

WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

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Jerrie Barber and John Parker



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Transition Monitoring Team by Jerrie Barber

We have had good participation in the forming of a group to facilitate better communication during the transition at Hendersonville. The concept of a monitoring team and many details are taken from *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, by William Bridges, Copyright © 1991, 2003 by William Bridges and Associates, Inc. The elders selected ten people and we asked for ten volunteers. The following is a summary of this group:



Transition Monitoring Team

1. This group is to help the congregation make a good transition (which is growth on the inside – spiritually) while change (finding a new youth minister and new pulpit minister) is happening in this church.
2. It is important for everyone to understand the purpose of this group:
 - a. It is a monitoring team – not a management team.
 - b. It has no decision-making power.
 - c. It's purpose is to facilitate communication to the elders, among people

- involved in the transition (Keith, Jerrie, other staff members), and to:
- i. Demonstrate that the church wants to know how things are going for people.
 - ii. Review plans or communications before they are announced.
 - iii. Provide ready access to the grapevine so that it can correct misinformation and counter rumors.
3. This group is to function from now until a new preacher is selected.
 4. The team is to be composed of twenty people from different groups (ages, occupations, interests, proponents, critics) in the congregation:
 - a. Ten selected by the elders.
 - b. Ten volunteers.
 5. It will be good to encourage people to participate in this group because of the benefits:
 - a. To this church in helping during this important time in its growth.
 - b. To themselves.
 - i. Develop closer relationships with good people.
 - ii. Learn more about change, loss, transition, and growth during the events in our lives.
 - iii. Feel satisfaction that one has contributed to the peace, harmony, and development of this church.
 6. There will be ongoing training to define the purpose, to describe the transition process, and to outline the benefits and responsibilities of those serving on this team.
 7. We will meet once a month.
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Surprised by Sin: MEASURE FOR MEASURE

by John Parker

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Matthew 7:1-2)



Jesus’ words supply the title of this dark comedy. People will judge us by the very standards we apply to others. But there’s a further dimension: eventually people are compelled to judge themselves by their own standards. Sometimes they’re quite surprised at what they find.

Principal Characters

Vincentio, the Duke of Vienna, who delegates rule to his deputy Angelo and then in disguise observes and regulates what Angelo does

Angelo, the Deputy put in charge of Vienna, who condemns Claudio to death for adultery and then commits adultery himself

Claudio, the young man condemned to death by Angelo for adultery

*Isabella, Claudio's sister and would-be nun, for whom Angelo lusts
Mariana, Angelo's former fiancée`*

The Play

Vienna is full of vice, and the Duke, aware that his lax enforcement of the laws is largely responsible, announces plans for a journey and appoints his deputy Angelo, known for his straight-laced morality, to rule in his place. Secretly, though, the Duke disguises himself as a friar and stays to watch. When Angelo immediately condemns Claudio to death for getting his fiancée pregnant, Claudio asks his sister Isabella, who's on the verge of taking orders as a nun, to plead for him.

As Angelo and Isabella debate the need for law versus mercy, the deputy develops a burning lust for her, and on her next visit tells her that unless she sleeps with him Claudio will die by torture. She immediately and indignantly refuses, but when she reports this outrage to Claudio, confident that he will confirm her refusal, her brother instead pleads with her to consent, provoking her further anger.

The Duke, overhearing this interview in the prison, arranges a solution. He instructs Isabella to tell Angelo she will submit to him in a dark house in her garden. But in her place the Duke sends Mariana, whose previous engagement to Angelo the deputy had broken off (compare the story of Laban's trick on Jacob in Genesis 29).

This assignation is carried out, but Angelo, thinking he has violated Isabella, orders Claudio's execution anyway to forestall any revenge. In response the Duke arranges another trick in which the head of a dead prisoner is substituted to appear to be Claudio's. When the Duke stages his "return" from his journey, Isabella comes forward to ask his judgment against Angelo for violating her and killing her brother. Mariana then appears as a witness against her, testifying that she herself was sleeping with Angelo at the hour Isabella claims.

