

WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

April, 2008, #22



Jerrie Barber and John Parker



To subscribe to this newsletter: > [Subscribe Page](#) .

In this newsletter:

Effective Evaluation

Principles of Reading and Studying the Bible

Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers

Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books

Smile of the Month

Jerrie and John this Month

Survey Results

Effective Evaluation

by Jerrie Barber

Do you ever want to know: “What do the elders think of my work?” “I wonder if I am in danger of being fired.” “Is our preacher happy?” “How could we encourage him?” “Would the preacher let us know if he were thinking of leaving?” “What do the other elders think of me?” “Am I overbearing?” “Do I communicate that I care about my fellow elders and the church?”



How would it be to have a relationship where all parties are comfortable in the knowledge that others will share what information is helpful – giving compliments when things are going well and sharing concerns when there are irritations or questions? One way to develop this is to have ongoing, effective evaluation. Here are some principles that I have observed and experienced that have been helpful to me.

Expectations of Evaluation

The time to begin effective evaluation is in the beginning of the relationship. I have found it helpful to have this included in the contract-job description. For the last thirty years of my ministry, I had it in two places in the agreement. A general statement of evaluation: “The elders and preacher agree to be able to disagree as well as agree and to deal with each other honestly, openly, responsibly, and with respect. This will include regular evaluation of our relationship, giving both strong points and weak points that need improvement.” ([page 4, item # 1 of Preacher-Church Agreement](#)) A second statement of the desire for evaluation is found in the financial agreements: “A merit raise will be considered each year and discussed as to why it is being given or not given.” ([page 3, item # 5 of Preacher-Church Agreement](#)) I not only wanted monetary reward for my work but I also wanted to know what I was doing well and what needed to be improved.

My experience has been that the clause in the contract does not guarantee evaluation. In one congregation, the elders scheduled an annual evaluation on the anniversary of my work with them every year. In another congregation, I waited two weeks after the designated time and reminded them of our agreement and they did it. I am 100% responsible for communication. Part of the evaluation process is to remind the evaluators if they forget about the evaluation. It could also be interesting to evaluate why one or both parties are reluctant to evaluate.

When part of my job description was to supervise the secretary, the contract read: “The secretary agrees to relate to the staff in a healthy way: to be able to disagree as well as agree and to deal with others honestly, openly, responsibly, and with respect. This will include regular evaluation of our relationship, giving both strong points and weak points that need improvement.”

Basis of Evaluation: Truth

If I really want evaluation, I need to be ready to hear my weaknesses as well as my strengths. That can be painful, but helpful. “Open rebuke *is* better than love carefully concealed. Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful” (Proverbs 27:5, 6, NKJV). A youth minister was told by an elder that he was doing a good job and was “right on target.” Within two weeks, during an elders’ meeting, he was told that his services were no longer needed. There was no explanation. Ultimate evaluation – firing – with no reason denies the person the opportunity to learn and to understand.

Time of Evaluation: Regular, Often, Scheduled, and Unscheduled

Annual reviews can be very helpful. However, for a good relationship, that is not enough. There can be an understanding that we will always be honest and open with each other. That is ideal. But I believe it is good to schedule periodic times to talk. When I supervised secretaries, between annual written evaluations, we scheduled quarterly evaluations. This was an appointment when we talked about any material or equipment that we needed, what was good, what needed improvement, and the number of sick and vacation days available for the rest of the year. Although we saw each other and talked daily, unless we scheduled time to talk about what needed correcting, improving, or repeating, we didn’t talk about it.

My agreement with them was that there would be no surprises of negative comments during the evaluations. If they needed to do something differently – if I was unhappy with anything about their job performance, I would let them know within forty-eight hours of the event. I would not want a supervisor to save up mistakes that I have made for a year and deliver them to me at an annual review. I was committed to follow that principle.

Evaluation Should Be Mutual

Obviously, elders have the oversight of a congregation which includes the preacher and other people on staff as well as the rest of the congregation (Acts 20:28). A supervisor has the responsibility of the effectiveness of those under his or her leadership. However, a position and title of oversight does not carry with it infallibility. Evaluators need to be evaluated. Christians are to honor and express appreciation to the leaders (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13). As members we are not to accept and believe frivolous, unfounded, derogatory comments about elders (1 Timothy 5:17). But if they continually and rebelliously miss the mark with no indication of correction, they are to be publically censured (1 Timothy 5:18).

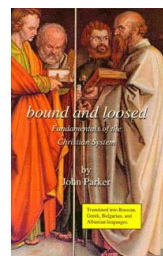
Evaluation isn't a negative word. It includes both corrective and positive observations – all for the good of everyone. When we tell the truth about each other, we are free to improve, continue, adjust, or reply to gain a better understanding and relationship. “Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go in there. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it” (Deuteronomy 1:38) “But command Joshua, and encourage him and strengthen him; for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which you will see” (Deuteronomy 3:28). “Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips” (Proverbs 27:2). “Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2). “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24).

