

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

December, 2008, #30



Jerrie Barber and John Parker



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## What Are the Rules?

by Jerrie Barber

Last month, [November 2008](#), I listed the questions that we asked about staff meetings. The answers to those questions determined the initial guidelines that will shape our meetings.

Some observations on group guidelines:

1. They need to be negotiated, not dictated. The group that will be functioning needs to have a say in the way it will operate.
2. The group needs to be serious about the way they want to relate to each other. If the guidelines are just “busy work” and not principles to which the group can be committed, the rules will be ignored and will not be helpful.
3. The guidelines will be tested. The leader will call the group to account only if he or she believes in the principles, believes the group was sincere when each person in the group agreed to the principles, and is serious about doing what we said we would do.
4. The guidelines need to be re-evaluated after being tried. We may see adjustments that need to be made to improve group interaction.



Here are the guidelines that we negotiated for the staff at the Hendersonville church of Christ:

### Staff Meeting Guidelines

1. The purposes (reasons) for having staff meetings will be:
  - a. To have clear, accurate, and caring communication with each other and to have that same kind of communication transferred to the congregation and to those outside the church as well.
  - b. To coordinate schedules for the most effective use of time and talent.
  - c. For mutual edification of each other and others.
  - d. To grow spiritually through Bible study and prayer.
  - e. To work on becoming a team, working in cooperation with each other.
  - f. To address and solve problems that arise quickly and positively.
2. Our aim is to continually develop a team relationship that is:
  - a. Open.
  - b. Honest.
  - c. Supportive.
  - d. Synergistic.
3. To do that we will:
  - a. Help others to be the best they can be.
  - b. Try to recognize each person's leadership style, understanding that we are different.
  - c. Have social interaction with each other.
  - d. One way to do that, we will celebrate each person's birthday.
    - i. Each person is responsible to notify the group of his/her birthday.
    - ii. The honoree will choose a restaurant for the celebration within twenty-five miles of Hendersonville church of Christ.
    - iii. The group will pay for the honoree's meal.
    - iv. We will each present an appropriate birthday card to that person.
4. The time of our meetings will be:
  - a. Tuesday.
  - b. 9:00 a.m.
  - c. One hour.
  - d. We will start on time.
  - e. We will quit on time.
5. The agenda for staff meetings:
  - a. Bible study and prayer – 30 minutes.
  - b. Coordination – 20 minutes.
  - c. Staff development – 10 minutes.
6. We will not criticize anyone not present.

- a. For individual conflict issues, we will talk to that person.
  - b. For group issues, we will discuss those in the group.
7. Because of our mutual care and concern for each other and for the good of this group, we will let the others know if we are going to absent or late for meetings.
8. We will invite the secretaries and Day School Director into our meetings in January. Roger will arrange for the phones to be answered either by volunteers or staff rotation.
9. We would like for one elder to come to a staff meeting at the middle of the month.
  - a. This can be on a rotating basis, with as many elders visiting during the year as possible.
  - b. He will participate in the meeting.
  - c. He can bring any communication from the elders.
  - d. We will express ideas we have with him.
10. We will meet in the Pier next week, talk with Joe Armstrong about heating, and then decide on our meeting place.
11. We will set our phones on vibrate. Each person will evaluate the urgency of her/his calls. Non-critical calls will be returned after the meeting.
12. Discussion guidelines for staff meetings:
  - a. Jerrie will coordinate the meetings.
  - b. We have a right to all our feelings. We can be mad, sad, glad, or scared. We can express those with care, concern, and responsibility.
  - c. We will settle group business in the group.
  - d. We have a right to disagree as well as agree with each other.
  - e. We have agreed to speak confidentially during staff meetings. That means that what we say here stays here and will not be shared with others outside the meeting unless it is general knowledge that others would receive from sources other than our staff. Material that would not be appropriate to publish in the weekly bulletin is not to be shared with anyone: family, friends, other members of this congregation, or others. I will take care of myself, telling the group only what I trust them to keep.
  - f. We have a right to bring up old business when we feel we have not finished with any issue.
13. We will re-evaluate these guidelines December 16, 2008, in our staff meeting.

Shakespeare Quotations for Ministers  
by John Parker

O, what authority and show of truth  
Can Cunning sin cover itself withal!  
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING 4.1



Give not me counsel;  
Nor let no comforter delight mine ear  
But such a one whose wrongs do suit with mine.  
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING 5.1

I know not how to pray your patience'  
Yet I must speak. Choose your revenge yourself;  
Impose me to what penance your invention  
Can lay upon my sin: yet sinn'd I not  
But in mistaking.  
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING 5.1

I thank thee for thy care and honest pains.  
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING 4.1

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Religious Values in Shakespeare  
by John Parker

*HAMLET*

In a conversation Hamlet has with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, his boyhood friends whom he now distrusts and despises, he says of the sky:

*This most excellent canopy the air, . . . this majestic roof  
fretted with golden fire—why, it appears no other thing to me  
than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.*



Ever feel that your world is “a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours”? That you’re just a “quintessence of dust” and your life isn’t worth living? At this point Hamlet does, and at some point so did David, and Job, and Peter, and most of us.

Yet Hamlet also recognizes man’s nobility and intelligence, and, more than those, his capacity to reflect the divine:

*What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in  
faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how  
like an angel, in apprehension how like a  
god . . . !*

“In action how like an angel. . . .” What might make *that* possible? There are answers, although only Hamlet in this play comes anywhere close to finding them. He still comes up short (and the other characters *far* short), but it’s possible for us to come closer to the angels.

