

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

August, 2010, #49



Jerrie Barber and John Parker

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## Evaluations and the 48-hour Rule

by Jerrie Barber

During the last years of located ministry, I had a yearly evaluation the last week of May, leading up to my anniversary of coming to that congregation. I always looked forward to it. The elders spend time going over my job description, reviewing the work of the past year, and making comments.

One of the things that made it pleasant and something to be enjoyed was that I knew it would not be a listing of all my mistakes of the past year.



There were times when the elders had ideas for me to consider. There were requests, corrections, and suggestions for improvement. However, these rarely, if ever, came up in my yearly evaluation. These matters were addressed during the year and not saved until the last week of May to be listed as all my mistakes of the previous year.

I was the “office manager” in that congregation. Part of that responsibility was selecting and working with the secretary. I established the “48-hour rule.” My promise was that I would not save her mistakes and shortcomings for scheduled evaluations.

We scheduled a meeting every three months for a verbal evaluation. We did a written evaluation each year on the anniversary of her employment. My commitment was that if she did something I wanted changed, if she did or said something I didn’t like, or if she were not doing something I wanted done, I would tell her within forty-eight hours of when I became aware of a needed adjustment.

Why would I want to wait weeks or months to communicate a suggested improvement? Why would I want someone to dread an evaluation – expecting a listing of all mistakes made in the last twelve months?

In working with our secretaries, I tried to follow my elders’ example. I dropped notes into the secretaries’ folders when they did something helpful, extra, with exceptional excellence, or something that was beyond what was rightfully expected in their job description and included this listing of outstanding performance in the written yearly evaluation.

I didn’t have to list the improvements that needed to be made. Forty-eight hours had passed long ago for the suggestions on how to correct mistakes.

Paul wrote that love “doesn’t keep a record of wrongs that others do” (1 Corinthians 13:5, CEV).

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AS YOU LIKE IT  
*Seeking Contentment*  
by John Parker

Paul could say it:

Philippians 4:11

I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.

1 Timothy 6:8

And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.



But not many of the rest of us can. When have you ever *really* been content with your present situation; I mean *really* happy with your financial status, your looks, your friends, your house, your church, your career, your golf game, your whatever? Most of us go from one day to the next trying to improve or change just about everything. We have a hard time being content.

In *As You Like It*, people spend a lot of time, mostly in the forest of Arden, talking about what they want that they don't have. Rosalind, one of Shakespeare's most delightful heroines, struggles with the problem too, but she goes a long way in helping herself and others deal with it, at least on an earthly level. On the spiritual level, the challenge is even greater: it takes forgetting oneself entirely to reach contentment.

### The Play

Orlando the younger son of the late Sir Rowland de Boys, is a talented young man, but he's being squelched by his jealous older brother Oliver, who's inexplicably trying to have him killed. This kind of fraternal antipathy, unfortunately, is epidemic in the play. Duke Senior, the rightful ruler of the kingdom, has been usurped by his brother Frederick and forced into exile in the forest of Arden, where he lives in a kind of Robin Hood existence.

Orlando, in an attempt to improve his fortunes, signs up to compete against the kingdom wrestling champion Charles. The young challenger not only wins the match, but also the heart of Rosalind, daughter of Duke Senior and best friend of Frederick's daughter Celia. Soon after, Frederick banishes Rosalind, so she and Celia disguise themselves as men and head for the forest, taking with them the clown Touchstone. When Oliver also attempts to murder Orlando, he flees to Arden as well, accompanied by his elderly servant Adam.

Arden is an idealized pastoral world of shepherds and shepherdesses with names like Corin and Phebe and Silvius who seem to spend most of their time in courtship and/or philosophizing. It's a convenient venue for interchange and discussion between groups that elsewhere would never talk and debate with one another, and for freedom of relationships otherwise restricted. Duke Senior delivers his famous "sermons in stones" speech about how much more honest and beneficial the forest is than the city, while Touchstone and the lord Jacques are much more frank about its crudeness and hardships.

In Arden, dressed as a man and unrecognizable, Rosalind can be frank with Orlando about his inexperienced and awkward approach to the one he loves (Rosalind herself of course) and train him in her own preferred style. Meanwhile country and city folk can debate their respective lifestyles, and wonderful things can occur that the court would preclude.

Finally, things come to a crisis when Oliver and then Frederick enter the forest in an attempt to capture their respective brothers. When Orlando saves Oliver from a both a snake and a lioness and Frederick's converted by a hermit (Shakespeare's not overly worried about realism in this play), peace is restored, and Rosalind—with the help of the god Hymen—orchestrates the marriages of Celia and Oliver, herself and Orlando, Phebe and Silvius, and the clown Touchstone and Audrey, a country girl. The nobles return to the court and a new life as the play ends.

Ever get caught in the middle, wanting it both ways? Most intelligent, life-loving people do. For example, when Corin asks him how he like the life of a shepherd, Touchstone reflects the tension many of us experience who don't want to have to choose between the peace of the rural life and the culture and excitement of the city life: we want *both*.

Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect that it is a shepherd's life, it is naught. In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life. Now in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious. As it is a spare life, look you, it fits my humour well; but as there is no more plenty in it, it goes much against my stomach. (3.2)

That's how we are, isn't it? Faced with two diverging paths, we want to go down both, and we're frustrated at having to choose:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

Frost is telling us here that there's nothing intrinsically wrong with either road, either the well traveled or the less traveled one. Either is a good road. But whichever you choose, he says, you'll always regret not having been able to travel the other too,

And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler . . . .

and you'll yearn for what might have been.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence.

What would it have been like to be a veterinarian instead of a teacher, a doctor instead of a lawyer, a preacher instead of a politician, a philosopher instead of a businessperson? What might have been if you'd lived in the country instead of the city; in New York instead of San Francisco; in Europe instead of the U.S.?

There's one dimension beyond the one in Frost's poem, however. As you choose, ask yourself this question: which occupation, or location, or spouse—either, apparently, acceptable and good—would *God* have you choose? Which would cause you to serve him the better?

Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."

And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

There are many opportunities to choose "that good part" in your life, in marriage, career, religious service. Choose wisely, even when the choices all seem acceptable.

Some choices, though, are intensely compelling. Since you're reading a book devoted to this level of thought, chances are you're given to achieving goals: religious, educational, financial, physical, cultural. Now achievement can be an exhilarating experience. Achievers often accomplish much good, both for themselves and their society. But goal seeking and goal achieving can be addictive; ambitions grow, and the hunger to make more, learn more, know more, build more, be more can become a consuming, restless, insatiable passion.

You've almost certainly felt that whirlpool pull. Though only the court clown, Touchstone is an intelligent man, and his frustration over wanting to be in both the court and the country at the same time probably reminds you of your own tensions. So many possibilities, so many things you'd like to do, so little time to do them. And, as the years go by, there's that aching realization that you're simply not going to be able to do them all, or even a satisfactory number of them. As Tennyson's Ulysses put it,

Life piled on life  
Were all too little, and of one to me  
Little remains.

Insightful, curious, energetic people always feel this way, even the young. Consider Huck Finn's description of Tom Sawyer:

Pretty soon he got to worrying and fretting right along day in and day out, and when I asked him what *was* he in such a state about, he said it 'most broke his heart to think how time was slipping away, and him getting older and older, and no wars breaking out and no way of making a name for himself that he could see. Now that is the way boys is always thinking, but he was the first one I ever heard come out and say it. (from *Tom Sawyer Abroad*)

By yourself, there's no way to lay the ghost on this one. Relying on your own philosophy or self-discipline, you'll never rest content; like Ulysses you'll always be saying to yourself

'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.

I hear people saying "I don't have that many years left, so I'm going to get the most out of them I can." But there's little satisfaction in that approach. The years will run out quickly anyway, and you'll never get anything like all that you want to have.

But devote yourself to God, concentrate on what he wants for you instead of what you want for you, and you can achieve the seemingly unachievable—contentment. As Peter puts it,

casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.  
(1 Peter 5:7)

The scriptures offer wisdom on what makes for peace of mind. For one, they teach us not to be in competition with others, especially the evil people of the world:

Psalm 37:7

7 Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him;  
Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,  
Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.

Galatians 5:26

Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

Instead, the Bible teaches a deliberate strategy of acceptance and peace based, not on some degree of personal achievement, but on knowledge of God's love and sovereignty that supersede circumstances.

Philippians 4:11-12

Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

That Paul himself had been a super-achiever (cf. Philippians 3:4-6) testifies to the genuineness of his words, and the following statement from him reveals the basis of his assurance and sacrifice:

Philippians 3:8-9

8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.

It's this faith that provides context for other admonitions on contentment in scripture, including those calling for pleasure in the most basic of God's blessings:

Ecclesiastes 2:24

There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God.

Ecclesiastes 9:7-9

Go then, eat your bread in happiness, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life, which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.

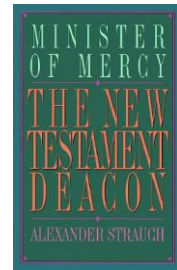
Happiness doesn't come only, or even primarily, from seeking new experiences or grand achievements. As worthy as those can be, they're self-centered. Happiness comes from contenting yourself with loving God and enjoying his spiritual and earthly blessings, especially the most basic ones of family, love, food, and health.

God gave them, so enjoy them. Learn contentment in him.

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## Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

*The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy*, by Alexander Strauch, © 1992 by Alexander Strauch



Good leaders always distinguish themselves by their ability to skillfully confront troublesome issues and to be decisive. In fact, confronting problems is a major part of leadership responsibility. Fearful leaders who refuse to confront problems have demoralized many churches and organizations. Running away from problems creates worse problems. In this trying situation facing the Jerusalem church, the apostles acted decisively and skillfully. Their actions avoided a potential disaster and led to the creation of a better situation (page 18).