Angelo denies all of these charges, and leaving the deputy to judge his own case, the Duke leaves. He reappears as the friar, then removes his hood to reveal his true identity. Exposed, Angelo asks only to be executed immediately, but on the Duke's orders he first marries Mariana so that she will inherit his property. Mariana then pleads for his life and persuades Isabella to plead with her. Finally, the Duke brings forward Claudio alive to marry Juliet, pardons Angelo to live husband to Mariana, and, to everyone's surprise, marries Isabella himself.

“When judges steal themselves”

Angelo, “a man whose blood/Is very snow-broth,” is astounded by his lust. He’s never broken a civil or moral law, and therefore never had sympathy for those who did. That moral position has just allowed him to argue to Isabella strict judgment and punishment as deterrents:

Those many had not dar’d to do that evil
If the first [person] that did th’ edict infringe
Had answer’d for his deed.

Sounds right, and is. The “nip it in the bud” argument is irrefutable. Many a fifth-grade teacher has saved herself and her class future disturbance by walloping the first headstrong boy who got out of line, discouraging any others. The Duke himself admits that his laxness in enforcing the law has caused it to be scorned, like a father’s switch that’s never used and “becomes more mock’d than fear’d” (1.3).

So what we need here is Angelo: pure, stern, uncompromising, unflinching in applying the law. Problem is, when it comes to sexual purity, that man may be hard to find. As Angelo argues to his assistant Escalus the necessity for Claudio’s punishment, the old counselor urges leniency:

Let us be keen and rather cut a little,
Than fall and bruise to death.

He suggests that Angelo consider what might have occurred in his own past if circumstances had been only a little different:

Whether you had not sometime in your life
Err’d in this point which now you censure him,
And pull’d the law upon you.

It’s a delicate balance: there’s no place for a judge who winks at vice and crime, but every judge must remember his own weaknesses, especially where all of us have weaknesses.

What evangelist has never preached against a sin without that niggling awareness of his own problems with it, perhaps especially that one Angelo struggles with? How many judges, teachers, principals, or guidance counselors share David’s prayer:

Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions;
According to Your mercy remember me,
For Your goodness’ sake, O Lord. (Psalm 25:7)

If I have such a past, I can still be a good judge: maybe even a better judge for the memory. But may the Lord help me to remember my own sins, or even better the sins I narrowly avoided that snared the poor wretch I’m judging.

Still, as Angelo rather condescendingly replies,

‘Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,
Another thing to fall.

But Angelo has never really been tempted: until he meets Isabella. He’s surprised by his lust, and by his weakness in beating it down, or in wanting to. He knows he’s falling, wants to save himself, knows he can, but knows he won’t. His desires for an almost-nun both appall and fascinate him:

What dost thou, or what art thou, Angelo?
Dost thou desire her foully for those things
That make her good?

* * * * *

Most dangerous
Is that temptation that doth goad us on
To sin in loving virtue. Never could the strumpet [prostitute],
With all her double vigor, art, and nature,
Once stir my temper; but this virtuous maid
Subdues me quite. Ever till now,
When men were fond, I smil’d and wond’red how. (2.2)

The most fascinating portrait of Angelo is his continued struggle with temptation. His is no momentary weakness quickly subdued by devotion. The next day, he’s still watching himself go down, even as he tries to pray:

When I would pray and think, I think and pray
To several subjects. Heaven hath my empty words.
Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue,
Anchors on Isabel: Heaven in my mouth,
As if I did but only chew his [God’s] name,
And in my heart the strong and swelling evil
Of my conception.

Strike a nerve? Ever chew God’s name, praying with your mouth and the front part of your mind, while your inner soul still clings to the ambition or greed or hate you harbor? Ever shrink away from promising God you’ll never sin this way again, because you know you’re going to hang on to that very lust you’re praying about? Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn, frustrated with his very unaccustomed attempt at prayer, finally concludes, “You can’t pray a lie. I found that out.”

We’ll add here the other major Shakespearean character in this prayer predicament. Claudius, uncle of Hamlet, has seduced the wife of his brother, murdered

him, and seized his crown. His conscience torments him, and he tries to pray. But this adulterer, murderer, thief, and liar is too honest, intellectually or spiritually, for a hypocritical petition for grace:

Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will.
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent.
And, like a man to double business bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect.