This principle has tremendous implications. Think of how relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, elders and congregations, teachers and students could be improved by invited, truthful, regular, and mutual evaluation.

Principles of Reading and Studying the Bible by John Parker

Following is a selection from my book *Bound and Loosed: Fundamentals of the Christian System*, 2004. Please e-mail for information on purchasing this book: johnparker22@comcast.net .

In Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, the author tells about a good-hearted farmer who is also a preacher. Huck and Tom Sawyer rescue



the slave Jim from captivity on this man's farm, and they do so with such an elaborate and romantically absurd plan that the good old fellow is thoroughly confused when it is told to him. Huck says,

It kind of made him drunk, as you may say, and he didn't know nothing at all the rest of the day, and preached a prayer-meeting sermon that night that give him a rattling reputation, because the oldest man in the world couldn't-a understood it. (212)

Unfortunately, people sometimes take the same attitude toward the Bible that this preacher's audience did regarding his sermon: that the Bible is a wonderful but mysterious book that is not supposed to be understood, or at least only to be understood by Bible scholars. But this attitude contradicts the very purpose of God in giving us the Bible, to reveal his will to us so that we can know and obey it:

PSA 119:105 NKJV Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

2 TI 3:16 NKJV All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,
17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

In order to understand the Bible and derive the greatest good from it, you should observe these principles of reading and interpreting it.

1. Read with confidence that you can understand the Bible. God wants you to know his will; therefore he has given you a book which you and others can understand.
2. Read with confidence that the Bible is relevant to you.
After Huck Finn was adopted by the widow Douglas, she tried to teach him about Moses:

After supper she got out her book and learned me about Moses and the Bulrushers; and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by-and-by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn't care no more about him; because I don't take no stock in dead people. (Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 28)

Huck failed to realize the relevance of the story of Moses to himself. Just as Moses had been adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, scholars observe, Huck himself had been adopted by the widow (Baym, 28n). Many people make the same mistake that Huck did: they fail to see that the Bible is relevant to them and their situations. No other book so directly addresses your present situation and needs as does the Bible. Give it the chance to affect and help your life.

3. Read with the understanding that the Bible is authoritative. This is God's word, and man must obey it if he wishes to be blessed by God (Acts 5:29; Heb. 4:12).

4. Read with an open mind. Do not begin with preconceived ideas about what the Bible says or what you want it to say. (Gross examples of this attitude include nineteenth-century attempts to justify slavery by references to the Bible's injunctions for first-century servants to obey their masters.) Rather let the Bible speak to you and accept what it says.
5. Read with recognition of who is being spoken to. While we are to learn from all of the Bible (Rom. 15:4), some of its laws, especially those of the Old Testament, were given to men living before the Christian age and are not to be regarded as binding on us today. For example, we are not to build an ark because Noah was told to build one, or to offer animal sacrifices because the Israelites were commanded to offer them. The New Testament, however, is binding on us, and we are to obey its teachings.
6. Read with an awareness of the historical background of the passage you are reading. The events of the Bible took place in history, and the background of each passage should be considered for a proper understanding of it.
7. Read with an awareness of the context of the passage you are reading. Do not isolate a verse and ignore the verses that are surrounding it, but rather consider the verses together so that you will have the whole of the message conveyed in the verses. For example, Paul's instruction in 1 Cor. 12:31 for Christians in Corinth to desire to obtain the best miraculous gifts is in the context of a passage addressed to a congregation in New Testament times on whom miraculous powers had been bestowed. When that context is considered the reader sees that such a command was limited to that special, first-century situation, not to all Christians in all times.
8. Read and harmonize *all* of what the Bible says on a subject, not just what one verse says on it. For example, Acts 16:30-31 discusses what is necessary for salvation, but Acts 2:38, Rom. 10:9-10, and Mk. 16:15-16 also discuss what man must do to be saved. All of the verses must be obeyed, not just one or a few of them.
9. Read with both faith and common sense. The Bible is not a mysterious treatise unrelated to the real world, but a logical and sensible book for rational people.

One should use common sense, for example, in regard to the language of the Bible. Its accounts of events—such as the creation story (Genesis 1-3), the story of Jonah and the great fish (Jonah 1-2), and the virgin birth of Christ (Luke 1-2)—are true and historically accurate, and the language used in describing these accounts should be regarded as literal.

The language used in some other parts of the Bible, however, is obviously intended to be figurative or symbolic and should be read with the writer's intention in

mind. When Isaiah speaks of “the four corners of the earth,” for example, or when Jesus calls his disciples “the salt of the earth,” they are obviously speaking figuratively and not literally. Symbolic passages are found in several passages in Revelation. Similar combinations of literal and figurative language are found in the literature of all times and nations, and we should not be surprised to find them in the Bible as well.