### *Principal Characters*

*Hamlet, prince of Denmark; son of the late king Hamlet, and nephew to the present king Claudius*

*Ghost, claiming to be Hamlet’s late father the king*

*Claudius, king of Denmark and Hamlet’s uncle; brother of the late king, whom he murdered; husband of Gertrude, Hamlet’s mother, whom he seduced before killing her husband*

*Gertrude, Hamlet’s mother; widow of the late king Hamlet; wife of Claudius*

*Polonius, Lord Chamberlain and advisor to Claudius; father of Ophelia and Laertes; killed by Hamlet*

*Ophelia, Hamlet’s girlfriend; daughter of Polonius and sister of Laertes*

*Laertes, son of Polonius and brother of Ophelia; tries to murder Hamlet but is killed by Hamlet instead*

*Horatio, Hamlet’s close friend and confidant*

*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, courtiers enlisted by Claudius to investigate Hamlet*

*Fortinbras, prince of Norway; son of late king and nephew of current king of Norway; designs to take over Denmark*

### *The Play*

*Hamlet is the longest of Shakespeare’s plays and involves much action.*

*A Ghost appears to Horatio and soldiers on guard at Elsinore castle in Norway, appearing to be the late king, father or Prince Hamlet. Horatio tries to converse with it, but it stalks off, so he determines to tell Hamlet.*

*Claudius explains glibly to the court what prompted him and Gertrude to marry within a month of her late husband the king’s death, then changing the subject gives Laertes permission to return to France and sends a warning to the king of Norway to stop his nephew Fortinbras’ saber rattling. Finally, he and*

*Gertrude admonish Hamlet, who's still wearing black mourning clothes, to cheer up, and command him to stay in Norway instead of returning to his seminary studies in Wittenburg. After the court all leave, Hamlet delivers his first soliloquy, in which he laments that God has forbidden suicide, pronounces the world a dreary, profitless wasteland, and condemns his mother for marrying the blackguard Claudius so soon after the death of his noble father whom she loved passionately: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" Then he's astounded when Horatio enters and claims to have seen his father.*

*Laertes and Polonius forbid Ophelia from seeing Hamlet again, fearful that he is toying with her and will leave her ruined. That night the Ghost appears to Hamlet, tells him that Claudius poisoned him, and calls on him to seek revenge. Hamlet vows to do so, but lapses into despair. The soldier Marcellus concludes "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark."*

*Two months pass, and Hamlet has taken no action against Claudius. Denied access to Ophelia, burdened by the Ghost's charge, and disgusted with his mother, he's been acting so strangely that Claudius engages Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to determine what's wrong with him. Knowing his love of theater, they bring in some visiting actors, whom Hamlet gladly greets. Privately he asks the lead actor to inject a few lines by Hamlet into their play before the king.*

*Left alone, in his second soliloquy Hamlet berates himself for inaction and reveals his plan to have the players enact a murder similar to Claudius' killing his father so that he can watch the king's reaction. He fears that the Ghost "May be the devil" and wants corroboration of its tale before killing Claudius.*

*Polonius and Claudius plan to have Ophelia talk with Hamlet while they spy. Hamlet enters and delivers his famous third soliloquy beginning "To be or not to be . . .," another contemplation of suicide. Confronting Ophelia, he treats her roughly, and makes insinuations that put Claudius on guard.*

*At the play, Claudius is rattled by the similarity to his murder of Hamlet's father, convincing Hamlet of his guilt. By the end of the scene he is ready to "drink hot blood," but already begins to soften toward Gertrude. Claudius announces he will send Hamlet to England, while Polonius plans to spy on him and Gertrude. While Claudius is attempting pray in repentance of murdering the king and stealing his wife and crown, Hamlet enters but decides not to kill him during a devotional that might save his soul. He retreats, and Claudius finally stops praying, knowing he will never repent.*

*In Gertrude's bedroom, Hamlet hears someone behind the arras and stabs through it, killing Polonius. He berates Gertrude for marrying Claudius until the Ghost reappears to stop Hamlet and to admonish him for not achieving revenge.*

*Hamlet is quickly sent off to England in the charge of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in order to cover Polonius' death. Hamlet observes Fortinbras, who is crossing Denmark soil ostensibly to attack Poland, and in his fourth soliloquy criticizes himself for inaction in contrast to this other son of a slain king. Meanwhile, Laertes has returned from France hot for revenge for his father's death. Claudius, for his own purposes, skillfully deflects his rage toward Hamlet.*

*Unexpectedly, Hamlet returns to Denmark, having been ransomed from pirates who had captured him. Sensing danger, Claudius enlists Laertes to engage in a fencing bout with Hamlet in which Laertes is to stab him with a poisoned foil and Claudius is to give him a poisoned cup. They are interrupted by news of Ophelia's drowning, which may have been a suicide.*

*Hamlet and Laertes come upon the gravedigger and exchange witticisms and philosophy. Hamlet is shocked to see Ophelia's body brought in for burial, and he and Laertes fight in her grave. Later, Hamlet explains how on the voyage to England he discovered his own death warrant from Claudius and changed it to have Rosencrantz and Guildenstern executed instead. He concludes that providence is now directing him.*

