

WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

May, 2009, #34



Jerrie Barber and John Parker



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Writing “Epistles,” by Jerrie Barber

Some time ago, I received the following email. I copy it here with my response. I hope you get a “mustard seed” from it:

Jerrie

I hear that the elders presented their case against me to the Deacons last night. I don't know the details of how much they shared or how it was received. But I certainly feel as if I have the right to either defend myself, or tell my side of the story.

I want to do what is best for the church. I am already the sacrificial lamb who is taking a fall, so I don't want my reputation tarnished – and I do not want to become known as the one who tore the church apart.

What should I do? I have a written document of my side of the story based on the most common discussions of the past. My inclination is to make copies and give them to the elders and deacons.



Dear brother,

My first thought is to ask the elders if what you heard is true – that they presented their case against you. Find out what they said – from them. Evaluate whether they harmed you by what they said.

If that is true, how should you tell your perspective? It is natural to tell a story from one's point of view – that's the only way we can tell it. However, that is not the full story. "The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him (Proverbs 18:17 NKJV).

I have written four "epistles" in my ministry. I have found it helpful to carefully write it, evaluate it, ask for an independent evaluation from a trusted friend, make copies and place one in my safety deposit box, read it to the group that is involved (elders), pass out copies to the ones who had heard it read after the reading, then ask for a response at a later scheduled meeting.

I made the mistake once of writing and reading a lengthy "epistle" and immediately asking for a response. It had taken me three months to write it, rewrite it, evaluate it, and practice it. I asked them to give their response thirty seconds after they received powerful information. They were upset and did not respond well. I asked them to answer what I had taken three months to think through, revise, and read. It was not fair to them. The next time I wrote to this same group, I read it and asked for a response two weeks later. That worked much better.

Something to think about: after learning if what you heard is true,

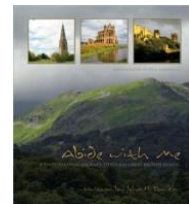
1. Meet with the elders, expressing your concern.
2. Read your document.
3. Ask them what they think would be fair to you and best for the church.
4. Ask how they would want to be treated if they were in your place.
5. Talk little "off script."
6. After asking a question, allow more than enough time for each person to respond.
7. If you can leave this congregation after working through this, where each can respect and partially understand what happened, and how each party had a part in it, both will be freer to go into another relationship without "baggage."

Let me know how you are doing.

Jerrie

John Parker Announcement: *Abide with Me*

After three years of work and waiting: John, international photographer Paul Seawright, and legendary entertainer Ray Walker are pleased to announce the release this month of



ABIDE WITH ME
A Photographic Journey Through Great British Hymns

PLEASE LOG ON NOW TO JOHN'S WEBSITE FOR THE BOOK AT

FOR PHOTOGRAPHS, DESCRIPTION OF BOTH THE TEXT AND RAY'S CD OF
BELOVED HYMNS, AND INFORMATION FOR ORDERING.

Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers, by John Parker



Those wits that think they have thee [wit] do very oft prove fools, and I
that am sure I lack thee may pass for a wise man. TWELFTH NIGHT. 1.5.

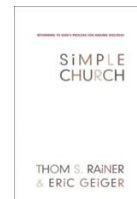
What is yours to bestow is not yours to reserve. TWELFTH NIGHT. 1.5.
[What we are given we have an obligation to give.]

Lady, you are the cruell'st she alive
If you will lead these graces to the grave
And leave the world no copy. TWELFTH NIGHT. 1.5.
[A reminder of young women of their obligation to marry and bear children]

But come what may, I do adore thee so
That danger shall seem sport, and I will go. TWELFTH NIGHT. 2.1.

Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

Simple Church, by Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, Copyright © 2006 by
Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger



The significance is that, in general, simple churches are growing and vibrant. Churches with a simple process for reaching and maturing people are expanding the kingdom. Church leaders who have designed a simple biblical process to make disciples are effectively advancing the movement of the gospel. Simple churches are making a big impact.

Conversely, complex churches are struggling and anemic. Churches without a process or with a complicated process for making disciples are floundering. As a whole, cluttered and complex churches are not alive. Our research shows that these churches are not growing. Unfortunately, the overprogrammed and busy church is the norm. The simple church is the exception, yet our research shows that should not be the case (page 14).

The third step in the process is to serve the world, and ministry teams engage people in ministry. People enjoy camaraderie in a team environment while experiencing the joy of serving others. Some of the teams focus on the church while others focus on the community. New members are told at the new member's class that they should not join the church if they do not plan on serving (page 44).