Bible handbooks, dictionaries, and encyclopedias will aid you in reading and understanding the Bible. But the important thing is just to *read* it: read it with the confidence and knowledge that God is speaking to you and that you can hear and obey his word.

(While reading John’s book, I have thought that this would be a good resource for a New Converts class or a class for non-members. You may contact John for one or multiple copies of this book: johnparker22@comcast.net , Jerrie Barber).

Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers, by John Parker

In religion,
What . . . error but some sober brow
Will bless it with a text.
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 3.2



There is no vice so simple but assumes
Some mark of virtue on his outward parts.
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 3.2

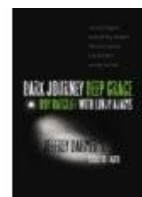
Here are a few of the unpleasant’st words
That ever blotted paper!
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 3.2

I never did repent for doing good.
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 3.4

Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

Dark Journey, Deep Grace; Jeffrey Dahmer’s Journey of Faith, Roy Ratcliff, Copyright 2006 by Roy Ratcliff

Eventually, he tried to justify his anomalous personality by the theory of evolution – which he viewed as antithetical to faith. He told Stone Phillips in an *NBC Dateline* interview that he had felt he didn’t have to be accountable to anyone. Since man came from slime, he was accountable to no one (pages 58, 59).



While in prison, Jeff received reams of unsolicited religious materials from well-meaning people. But when Curtis Booth and Mary Mott sent him a Bible and Bible correspondence courses, he took notice. Both were members of the Church of Christ – his father’s church – and the courses were produced by World Bible School, a Church of Christ ministry. He usually discarded the materials he received, but he didn’t discard these (page 59).

“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinner, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe in Him and receive eternal life.” 1 Timothy 1:15-16, read by Jeffrey Dahmer in his statement to the court, 1992 (page 63).

Jeff and I talked a lot about his parents. He loved them both. He grieved over their wars. After being divorced for many years, their relationship was as bitter and harsh as the day they parted. Most of the prayers we prayed were on his parents’ behalf. Whether his family’s turmoil gave birth to his crimes is unknowable. But it is significant to me that Jeff’s first murder took place the summer he was abandoned by both mother and father (pages 172, 173).

Jeff’s story is a powerful one of a transformed life, but it is more than that. It shows how far God can reach to save a soul. It shows what God may do in the life of a person like me to prepare him for God’s work. A younger version of me could not have dealt with Jeffrey Dahmer. God was working in my life for His purposes. Jeff’s story is the story of a God who works in this world (page 174).

Smile of the Month

At a jewelry store, a young man bought an expensive locket as a present for his girlfriend. “Shall I engrave her name on it?” the jeweler asked.

The customer thought for a moment, and then said, “No engrave it “To my one and only love.” That way, if we ever break up, I can use it again” (*Reader’s Digest*, October 1993, page 10).



Barber Clippings

Since the last newsletter, I led a leadership workshop at the Beattie Road church of Christ in Albany, Georgia. You can see the material covered, pictures, and a list of participants: [Leadership Workshop](#) .

April 6-9 I was with the church in Bernie, Missouri in a gospel meeting. We also had special leadership sessions with the men Sunday night and Wednesday night before services.

Eddyville continues to look for a preacher. They have already talked with some men about the work. If you have an interest, contact the elders: [Eddyville Elders](#) .

Jerrie Barber
jerrie@barberclippings.com
www.barberclippings.com
<http://barberclippings.blogspot.com/>
(615) 356-8371
P. O. Box 630
Eddyville, Kentucky 42038
Church phone: 270-388-7948
Cell phone: 615-584-0512

John Parker

Jerrie and I will be speaking at the Lipscomb Summer Series July 2-4 on interim ministry. We hope to continue to inform brethren of this kind of service and the benefit it can be to congregations in transition. I completed my series on the histories and composers of the great British hymns at the Granny White church in Nashville last month. There are many rich themes in these hymns and I enjoy revealing them to church audiences and to university students who may have sung the hymns but have not had their messages explicated for them.

Jill and I plan to travel to Israel the last of May with a group from the Bellevue Church of Christ in Nashville.

John H. Parker
Johnparker22@aol.com
www.interimcofc.com
(615) 373-4462

Survey Results

I appreciate each one who responded to the survey to suggest topics for articles. The results:

- 20% Establishing trust
- 30% Dealing with criticism
- 5% 3 questions to ask someone considering suicide

45% Effective evaluation

Other suggested topics: Creating Vision, Making Change Happen, Parents Obligations to Teenagers, Effective Communication, Mediation – Value Of, Avoiding Burnout, Building Support Among Leadership, Building Better Relationships with Church Leadership, Why do people wait after deciding to be baptized?, Patience with the Brethren While Searching for a Congregation, Plans for Getting the Congregation Interested in Growing and Growing a Congregation, Helping a Congregation Heal After a Fuss, Should I Stay or Should I Go? When is the optimum time to leave a congregation?

To subscribe to this newsletter: > [Subscribe page](#) .