* * * * *

O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my foul murder"?
That cannot be, since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardon'd and retain th' offense?

No, one can't. Claudius dies damned, though here at least he's honest.

There's a long history in public and ecclesiastical circles of making examples of erring leaders. Paul commanded such for sinning elders of the church (1 Timothy 5:20). In the end, Angelo, who has shown no mercy to others, pleads to the Duke that no mercy be given him.

Measure for measure.

Nonetheless, Angelo does receive mercy, ironically at the intercession of Isabella: the very woman who pleaded for mercy *from* him now pleads successfully for mercy *for* him. But Isabella has had to make a spiritual adjustment herself before she's ready to be so charitable.

"Then, Isabel, live chaste, and, brother, die"

Isabella is one part of a rather odd equation in *Measure for Measure*. She and Angelo, different as they are, share one trait: each starts out single-mindedly determined to adhere to the strictest moral and religious code, and serenely confident about following it personally. But they are *so* confident that problems develop. Angelo's experience is a classic illustration of the Biblical admonition:

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (1
Corinthians 10:12)

As to Isabella, she so far from falling in the Claudio/Angelo mode that her convent-bound attitude and disdain for spiritual weakness leave her a tad lacking in sympathy.

Isabella is without question a remarkably fine woman: pure, devoted to God, avidly opposed to sin, looks nice in white. Almost every appearance wins our admiration, including the first, where she's about to enter a convent and is discussing the rules with one of the nuns. Somewhat typically, her first speech is a challenging question about what privileges are allowed. When the nun asks if she thinks they are too few, she rather primly replies:

I speak not as desiring more,
But rather wishing a more strict restraint
Upon the sisterhood, the votarists of Saint Clare. (1.4)

Even the rules of a convent are not quite strict enough for her taste, it seems. This strikes us as just a touch out of place for a first-day novice, and an indication that there might be a problem here with—if not self-righteousness—at least a kind of zealous prudishness.

Isabella responds readily enough to Claudio's urgent summons to go and plead for him to Angelo: "I'll see what I can do." And she hold up her end of the debate with the deputy, although her companion Lucio has to urge her on when her strong and natural aversion to what Claudio has done prompts her to retreat.

But Isabella's own spiritual weakness surfaces when Angelo finally drops all indirection (she's not understanding his implications anyway) and gives her the option of either sleeping with him or seeing her brother die. Isabella is outraged, which is fine, but almost immediately she responds with threats and blackmail:

I will proclaim thee, Angelo, look for 't!
Sign me a present pardon for my brother,
Or with an outstretch'd throat I'll tell the world aloud
What man thou art.

This emotional tactic doesn't work, of course; Isabella is out of her element and no match for Angelo on treachery. Further, she goes from bad to worse. When Claudio wilts and begs her to give in to Angelo's proposition, she rails at a man facing imminent execution:

O you beast!
O faithless coward! O dishonest wretch!
Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?
Is't not a kind of incestk to take life
From thine own sister's shame? What should I think?
Heaven shield my mother play'd my father fair!
For such a warped slip of wilderness
Ne'er issu'd from his blood. Take my defiance!
Die, perish! Might but my bending down
Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed.

I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,
No word to save thee.

Isabella's moral position is right, but not her heart and attitude. She must have the Duke's providential intervention both to save her brother's life and to bring her to a more Christ-like sympathy for those whose moral courage is not the equal of hers:

We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. (Romans 15:1 NKJV)

She does arrive there, however. Isabella's best moment is not her intercession for her brother, but her intercession for the man she believes killed her brother. Kneeling before the Duke with Mariana, she says:

Most bounteous sir,
Look, if it please you, on this man condemn'd
As if my brother liv'd. I partly think
A due sincerity govern'd his deeds,
Till he did look on me. Since it is so,
Let him not die. (5.1)

Isabella has risen far from being either the prudish novice, the timid and naïve petitioner, or the shrewish prosecutor. Her spiritual height is reached in her humble prostration and prayer for her enemy.