*The play ends with the deadly fencing bout. Laertes wounds Hamlet with the poisoned foil, and, when they drop and exchange foils, Hamlet stabs him in turn. Meanwhile Gertrude drinks from the poisoned cup and dies, another possible suicide. Hamlet then stabs Claudius and pours the poisoned cup down his throat. He and Laertes exchange forgiveness before Laertes dies, and Hamlet, fatally wounded himself, prevents Horatio from committing suicide so that he may live to tell Hamlet's story. Hamlet dies, and Fortinbras enters to seize control of Denmark.*

If you can quote only one line from Hamlet, it's probably this one:

*To be, or not to be, that is the question. (3.1)*

When he says those words, Hamlet's considering whether or not "to be" at all, whether he should commit suicide. But even if one chooses "to be" physically, he still must decide *how* he will "be" or not "be" spiritually, all the while living in a chaotic and sinful world. And that, in turn, depends on his spiritual view.

Which will you choose? You can "be" with a recognition of God, of his infinity and goodness, and consequently live with integrity, faith, and hope, regardless of your circumstances. Job said,

Job 13:15

15 Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.



miserable guilt and fear of certain divine punishment, he knows that he won't repent, because that would mean giving up his queen and his throne.

In an odd kind of way, Claudius here is remarkably honest (for a killer, adulterer, and liar), mainly because he knows that God sees through his hypocrisy. And he has a fair knowledge of grace. He thinks of the blood on his hand and asks rhetorically

*Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens  
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy  
But to confront the visage of offense?  
And what's in prayer but this twofold force,  
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,  
Or pardon'd being down?*

Still, unrepentant, he's beyond forgiveness, and he knows it.

Claudius' lack of repentance, however, comes not only from a sin problem, but from a theological problem. Refusal to repent to God betrays incomprehension of God. It's being *unaware* of God. A man who commits terrible sins and who won't get past those in order to approach God can only know fear of him.

Contrast Claudius' prayer with that of another murderer, adulterer, and liar:

*Psalm 51:1-19*  
*Have mercy upon me, O God,  
According to Your lovingkindness;  
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,  
Blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
And cleanse me from my sin.  
For I acknowledge my transgressions,  
And my sin is always before me.  
Against You, You only, have I sinned,  
And done this evil in Your sight—  
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
Make me hear joy and gladness,  
That the bones You have broken may rejoice.  
Hide Your face from my sins,  
And blot out all my iniquities.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from Your presence,  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,  
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.  
Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,*

*And sinners shall be converted to You.  
Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,  
The God of my salvation,  
A broken and a contrite heart—  
These, O God, You will not despise.*

David's prayer of forgiveness for his adultery with Bathsheba, murder of her husband Uriah, and subsequent cover-up, contains far more than guilt and a desire to avoid punishment. There's an earnest desire to return to a union with the Lord.

What's the difference between David and Shakespeare's royal sinner? David has a wholeness in his grasp of God. He knows not only the power, justice, and wrath of God, but the majesty, goodness, grace, and love of God. He not only fears God's punishment; he misses God's closeness, a closeness developed over years of communion from the time of his days as a young shepherd, through his tumultuous rise as king, until the tragedy of his sin. If God receives him back, David knows, he'll have not only forgiveness, but *joy*.

This is one of the "things in heaven" that Claudius' philosophy doesn't dream of. Those who live lives of goodness, holiness, and morality are men and women who know God in a full faith, not in an incomplete attempt to make deals with him, or to pray to him out of the narrow motive of avoiding hell. When they sin—even grievously—their sin is an aberration, not a consistent part of their lives, because they're accustomed to his presence and guidance, and they're so devastated when they lose them that they run back in full repentance. This is one of the reasons why David—the murderer, adulterer, and liar—is called a "man after God's own heart" and why his name is even a prophetic name for Christ himself (Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 34:23-24).

Want to be honest, moral, and free of guilt, and at the same time happy, purposeful, and joyful? Don't just unevenly try to avoid punishment: come to *know God* in his fullness of righteousness, love, grace, and power through submission to his will and word:

*Mark 12:29-30*  
*Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.*

*1 Corinthians 8:3*  
*But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.*

*John 14:23*

*Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.*

*Gertrude, Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern: The Spiritual Suicides*

*Why, man, they did make love to this employment.*

*. . . . Their defeat*

*Does by their own insinuation grow.*

*'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes*

*Between the pass and fell incensed points*

*Of mighty opposites. (5.2)*

Knowing God requires faith, and faith requires courage and independence. Jesus said that cowards have their place in hell (Revelation 21:8), and you'll only comprehend the full love and greatness of God if you muster the courage to follow him, not others:

*2 Timothy 1:7*

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

Given over to evil and spiritual death as Claudius is, there's another set of characters in *Hamlet* that in some ways are even more hopeless: Gertrude, Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern all die in the play, as does Claudius himself. Ophelia and Gertrude probably commit literal suicide, but in a sense all of them cop out with a weak, suicidal following of a powerful figure to spiritual death. All but Ophelia surrender their wills to Claudius; she timidly bows to the orders of her father and brother to betray Hamlet.

Like "the beauteous queen of Denmark" you may self-destruct by taking whatever course in front of you offers the least resistance. Be pretty, say nice things, have a cushy bedroom furnished by forgetfulness of the commitments on the far side of the arras and the flattery and comfort on this side. You can hang on to Jesus for a while

*As if increase of appetite had grown*

*By what it fed on, and yet, within a month*

abandon him for some smiling villain that offers you an incestuous bed of easy comfort and disgraceful behavior.

