dennis Makins, told me, “We have decided we want to have an eldership funeral and we want you to preach it.” After some discussion, the date was set for April 3.

After visiting the funeral home with a former elder whose step-father had died, we, along with the youth minister, Jeremy Houck, proceeded to a log cabin in Bell Buckle, Tennessee. After getting settled in for the night, we spent about three hours going over the outline: [Eldership Funeral](#) .

One of the benefits of that night came in response to a question: “Will a new elder really have any input; will you do anything different?”. After some discussion, they said that some things could be changed but other things couldn’t. There were some things that would stay the same. The next question: “Will you tell him (them) in advance or surprise them with your fixed rules after they are appointed?” The elders spent some time and came up with the following list that is shared with prospective elders:

### Standard Operating Procedures Non-negotiable Items

- Confidentiality – What is said here stays here!
- The Bible is our only creed!
- Disagreements are allowed internally – Externally we speak with one voice.
- When we speak as an eldership, we speak with one voice.
- No elder is the head elder!
- Deacons buy the paint! Elders are shepherds and are not Deacons.
- Lots of prayer! Lots of prayer! Lots of prayer!
- Express gratitude to the congregation and others often.

This is one of the advantages of a “funeral” in any group that is going through a transition. Family rules are usually unconscious, unspoken, but understood. For the new group to be most effective, everyone needs to learn the rules of the group – some can be negotiated. If we are following the Bible, some are non-negotiable. That discussion before ordination could be helpful to present and future shepherds.

William Bridges in his [books on transition](#), states that there is an ending, a neutral zone, and a new beginning. An eldership funeral is one way to recognize and facilitate that process.

For an outline, go to [Eldership Funeral](#) .

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## Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers by John Parker

I like not fair terms and a villain's mind.  
Seemingly favorable offers from a villain are suspicious.  
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 1.3



Fast bind, fast find.  
Lock up a property securely and you will find it safe when your  
return.  
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 2.5

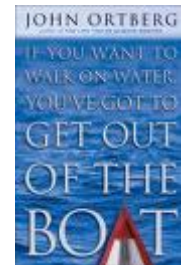
All that glisters is not gold.  
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 2.7 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 1.3

O, that estates, degrees, and offices  
Were not deriv'd corruptly, and that clear honor  
Were purchas'd by the merit of the wearer!  
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 2.9

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### Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

*If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get out of the Boat*, by John Ortberg, Copyright 2001, Zondervan.



Here is a deep truth about water-walking: *The fear will never go away.* Why? Because each time I want to grow, it will involve going into new territory, taking on new challenges. And each time I do that, I will experience fear again. As Susan Jeffers writes, “The fear will never go away, as long as I continue to grow” (page 21).

Failure is not an event, but rather a *judgment* about an event. Failure is not something that happens to us or a label we attach to things. It is a way we think about outcomes (page 22).

Somebody once asked Winston Churchill what most prepared him to risk political suicide by speaking out against Hitler during the years of appeasement in the mid-1930s, then to lead Great Britain against Nazi Germany. Churchill said it was the time he had to repeat a grade in elementary school.

“You mean you failed a year in grade school?” he was asked.

“I never failed anything in my life. I was given a second opportunity to get it right” (page 22, 23).

A man appears before the pearly gates.

“Have you ever done anything of particular merit?” St. Peter asks.

“Well, I can think of one thing,” the man offers. “Once I came upon a gang of high-testosterone bikers who were threatening a young woman. I directed them to leave her alone, but they wouldn’t listen. So I approached the largest and most heavily tattooed biker. I smacked him on the head, kicked his bike over, ripped out his nose ring and threw it on the ground, and told him, ‘Leave alone now or you’ll answer to me.’”

St. Peter was impressed. “When did this happen?”

“A couple of minutes ago” (page 53).

Two baseball-loving friends agree that which ever one dies first will come back and let the other know if there’s baseball in heaven. The first one to die contacts his friend and says, “The good news is that there is baseball in heaven. The bad news is that you’re pitching Friday” (page 98).

Sin, to paraphrase what psychologist Carl Jung once said about neurosis, is always a substitute for legitimate suffering. It is an attempt to obtain the pleasure that does not rightfully belong to me or evade the pain that does (page 106).

Robert Levine, in a wonderful book called *A Geography of Time*, suggests the creation of a new unit of time called the *honko-second* — “the time between when the light changes and the person behind you honks his horn.” He claims it is the smallest measure of time known to science (page 173).

Some forms of waiting — on expressways and in doctor’s offices — are fairly trivial in the overall scheme of things. But there are more serious and difficult kinds of waiting:

- The waiting of a single person who hopes God might have marriage in store but is beginning to despair
  - The waiting of a childless couple who desperately want to start a family
  - The waiting of Nelson Mandela as he sits in a prison cell for twenty-seven years and wonders if he will ever be free or if his country will ever know justice
  - The waiting of someone who longs to have work that is meaningful and significant and yet cannot seem to find it
  - The waiting of a deeply depressed person for a morning when she will wake up wanting to live
  - The waiting of a child who feels awkward and clumsy and longs for the day when he gets picked first on the playground
  - The waiting of persons of color for the day when everyone’s children will be judged “not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character”
  - The waiting of an elderly senior citizen in a nursing home—alone, seriously ill, just waiting to die (page 176).
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## Smile of the Month

### You might be in a country church if...

1. The call to worship is, “Y’all come on in!”
2. The preacher says, “I’d like to ask Bubba to help take up the offering” – and five guys stand up.
3. The restroom is outside.
4. Opening day of deer hunting season is recognized as an official church holiday.
5. A member requests to be buried in his four-wheel drive truck because, “I ain’t never been in a hole it couldn’t get me out of’.
6. Never in its entire 100-year history has one of its preachers had to buy any meat or vegetables.
7. Prayers regarding the weather are a standard part of every worship service.
8. The church directory doesn’t have last names.
9. Four generations of one family sit together in worship every Sunday.
10. The only time people lock their cars in the parking lot is during the summer and then only so their neighbors can’t leave them a bag of squash.
11. There’s no such thing as a “secret” sin.
12. You miss worship one Sunday morning and by two o’clock that afternoon you have had a dozen phone calls inquiring about your health.
13. People wonder when Jesus fed the 5,000 whether the two fish were bass or catfish (e-mail, March 3, 1999).



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### Barber Clippings

One of the most helpful attitudes that I have changed in the last twenty-five years has been my outlook on criticism. There was a time when I dreaded it, feared it, and avoided it. After conversation on a Monday afternoon more than two decades ago, I began to change my approach. Now I welcome it, invite it, and schedule criticism. If you would like to consider that approach, I now have a CD available: “How to Accept, Invite, and Enjoy Criticism.” You can order them on my web site: [Criticism CD](#) .

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I continue to develop a series of Power Point lessons on the classic British hymns and their sites which I visited in the summers of 2006 and 2007 with photographer Paul Seawright, member of the church in Ireland. At present Jill and I are planning a trip to Israel in May.

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