"Ever till now . . ."

When Isabella finds herself kneeling beside Mariana to plead for the life of the man she thinks executed Claudio, she must be astounded at her own physical and spiritual position. And as Angelo watches lust sweep over him like a rising flood, he's mused in bewilderment:

Ever till now,
When men were fond, I smil'd and wond'ered how.
(2.2)

"Ever till now" neither of these characters knew a challenge to spiritual security. "Now" they have fallen to an unprecedented low, but it is a low from which they rise to a new spiritual awareness.

"Ever till now," David realizes as he writes Psalm 51, he has been unaware of the true horror of sin. "Ever till now" in the temple, Isaiah has served unconscious of unclean lips. "Ever till now" the prodigal son has been clueless of degradation. "Ever till now" the kneeling Peter, begging the Lord to leave his presence, has missed the gulf between his sinful self and Christ's sinless majesty. But from their points of contrition all of these are restored to new heights of service.

Only with his incarnation did the Son become complete in obedience, enabling him to become “the source of eternal salvation”:

who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. (Hebrews 5:7-9)

In heaven, on equal plane with God, Christ determined to lower himself. Before that moment, he did not know lowliness: now, in flesh, he can be so humbled as to be exalted:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11 NIV)

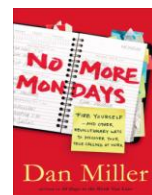
The agony of self-discovery by Angelo and Isabella, or by David, Isaiah, and Peter, or by me, or by you, can bring us to that level of lowness that is the only avenue to exaltation. Let’s take heed lest we fall. When we do fall, let’s rise with a chastened attitude to better service.

Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

No More Mondays, by Dan Miller, Copyright © 2008 by The Business Source.

In his book *Every Excuse in the Book*, Craig Boldman offers some excuses for why “It’s not my fault!”

- I got severe tire damage on the *Road Less Traveled*.



- I learned the wrong *7 Habits*.
- The *Chicken Soup for My Soul* was contaminated with *E. coli*.
- Someone slipped me some bad affirmations.
- I'm one of those good people bad things happen to.
- There's no evidence of wrongdoing on my part.
- My Inner Child made me do it (page 51).

When Monty Roberts was in high school, his teacher asked the class to write about what they wanted to do when they grew up. Monty wrote that he wanted to own a ranch and raise Thoroughbred racehorses. His teacher gave him an F and explained that the dream was unrealistic for a boy living in a camper in back of a pickup truck. He would never be able to make this a reality. When the teacher offered the chance to rewrite his paper for a higher grade, Monty told him, "You keep your F; I'm keeping my dream" (page 59).

Do you know what qwerty is? Unsure? Then just glance down at your computer keyboard. The first six letters at the top left spell it out – QWERTY. Do you know that these letters were arranged that way to make the job of typing more *difficult*? The first commercial typewriter, developed by Christopher Latham Sholes in 1873, originally had keys that were arranged alphabetically. However, a problem soon arose. People became so adept at using the keyboard that the typewriter keys would jam when struck in quick succession. In order to overcome this problem, Sholes decided to make typing as slow as he could. He placed the most frequently used keys as far from one another as he could. His keyboard became known as the QWERTY keyboard.

Today, every aspect of your computer is designed for maximum speed and efficiency – you simply cannot outtype the speed your keyboard is capable of handling. But we continue to use a speed trap – a keyboard design that's over 130 years old. The only reason: we have become accustomed to having things in a certain way and are very resistant to change (page 98).

This process of defining a clear direction is a very important part of change. Often people come to see me with a very precise sense of what they are *leaving* but no sense of what they are moving *to*. *As long as you are focused on what you are moving away from, you are likely to experience fear, resentment, anger, or even depression. As soon as you get a clear picture of what you are moving to, you will get a wave of confidence, boldness, and enthusiasm* (page 110).