Problem is, some honest friend or teacher or preacher will pin you down some day and force you to look at yourself, the worthy Lord you had but threw away, and the wretch you're sleeping with now:

*O Hamlet, speak no more:*

*Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;  
And there I see such black and grained spots  
As will not leave their tinct. (3.4)*

By the end of the play, Gertrude has the nerve to walk away from Claudius:

*KING*

*Gertrude, do not drink.*

*QUEEN*

*I will, my lord; I pray you pardon me. (5.2)*

For her, though, courage came too late. Don't make Frailty thy name, whether you're woman or a man: say "I will" do right to whoever is trying to tell you "do not," and you can "be" something infinitely better.

Like Ophelia, you can choose to grow "indeed distract" under the pressure of forces alternately claiming they love you now, or "I did love you once," or "I lov'd you not," or whatever; or else insulting you by advising "Get thee to a nunn'ry [slang term for a brothel]"—as if you're too low for God to be interested in you, pulling you this way and that until you completely lose your spiritual wits and end up suspended on the pendent bough of some faddish philosophy or shallow friendship or money or sports-turned-religion until it breaks and you're pull'd under too.

Instead, why not "be" as one who listens to God as opposed to some low-minded Polonius or even a confused Hamlet, and get thee to God's real kingdom and its people who think above, not below (Colossians 3:2).

Worse even than Gertrude or Ophelia, you can "be" successfully enough as one savvy in worldly acumen and completely devoid of spiritual wisdom. Polonius mouths off lots of proverbs ("Neither a borrower nor a lender be," etc.), which, ironically are some of the most quoted in this oft-quoted play, but his advice is mainly for self-promotion, nothing much beyond that. Jesus said that

*The sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. (Luke 16:8)*

In the end, the sons of this world also end up dead behind some arras. "Be" as one of the sons of light, not one who lurks around in some dark, seamy corner trying to see what dirt others are involved with.

If you're the hotheaded Laertes type that bursts in saying things like

*To hell allegiance! Vows, to the blackest devil!*

*Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!  
I dare damnation.*

every time somebody crosses you or questions your manhood, then you'll "be" as a prey to every calculating Claudius that knows how to turn you to his own ends. That's the easiest way to *get* the damnation you dare. Don't fall for that. When you're offended and enraged, run *toward* heaven, not *away* from it.

*Ephesians 4:26-27*  
*Be angry, and yet do not sin; . . . and do not give the devil [like Claudius] an opportunity.*

Or you may choose to "be"—if we can call this life-style existence at all—a person of such faceless mediocrity that you lose your own spiritual identity:

*Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.*  
*Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz. (2.2)*

Do that, and like these two you'll also be one of "ten thousand lesser things . . . /mortised and adjoin'd" to some "massy wheel" poised at the top of a hill (3.3): when it loses its place and starts to roll down, you'll go with it, just as R&G did. What massy wheel of a powerful leader, spouse, girlfriend, boyfriend, organization, or shallow religion that's about to plunge down hill are *you* mortised and adjoin'd to? Paul urged his readers to remain in Christ, who makes free, rather than to a force that enslaves:

*1 Corinthians 6:17*  
*But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.*

*Galatians 5:1*  
*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.*

*Hamlet: "What a piece of work is a man!"*

To give him his due, Hamlet follows a course independent of any of these. He's constitutionally and theologically opposed to doing evil, at least gratuitous evil. And he refuses to follow anyone's lead, even that of a spirit claiming to be the ghost of his father. He's miles ahead of the other characters in the play in perception and courage, and even in spiritual insight.

Still, Hamlet's far from the spiritual certainty and confidence that characterize the great servants of scripture: Abraham, or Job, or David, or Paul. His reflections to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern resemble more the pessimism of the Preacher in Ecclesiastes. His melancholy dirge

*How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
Fie on 't, ah fie, fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden  
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely.*

seems very much in the vein of these memorable words:

*Ecclesiastes 1:2-4, 9  
"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher;  
"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."  
What profit has a man from all his labor  
In which he toils under the sun?  
One generation passes away, and another generation comes;  
But the earth abides forever.  
That which has been is what will be,  
That which is done is what will be done,  
And there is nothing new under the sun.*

But in his happier days, according to Ophelia, Hamlet has been

*Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,*  
and one who sees man as being "in apprehension how like a god" is at least capable, we would hope, of rising to a higher level of faith. Whether Hamlet rises at all has been a question of critical debate for four centuries. Certainly he never comes near the stature of Job, although like Job he struggles admirably against overwhelmingly difficult forces. He's prone to sarcasm, abuse, and ultimately major violence, killing three people with his own hand and arguably having part in the deaths of two others. Hamlet is no spiritual example; but he does reject easy and facile answers, and he ultimately comes to see justice, and his part in it, as an act of providence.

How does Hamlet choose to "be"?

When we first see him, Hamlet's the only person still in mourning for the late king at a gala gathering of the Danish court, and refuses to put off either his mourning dress or his clouded demeanor at the urging of his mother and step-father. But at this point he lacks the information he'll shortly be getting, and all he can do is lament his mother's disgraceful marriage to Claudius:

*That it should come to this—  
But two months dead—nay, not so much, not two—  
So excellent a king [Hamlet's late father], that was to this  
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother  
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven  
Visit her face too roughly! Heaven and earth,  
Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him*



It might be a family or school or fraternity or sorority or even church espousing a code that, like Hamlet's Ghost, pressures you to commit a terrible sin for the honor of the group, resulting in dishonor to God. To "be" on the level God wants involves not pietistic naivete, but caution: watch out for red Ghosts, even if they look pale.