Mismanagement and disorganization ruins families, businesses, governments, and churches. It is the product of the polluted soil of greed, laziness, carelessness, lovelessness, and selfishness. It is not from God. Therefore the family of God should not

be mismanaged. God should receive our best effort, energy, and skill. The entire account of Acts 6 is a sterling example of good organization and loving care for the people of God (page 32).

The apostles, however, were not concerned about money and control. They were not greedy. Their decision to delegate the responsibility of handling the church's charitable funds to others should be an example to Christian leaders today who think they must control everything, especially the money (page 36).

No wonder the Seven were commissioned for their work through the laying on of hands! Thereby they were given official status to handle the important work of caring for the church's needy. The Seven formed a distinct body of officials who were separate from the apostles. They were not equal with the apostles, nor were they junior apostles or shepherds in training. They did not become assistants to the apostles. The Seven formed a separate but complementary ministry to that of the apostles (page 42).

Paul mentions only two distinct groups of officials in his salutation to the Philippians: "overseers and deacons." Fifty years after Paul wrote this letter, Polycarp (A.D. c.70-155), who was a disciple of John the apostle, wrote a significant letter to the church at Philippi in which he referred to the church officers. It is immensely relevant that in his letter to the Philippians, Polycarp *refers to only two distinct officers: elders and deacons*. He writes, "Wherefore it is right to abstain from all these things submitting yourselves to the presbyters [elders] and deacons as to God and Christ" (page 61).

The New Testament speaks loudly and distinctly on the identity and duties of church elders. In fact, the New Testament offers more instruction regarding elders than on such important church subjects as the Lord's Supper, baptism, and spiritual gifts. Since the pastoral care of the local church is of the utmost importance to God, He has plainly stated His will on this matter (page 63).

The question of whether deaconship is an office or work is easily answered: it's both. It's obviously a work to perform, yet it's an office because it requires qualifications and an examination for entry, and it entails appointment to an official, public position with prescribed duties and designated authority. Thus the diaconate is an office in the church as is eldership (page 71).

The idea here is for others to officially examine, evaluate, and scrutinize the prospective deacon's character. Just as medical doctors are officially examined before they are licensed, so prospective shepherds and deacons are to be examined in the light of God's requirements (1 Timothy 3:2-12) before they can take office (page 105).

"But why," people often ask, "are the wives of deacons mentioned and not the wives of overseers?" The answer lies in the nature of the diaconate, which is not a teaching, governing office like the eldership. First Timothy 2:12 states, "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man..." Pastor-elders (shepherds)

teach and govern the whole church. Their wives are not to assist in the governing of the church (page 127).

The Greek word for “malicious gossips” is the same word for *devil* (in the singular). Here it is used as an adjective and thus means “slandorous” or “malicious talkers.” Slander is the devil’s work. It divides and hurts people. It destroys churches (page 128).

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## Smile of the Month

The modern American is a person who drives a bank-financed car over a bond-financed highway on credit-card gas to open a charge account at a department store so he can fill his savings-and-loan financed home with installment-purchased furniture (*Your Money: Frustration or Freedom?*, by Howard L. Dayton, Jr., page 39).



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## Barber Clippings

Thirty-two men are enrolled in an elder-deacon leadership training class that started Wednesday, August 4. I am encouraged by the enthusiasm and participation. We have elders in the class. We have teenagers in the class. I see similar interest with them and groups in between.

The elders are working on the appointment of a Selection Committee and an Interview Committee. There will be training. Then they start the search.

The Christians here continue to be cooperative and encouraging. I am thankful for the opportunity to work in interim ministry and to be in Cookeville at Collegeside.

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## John Parker

In May, Jill and I enjoyed leading a Friends of Lipscomb tour to England to visit the sites where great hymns were composed. The tour stemmed from my book, ABIDE WITH

ME: A PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY THROUGH GREAT BRITISH HYMNS. (Order from [www.abidewithmehymns.com](http://www.abidewithmehymns.com)). We had nineteen guests on our bus plus hosts and guides, and the people reported that they enjoyed the experience very much. We visited sites all the way from Southampton on the southern coast, home of Isaac Watts (“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”), to Ambleside the northern England and Dorothy Gurney’s “O Perfect Love.”)

I returned home to a very different experience. A few days later I had quintuple by-pass surgery. I am thankful to the Lord to be doing well and grateful to Jill and the medical personnel for their care and to the dozens of people who sent me cards and greetings. Also friends from the Fairview church where I preached last year most graciously came to our farm to help repair damage done by a tornado that hit us the Sunday morning of the May 1-2 flood weekend. We are most grateful for all of these Christian friends and blessings.

The Lord willing I will begin an interim with the Cave City, Kentucky, congregation on August 29. I preached there in June and was most blessed to meet these faithful and very friendly Christians.

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