In her autobiography, titled *Dolly*, Dolly Parton says, "My high school was small. So during a graduation event, each of us got a chance to stand up and announce our plans for the future. 'I'm going to junior college,' one boy would say. 'I'm getting married and moving to Maryville,' a girl would follow. When my turn came, I said, 'I'm going to Nashville to become a star.' The entire place erupted in laughter. I was stunned. Somehow, though, that laughter instilled in me an even greater determination to realize my dream. I might have crumbled under the weight of the hardships that were to come had it not been for the response of the crowd that day. Sometimes it's funny the way we find inspiration" (page 116).

You may identify determination even in a child if, for example, she is able to delay gratification by saving her allowance for a future goal instead of spending it now. In the 1960's Walter Mischel conducted a now-famous experiment at Stanford University. Four-year-olds were given a marshmallow and promised another, if only they could wait twenty minutes before eating the first one. Some children could wait and others could not. The researchers then followed all the children into adolescence and demonstrated that those with the ability to wait were better adjusted and more dependable, and scored an average of 210 points higher on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (page 117).

As a young boy, Walt Disney lived in the world of fantasy and entertainment. When he first approached a Kansas City newspaper with his drawings, the editor told him, "These won't do. If I were you, I'd give up this work. From these sketches, it's obvious your talent lies elsewhere." Walt could have easily given up. Here was a known "expert" telling him he had no talent for cartooning. He could have made excuses for not pursuing his dream to draw and write. All he could find for a studio was an old mouse-infested garage, but in that garage Walt continued to draw his cartoons. We all know how one of those mice became an international household word. Talent is a funny thing. If you wait for perfect conditions, it will likely never appear (page 117, 118).

"Faith, as well intentioned as it may be, must be built on facts, not fiction – faith in fiction is a damnable false hope" – Thomas Edison (page 120).

The man who never reads will never be read; he who never quotes will never be quoted. He who will not use the thoughts of other men's brains proves he has no brain of his own – Charles H. Spurgeon (page 190).

Many times a career path starts because of circumstances, rather than priorities. Family expectations, chance occurrences, a friendly teacher, or the desire for money can lead us down a career path that's ultimately unfulfilling. It's tough to make choices at eighteen that will be meaningful at forty-five. Just recently, I saw a forty-four-year-old client who opened with the comment "Dan, I'm tired of living my life based on the decisions made by an eighteen-year-old" (page 220).

Yes, I know, we've all heard the old adage "Winners never quit, and quitters never win." Do you realize that some old adages just aren't true? If you discover you're drinking not Gatorade but antifreeze, is it admirable to persist? And yet we have lurking in the backs of our minds that quitting a job, or a business, is somehow a moral failure. We hear Vince Lombardi barking in our ears – if you were just a stronger or better person, you wouldn't quit. Winning means never quitting...or does it (page 222)?

Smile of the Month



An amateur photographer friend was invited to dinner and took along a few pictures. The hostess looked at his work and exclaimed, "These are very good. You must have an excellent camera." Later, as my friend was departing, he turned to the hostess and said, "That was a delicious meal. You must have some excellent pots" – Simon Evans (*Reader's Digest*, October 2002, page 99).



Barber Clippings

Gail and I have been experiencing more change since last month. We rented an apartment in Hendersonville, 1.4 miles from the church building. We have furnished it from Goodwill and are enjoying being close to the work.

Gail is teaching Ladies' Bible Class Tuesday mornings. We are attending Senior Moments on Wednesday morning.

I am using Power Point for the first time in my ministry. It is the first congregation with the capability. I appreciate Ann Bell and others who have helped and made suggestions.

I am learning more about transition by experience.

The brethren at Hendersonville are encouraging.

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John Parker

My book with photographer Paul Seawright entitled *Abide With Me: A Photographic Journey Through the Great British Hymns* will be published this spring around April. It presents photographs of the sites where composers of many of the great hymns lived, descriptions of our visits there in 2006 and 2007, and accounts of the composers' lives. It will be published by New Leaf Publishing Group of Green Forest, Arkansas.

This semester I am on sabbatical from Lipscomb University to work on teaching materials on Shakespeare with an emphasis on how his plays demonstrate Biblical truths. It will serve English teachers in private religious schools and parents of home schools. Following is a chapter on *Measure for Measure* from my manuscript on religious values in Shakespeare.

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