"To be" meaningfully requires the courage *not* to act.  
The Ghost exerts ever-so-slight pressure on Hamlet by saying

*If thou didst ever thy dear father love—  
... Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder. (1.5)*

Yet two months later, he hasn't. Why?

Every cultural expectation is that Hamlet should act for revenge and will. He's the only son of an honorable and wronged father, and only sons are supposed to avenge the honor wronged. Further, immediate pressure is also exerted by the example of two other young men, Fortinbras and Laertes, who're in precisely the same situation as he is: each of them is also the only son of a father violently killed, and neither of them has the slightest compunction against killing his father's slayer or nearest relative. On top of all this, Hamlet *himself* believes he should act: his second and fourth soliloquies are taken up with his guilt from his inaction.

Hamlet beats himself up about his passivity, and considers himself a coward. Whether he really delays at all, and if so precisely *why* he does, was for many years the central question argued by critics of this drama, and no single answer to it ever satisfied them. But at least one influence on Hamlet is his belief that revenge is murder, and therefore in violation of the canon of the Everlasting. In fact, it's this inconsistency between a visit from the spiritual world and his reading of God's law that makes Hamlet question the Ghost's validity.

Whatever Hamlet's motivation, restraint takes courage, often more than action does. God has these traits:

*Jonah 3:10  
Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.*

As does Christ:

*Isaiah 53:7  
He was oppressed and He was afflicted,  
Yet He opened not His mouth;  
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,  
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
So He opened not His mouth.*

*Matthew 26:52-53*

*But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?"*

Your challenge on this issue will more likely be in the category of refusing to do what's "cool" when others will snigger at you for your principles.

The larger issue here, however, may not be courage, but vision. In his fourth soliloquy, Hamlet admires Fortinbras for his action in committing his army to battle over a small piece of Polish land. But even as he expresses his admiration, his words reveal how meaningless bravado can be:

*How stand I then,  
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,  
Excitements of my reason and my blood,  
And let all sleep, while, to my shame, I see  
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,  
That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,  
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot  
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,  
Which is not tomb enough and continent  
To hide the slain? O, from this time forth,  
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth! (4.4)*

How stands he then? He stands much better in letting all sleep than Fortinbras, who's responsible for the slaughter of twenty thousand men over a worthless piece of ground. But to recognize this requires a larger, wider vision than Fortinbras ever has or wants, or than Hamlet himself has at this point. Inaction here would be heroic, and more godlike in its scope. Christ restrained himself and his more volatile apostles—Peter, James, and John—not so much from courage *in* the crisis, as from love *above* the crisis. He is the essence of love and righteousness, and you'll learn to follow him most perfectly when you find yourself thinking—not about how strong you're being—but about how loving you're being.

What gravedigger philosopher have you been listening to lately? The one Hamlet encounters is witty—full of puns, and Hamlet admires his skill with words:

*Hamlet* Whose grave's this, sirrah?  
*First Clown* Mine, sir. . . .  
*Hamlet* I think it be thine indeed, for thou liest in 't.  
*First Clown* You lie out on 't, sir, and therefore it is not yours.  
For my part, I do not lie in 't, and yet it is mine.





You can't fully "be" by denying the world beyond this one, or by avoiding those human contacts that bring both pleasure and pain. All great servants of God experienced both, and you should seek that service that will bring them.

*Claudius: "O limed soul"*

*O wretched state! O bosom black as death!  
O limed soul, that, struggling to be free,  
Art more engag'd! Help, angels!*

Claudius utters that pathetic lament after trying and failing to pray God's forgiveness for murdering his brother and stealing his wife and crown. Despite his miserable guilt and fear of certain divine punishment, he knows that he won't repent, because that would mean giving up his queen and his throne.

In an odd kind of way, Claudius here is remarkably honest (for a killer, adulterer, and liar), mainly because he knows that God sees through his hypocrisy. And he has a fair knowledge of grace. He thinks of the blood on his hand and asks rhetorically

*Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens  
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy  
But to confront the visage of offense?  
And what's in prayer but this twofold force,  
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,  
Or pardon'd being down?*

Still, unrepentant, he's beyond forgiveness, and he knows it.

Claudius' lack of repentance, however, comes not only from a sin problem, but from a theological problem. Refusal to repent to God betrays incomprehension of God. It's being *unaware* of God. A man who commits terrible sins and who won't get past those in order to approach God can only know fear of him.

Contrast Claudius' prayer with that of another murderer, adulterer, and liar:

*Psalm 51:1-19  
Have mercy upon me, O God,  
According to Your lovingkindness;  
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,  
Blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
And cleanse me from my sin.  
For I acknowledge my transgressions,  
And my sin is always before me.  
Against You, You only, have I sinned,*

*And done this evil in Your sight—  
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
Make me hear joy and gladness,  
That the bones You have broken may rejoice.  
Hide Your face from my sins,  
And blot out all my iniquities.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from Your presence,  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,  
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.  
Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,  
And sinners shall be converted to You.  
Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,  
The God of my salvation,  
A broken and a contrite heart—  
These, O God, You will not despise.*

David's prayer of forgiveness for his adultery with Bathsheba, murder of her husband Uriah, and subsequent cover-up, contains far more than guilt and a desire to avoid punishment. There's an earnest desire to return to a union with the Lord.