Defining the process is formulating a strategy. It is agreeing to a blueprint. And this blueprint describes not only the kind of disciple that will be built but also how.

People are more likely to progress through the process if they know it. A clearly defined process encourages people to progress through it because they know the expectation. People cannot embrace the ambiguous (page 114).

For people to take your ministry process seriously, it has to be measured. For people to internalize the simple how in your church, you have to evaluate it. The cliché is true: what gets evaluated, gets done (page 121).

Thom has commented numerous times on the importance of a new members class. After studying churches that effectively reach the unchurched, he stated, “The relationship between assimilation effectiveness and a new members class is amazing. Churches that require potential members to attend a new members class have a much higher retention rate than those who do not” (page 158).

Implementing the same process everywhere prevents the church from having multiple directions. A process that is fully implemented pulls each ministry department together. The alternative leads to a group of subchurches that do not reflect the overall direction of the church (pages 181, 182).

Mediocrity bothers God because it violates His nature and behavior. God is an excellent God. His character is flawless. Excellence flows from the nature of who God is. Everything God has ever done has been excellent. Creation, the sunset, the ocean, and His resurrection point to His excellent nature.

The leaders offered an inappropriate response to God. Instead of reflecting His attribute of excellence to the world, they modeled mediocrity. God was frustrated with the leaders because they set the pace and the tone. The people took their cues from them. If the priests offered second best to God, the people would as well (page 235).

Smile of the Month

I remember reading an amusing story about a jeweler in a small town who noticed a man stopping each morning in front of his jewelry store, pulling a large gold watch out of his pocket, and setting it to the time of the large clock in the store window. He did this every day, month after month, year after year.



One morning, as the jeweler was sweeping the sidewalk in front of his store, the man in overalls stopped to set his watch. On impulse, the jeweler spoke to the man. He said: “I’ve noticed you setting your watch by my big clock every morning for years. What do you do at the factory?”

The man finished winding his watch, replaced it in his pocket, and replied: I’m the timekeeper. Every day at noon, my job is to blow the big whistle which tells everyone in town that it’s noon and time to quit for lunch.

The jeweler hesitated for a moment, and then he said: “That’s odd, I’ve been setting that big clock in the window every day, for all these years, by the noon whistle at the factory” (*This Is Earl Nightingale*, by Earl Nightingale, page 28).

Barber Clippings

The elders met Saturday, May 2, to discuss the results of the Self-Study. They have a meeting scheduled to develop the job description of the preacher they believe will fit with this congregation. The elders are selecting a Search Committee. There will be a training session. They will then continue the process as they evaluate men suggested and men who have applied for the pulpit preacher opportunity here.

One of the effective ministries of the Hendersonville congregation is www.studyjesus.com . Recently, I had lunch with Garland Briley who told me more about this good work. It is an internet Bible study reaching hundreds of thousands of students. Bill Tyner and Larry Snow have been involved in the development of this good work. As of May 9, there had been 210,354 hits on this site this year.

Please look at John’s book, *Abide with Me*. It is informative and beautiful. I had the opportunity to see one of the first books to arrive from the printer. You can learn more about the book and order it at: <http://www.abidewithmehymns.com/> .

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John Parker

I am grateful that April 5 I began an interim ministry with the Fairview Church of Christ in Fairview, Tennessee, near Nashville. This fine congregation serves the Fairview community and conducts worship, evangelism, a very active youth ministry, mission work domestic and abroad, and many other services. The faith and cheerfulness that come from decades of experience in living the Christian life are apparent. Jill and I are thankful to be a part of this work for a time. Please visit us when you are in the area. I attended the meeting of the board of directors of Inner City Ministry on April 18.

Jill is now on the board of African Christian Schools and attended their benefit dinner April 28, the same evening that I attended the dinner in honor of Don Meyer at Lipscomb. We both attended the benefit dinners of World Christian Broadcasting on April 16 and Eastern European Ministry on April 30. All of these are fine organizations led by very faithful and sacrificial people.

Jill and I are attending the Pepperdine lectureship May 5-8. We plan to see our friends Alexander and Eleni Melirrytos of the Omonia congregation in Athens, both of whom will speak on the lectures.

I am continuing to prepare to create videos on Shakespeare for use in Christian and home schools. They will feature Biblical parallels and Christian values.

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