

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

April, 2010, #45



Jerrie Barber and John Parker



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## Time in Isolation

by Jerrie Barber



Some of the best occasions for learning, thinking, and spiritual growth have been the days I spent in isolation.

The first time was in August of 2000 during my sabbatical. I went alone to a cabin in Natchez Trace State Park. Not only was I isolated from people, but I chose not to watch TV, listen to the radio, or listen to tapes or CDs. I called home each day to keep in touch with the family.

My daily schedule was to arise at 6:00, walk for thirty minutes, shave, shower, and begin reading and studying at 8:00. I carried boxes of books and magazines to read. I did memory work from the Bible. I had two reading “centers.” One was on the inside of the cabin. The other was on the outside. As sundown was approaching, I went to a bench beside the lake, watched the sun set, read until I couldn’t see, waited for the Big Dipper to come out, and then returned to the cabin. I read until 10:00, went to bed, arose at 6:00 the next morning, and repeated my schedule.

Since my class in *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* under Tom Holland in 1964, I have kept sermon ideas in files – later in a box. I have found that they don't grow much in the box. But in the afternoons, I selected some of the best sermon seeds and transferred them to the hard drive of my computer. Once they were “planted,” I found it easier to open the file and add an idea or illustration.

During each of the three times I have spent days in isolation, I have also worked on a special project: two series of lectures and my lesson on [\*How to Accept, Invite, and Enjoy Criticism\*](#). The extended, uninterrupted time was conducive to thinking through a topic.

I chose not to eat during my time away. I was amazed at how much time was saved by not cooking and eating or getting into the car, going to a restaurant, eating, and returning. Matthew 5:6 meant more to me after a few days without food.

On two other occasions, I have gone to a condo at *Fairfield Glade*. Both these settings were ideal for a time of study and reflection. When I became tired of reading and studying, I would take a walk. I have found that sometimes one of the best ways to study the Bible is to close my Bible and think about it.

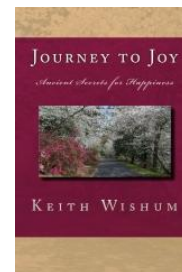
On these last two trips, I left after Sunday evening services and returned at the end of the week and did not miss a Sunday in the pulpit. These were some of the best “classes” and “lectureships” I have ever attended.

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## Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

*Journey to Joy: Ancient Secrets for Happiness*, by Keith Wishum, Copyright © Keith Wishum, Revised 2008

You just need to know where to look to find happiness. Robert Fulghum tells a hilarious story of a young college student stranded in a foreign airport. When Fulghum saw her she was bawling. She was tired, broke, and ready to go home. But she had lost her ticket and was stranded in the airport. Only to discover a wonderful secret – she had been sitting on her ticket (page 10)!



There's a secret for being content in every situation? Yes! Paul claimed to have learned how to be happy even in the worst of times and places. He had certainly experienced some depressing times – shipwrecked, beaten, stoned, arrested and jailed repeatedly. In fact, he was sitting in jail when he wrote those words about being content (page 11)!

When we talk of seeing the good in people and enjoying it in spite of their imperfections, we are not talking about some new practice. This is something we already do with our children. We don't expect our toddlers to walk without falling. We know

that an eight-year-old will often spill his milk. We expect mistakes from the young and, because we know he will outgrow it, we are patient with their failures. (Most of the time.) We just need to follow that same approach with everyone. We are all “young,” and still learning and growing. There is no reason to expect that our coworkers have reached perfection since we haven’t either. People at church inevitable have flaws just as we do. Our families will often fail us in some way. Everyone is a work in progress (pages 31, 32).

It was Jesus who taught his followers to drive a Yugo. That will need some explaining! What he actually taught was that, rather than waiting for someone else to take the first step, “You go” (Matt. 5:23-24). If someone had something against you, you go. Talk with them and try to settle your differences. On the other hand, if you have something against someone else, “You go” (Matt 18:15ff). Even if someone else caused the problem, you take the initiative to resolve matters. Whatever the cause of conflict, we must be willing to be the cause of reconciliation so that happiness can happen (page 46).

It is a good policy to follow the baby philosophy for life: If something stinks change it. That is an appropriate reaction. Complaining about it, however, does nothing to remove this odor (page 64).

Several types of beetle larvae carry what is called a fecal shield. They keep their own excrement and build a shield from it on their backs. That tends to discourage predators, not just for reasons we might think. It’s not that potential predators find the shield contents disgusting; they find it them dangerous. The beetles feed on noxious plants so that their fecal material is poisonous to predators.

Do you know anybody like that?

Some people feed on toxic thoughts. They store them up and build an invisible shield that is highly effective at keeping others away. Being near them proves to be very unpleasant. Being them is more of a drag (page 85).

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## Smile of the Month

The salesclerk had patiently listened to the complaints of the disgruntled customer for quite some time. Finally, as she went on and on about her dissatisfaction with a purchase she had made, he politely interrupted her. “Madam, suppose we refund your money, send you another one without charge, close the store, and have the manager shot. Would that be satisfactory?” (*Reader’s Digest*, May 1986, page 126).



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## Barber Clippings

Our first month at Collegeside has been very enjoyable. The brethren here have been encouraging. An overwhelming task in a large congregation is to learn names. Collegeside has the best name tags I have ever seen. They fasten with two strong magnets. The many who wear them are showing their love in a practical way.

We will have a Family Meeting after evening services on April 18. I will be explaining the tasks for self-study and the consideration and selection of the next preacher. We will be recruiting volunteers for the Transition Monitoring Team, Introduction to Collegeside and Cookeville, preparing and administering the self-study on *Survey Monkey*, and others things that need to be done during the interim.

I am encouraged by the competent staff. We meet each Thursday. I look forward to getting to know them better and working with them for a few months along with a new youth minister who is being selected now.

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## John Parker

Jill and I continue to plan leading our Lipscomb University tour of the English hymn sites with Ray Walker June 14-25. We will visit sites of such hymns as ROCK OF AGES; ABIDE WITH ME; AMAZING GRACE; I GAVE MY LIFE FOR THEE; O HAPPY DAY; JOY TO THE WORLD; ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS; O PERFECT LOVE; COME, THOU FOUNT OF EVERY BLESSING; THE SPACIOUS FIRMAMENT ON HIGH; GOD IS THE FOUNTAIN WHENCE; HOLY, HOLY, HOLY; AND BLEST BE THE TIE THAT BINDS. Please see [Great British Hymn Tour](#) for information. For a copy of my book which led to the tour, please see [www.abidewithmehymns.com](http://www.abidewithmehymns.com).

I continue to work on producing a film on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* with Lipscomb director of theater Mike Fernandez and videographer Russ Sturgeon. The film will be for students in Christian high schools and is scheduled for release in the fall.

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