What's the difference between David and Shakespeare's royal sinner? David has a wholeness in his grasp of God. He knows not only the power, justice, and wrath of God, but the majesty, goodness, grace, and love of God. He not only fears God's punishment; he misses God's closeness, a closeness developed over years of communion from the time of his days as a young shepherd, through his tumultuous rise as king, until the tragedy of his sin. If God receives him back, David knows, he'll have not only forgiveness, but *joy*.

This is one of the "things in heaven" that Claudius' philosophy doesn't dream of. Those who live lives of goodness, holiness, and morality are men and women who know God in a full faith, not in an incomplete attempt to make deals with him, or to pray to him out of the narrow motive of avoiding hell. When they sin—even grievously—their sin is an aberration, not a consistent part of their lives, because they're accustomed to his presence and guidance, and they're so devastated when they lose them that they run back in full repentance. This is one of the reasons why David—the murderer, adulterer, and liar—is called a "man after God's own heart" and why his name is even a prophetic name for Christ himself (Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 34:23-24).

Want to be honest, moral, and free of guilt, and at the same time happy, purposeful, and joyful? Don't just unevenly try to avoid punishment: come to *know God* in his fullness of righteousness, love, grace, and power through submission to his will and word:

*Mark 12:29-30*

*Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.*

*1 Corinthians 8:3*

*But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.*

*John 14:23*

*Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.*

*Gertrude, Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern: The Spiritual Suicides*

*Why, man, they did make love to this employment.*

*. . . . Their defeat*

*Does by their own insinuation grow.*

*'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes*

*Between the pass and fell incensed points*

*Of mighty opposites. (5.2)*

Knowing God requires faith, and faith requires courage and independence. Jesus said that cowards have their place in hell (Revelation 21:8), and you'll only comprehend the full love and greatness of God if you muster the courage to follow him, not others:

*2 Timothy 1:7*

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

Given over to evil and spiritual death as Claudius is, there's another set of characters in *Hamlet* that in some ways are even more hopeless: Gertrude, Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern all die in the play, as does Claudius himself. Ophelia and Gertrude probably commit literal suicide, but in a sense all of them cop out with a weak, suicidal following of a powerful figure to spiritual death. All but Ophelia surrender their wills to Claudius; she timidly bows to the orders of her father and brother to betray Hamlet.

Like "the beauteous queen of Denmark" you may self-destruct by taking whatever course in front of you offers the least resistance. Be pretty, say nice things, have a cushy

bedroom furnished by forgetfulness of the commitments on the far side of the arras and the flattery and comfort on this side. You can hang on to Jesus for a while

*As if increase of appetite had grown  
By what it fed on, and yet, within a month*

abandon him for some smiling villain that offers you an incestuous bed of easy comfort and disgraceful behavior.

Problem is, some honest friend or teacher or preacher will pin you down some day and force you to look at yourself, the worthy Lord you had but threw away, and the wretch you're sleeping with now:

*O Hamlet, speak no more:  
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;  
And there I see such black and grained spots  
As will not leave their tinct. (3.4)*

By the end of the play, Gertrude has the nerve to walk away from Claudius:

*KING  
Gertrude, do not drink.*

*QUEEN  
I will, my lord; I pray you pardon me. (5.2)*

For her, though, courage came too late. Don't make Frailty thy name, whether you're woman or a man: say "I will" do right to whoever is trying to tell you "do not," and you can "be" something infinitely better.

Like Ophelia, you can choose to grow "indeed distract" under the pressure of forces alternately claiming they love you now, or "I did love you once," or "I lov'd you not," or whatever; or else insulting you by advising "Get thee to a nunn'ry [slang term for a brothel]"—as if you're too low for God to be interested in you, pulling you this way and that until you completely lose your spiritual wits and end up suspended on the pendent bough of some faddish philosophy or shallow friendship or money or sports-turned-religion until it breaks and you're pull'd under too.

Instead, why not "be" as one who listens to God as opposed to some low-minded Polonius or even a confused Hamlet, and get thee to God's real kingdom and its people who think above, not below (Colossians 3:2).

Worse even than Gertrude or Ophelia, you can "be" successfully enough as one savvy in worldly acumen and completely devoid of spiritual wisdom. Polonius mouths off lots of proverbs ("Neither a borrower nor a lender be," etc.), which, ironically are some of the most quoted in this oft-quoted play, but his advice is mainly for self-promotion, nothing much beyond that. Jesus said that

*The sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. (Luke 16:8)*

In the end, the sons of this world also end up dead behind some arras. “Be” as one of the sons of light, not one who lurks around in some dark, seamy corner trying to see what dirt others are involved with.

If you’re the hotheaded Laertes type that bursts in saying things like

*To hell allegiance! Vows, to the blackest devil!  
Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!  
I dare damnation.*

every time somebody crosses you or questions your manhood, then you’ll “be” as a prey to every calculating Claudius that knows how to turn you to his own ends. That’s the easiest way to *get* the damnation you dare. Don’t fall for that. When you’re offended and enraged, run *toward* heaven, not *away* from it.

*Ephesians 4:26-27  
Be angry, and yet do not sin; . . . and do not give the devil [like Claudius]  
an opportunity.*

Or you may choose to “be”—if we can call this life-style existence at all—a person of such faceless mediocrity that you lose your own spiritual identity:

*Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.  
Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz. (2.2)*

Do that, and like these two you’ll also be one of “ten thousand lesser things . . . /mortised and adjoin’d” to some “massy wheel” poised at the top of a hill (3.3): when it loses its place and starts to roll down, you’ll go with it, just as R&G did. What massy wheel of a powerful leader, spouse, girlfriend, boyfriend, organization, or shallow religion that’s about to plunge down hill are *you* mortised and adjoin’d to? Paul urged his readers to remain in Christ, who makes free, rather than to a force that enslaves:

*1 Corinthians 6:17  
But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.*

*Galatians 5:1  
Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.*

*Hamlet: “What a piece of work is a man!”*

To give him his due, Hamlet follows a course independent of any of these. He's constitutionally and theologically opposed to doing evil, at least gratuitous evil. And he refuses to follow anyone's lead, even that of a spirit claiming to be the ghost of his father. He's miles ahead of the other characters in the play in perception and courage, and even in spiritual insight.

Still, Hamlet's far from the spiritual certainty and confidence that characterize the great servants of scripture: Abraham, or Job, or David, or Paul. His reflections to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern resemble more the pessimism of the Preacher in Ecclesiastes. His melancholy dirge

*How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
Fie on 't, ah fie, fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden  
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely.*

seems very much in the vein of these memorable words:

*Ecclesiastes 1:2-4, 9  
"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher;  
"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."  
What profit has a man from all his labor  
In which he toils under the sun?  
One generation passes away, and another generation comes;  
But the earth abides forever.  
That which has been is what will be,  
That which is done is what will be done,  
And there is nothing new under the sun.*

But in his happier days, according to Ophelia, Hamlet has been

*Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,*  
and one who sees man as being "in apprehension how like a god" is at least capable, we would hope, of rising to a higher level of faith. Whether Hamlet rises at all has been a question of critical debate for four centuries. Certainly he never comes near the stature of Job, although like Job he struggles admirably against overwhelmingly difficult forces. He's prone to sarcasm, abuse, and ultimately major violence, killing three people with his own hand and arguably having part in the deaths of two others. Hamlet is no spiritual example; but he does reject easy and facile answers, and he ultimately comes to see justice, and his part in it, as an act of providence.

How does Hamlet choose to "be"?

When we first see him, Hamlet's the only person still in mourning for the late king at a gala gathering of the Danish court, and refuses to put off either his mourning



*As he is very potent with such spirits,  
Abuses me to damn me. (2.2)*

One may be out to damn you too. Might be an opposite-gender predator out for your body and soul. Might be a false religious teacher, whom Jesus described with the best metaphor of all:

*Matthew 7:15  
Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.*

It might be a family or school or fraternity or sorority or even church espousing a code that, like Hamlet's Ghost, pressures you to commit a terrible sin for the honor of the group, resulting in dishonor to God. To "be" on the level God wants involves not pietistic naivete, but caution: watch out for red Ghosts, even if they look pale.

"To be" meaningfully requires the courage *not* to act.

The Ghost exerts ever-so-slight pressure on Hamlet by saying

*If thou didst ever thy dear father love—  
. . . Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder. (1.5)*

Yet two months later, he hasn't. Why?

Every cultural expectation is that Hamlet should act for revenge and will. He's the only son of an honorable and wronged father, and only sons are supposed to avenge the honor wronged. Further, immediate pressure is also exerted by the example of two other young men, Fortinbras and Laertes, who're in precisely the same situation as he is: each of them is also the only son of a father violently killed, and neither of them has the slightest compunction against killing his father's slayer or nearest relative. On top of all this, Hamlet *himself* believes he should act: his second and fourth soliloquies are taken up with his guilt from his inaction.

Hamlet beats himself up about his passivity, and considers himself a coward. Whether he really delays at all, and if so precisely *why* he does, was for many years the central question argued by critics of this drama, and no single answer to it ever satisfied them. But at least one influence on Hamlet is his belief that revenge is murder, and therefore in violation of the canon of the Everlasting. In fact, it's this inconsistency between a visit from the spiritual world and his reading of God's law that makes Hamlet question the Ghost's validity.

Whatever Hamlet's motivation, restraint takes courage, often more than action does. God has these traits:

*Jonah 3:10*

*Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.*

As does Christ:

*Isaiah 53:7*

*He was oppressed and He was afflicted,  
Yet He opened not His mouth;  
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,  
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
So He opened not His mouth.*

*Matthew 26:52-53*

*But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?"*

Your challenge on this issue will more likely be in the category of refusing to do what's "cool" when others will snigger at you for your principles.

The larger issue here, however, may not be courage, but vision. In his fourth soliloquy, Hamlet admires Fortinbras for his action in committing his army to battle over a small piece of Polish land. But even as he expresses his admiration, his words reveal how meaningless bravado can be:

*How stand I then,  
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,  
Excitements of my reason and my blood,  
And let all sleep, while, to my shame, I see  
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,  
That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,  
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot  
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,  
Which is not tomb enough and continent  
To hide the slain? O, from this time forth,  
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth! (4.4)*

How stands he then? He stands much better in letting all sleep than Fortinbras, who's responsible for the slaughter of twenty thousand men over a worthless piece of ground. But to recognize this requires a larger, wider vision than Fortinbras ever has or wants, or than Hamlet himself has at this point. Inaction here would be heroic, and more godlike in its scope. Christ restrained himself and his more volatile apostles—Peter, James, and John—not so much from courage *in* the crisis, as from love *above* the crisis. He is the

essence of love and righteousness, and you'll learn to follow him most perfectly when you find yourself thinking—not about how strong you're being—but about how loving you're being.

What gravedigger philosopher have you been listening to lately? The one Hamlet encounters is witty—full of puns, and Hamlet admires his skill with words:

<i>Hamlet</i>	<i>Whose grave's this, sirrah?</i>
<i>First Clown</i>	<i>Mine, sir. . . .</i>
<i>Hamlet</i>	<i>I think it be thine indeed, for thou liest in 't.</i>
<i>First Clown</i>	<i>You lie out on 't, sir, and therefore it is not yours. For my part, I do not lie in 't, and yet it is mine.</i>
<i>Hamlet</i>	<i>Thou dost lie in 't, to be in 't and say 'tis thine. 'Tis for the dead, not for the quick; therefore thou liest.</i>
<i>First Clown</i>	<i>'Tis a quick lie, sir, 'twill away again from me to you.</i>
<i>Hamlet</i>	<i>What man dost thou dig it for?</i>
<i>First Clown</i>	<i>For no man, sir.</i>
<i>Hamlet</i>	<i>What woman, then?</i>
<i>First Clown</i>	<i>For none, neither.</i>
<i>Hamlet</i>	<i>Who is to be buried in 't?</i>
<i>First Clown</i>	<i>One that was a woman, sir; but, rest her soul, she's dead.</i>
<i>Hamlet</i>	<i>How absolute the knave is! We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us. (5.1)</i>

But this glib way of thinking and talking—reminiscent of much of what passes for wise theological and philosophical discussion in our day—won't allow you to *be* in any meaningful way. Even Hamlet's musing about death, and how the dust of Caesar's body might eventually fill a hole in a wall to stop the wind, is not much more positive or capable of answering our yearnings. The word of God, though, can answer them, and will:

*Hebrews 4:12*  
*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

In the end, Hamlet sees himself as something of an agent of providence, no longer acting on his own and therefore free to let events develop as they will:

*There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how they may. (5.2)*

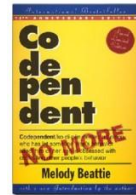
But the “ends” of the play are Hamlet's murder by Laertes and Claudius' treachery, Gertrude's death from drinking the wine Claudius had poisoned to kill Hamlet, Hamlet's

killing of both Laertes and Claudius with a poisoned sword, and Fortinbras' taking over the whole of Denmark. To ascribe all of this to Providence seems dubious at best. The ways of Providence aren't to be picked out of the events of a play or the events of history like so many pieces of thread. They're to be found—to the extent they're shown to us—in the larger picture of God's infinity, his love, and his revealed will. Better to start your attempt to “be” by surrendering to him. If you lose yourself for him—decide “not to be” for yourself as merely a “quintessence of dust,” then you'll “be” for him in a new and transformed life.

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## Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

*Codependent No More: How to Stop Controlling Others and Start Caring for Yourself*, by Melody Beattie, Copyright © 1987, Hazelden Foundation



Once upon a time, a woman moved to a cave in the mountains to study with a guru. She wanted, she said, to learn everything there was to know. The guru supplied her with stacks of books and left her alone so she could study. Every morning, the guru returned to the cave to monitor the woman's progress. In his hand, he carried a heavy wooden cane. Each morning, he asked her the same question: “Have you learned everything there is to know yet?” Each morning, her answer was the same. “No,” she said, “I haven't.” The guru would then strike her over the head with his cane.

This scenario repeated itself for months. One day the guru entered the cave, asked the same question, heard the same answer, and raised his cane to hit her in the same way, but the woman grabbed the cane from the guru, stopping his assault in midair.

Relieved to end the daily batterings but fearing reprisal, the woman looked up at the guru. To her surprise, the guru smiled. “Congratulations,” he said, “you have graduated. You now know everything you need to know.”

“How's that?” the woman asked.

“You have learned that you will never learn everything there is to know,” he replied. “And you have learned how to stop the pain.”

That's what this book is about: stopping the pain and gaining control of your life. Many people have learned to do it. You can too (page 7).

People say there are hundreds of different feelings, ranging from peeved to miffed to exuberant to delighted and so on. Some therapists have cut the list to four: mad, sad, glad, and scared. These are the four primary feeling groups, and all the rest are shades and variations. For instance, lonely and “down in the dumps” would fall in the sad category; anxiety and nervousness would be variations of the scared theme; tickled pink and happy would qualify as glad. You can call them whatever you want; the important idea is to feel them (page 135).

Even if we're not living with a serious problem or seriously ill person, it is still okay to feel anger when it occurs. Anger is one of the many profound effects life has on us. It's one of our emotions. And we're going to feel it when it comes our way – or else

repress it. “I don’t trust people who never get mad. People either get mad, or get even,” says my friend Sharon George, who is a professional in the mental health field (page 145).

As we grow and change, we may want to change our boundaries too. Here are some examples of boundaries common to codependents who are recovering:

I will not allow anyone to physically or verbally abuse me. I will not knowingly believe or support lies.

I will not allow chemical abuse in my home.

I will not allow criminal behavior in my home.

I will not rescue people from the consequences of their alcohol abuse or other irresponsible behavior.

I will not finance a person’s alcoholism or other irresponsible behavior.

I will not lie to protect you or me from your alcoholism.

I will not use my home as a detoxification center for recovering alcoholics.

If you want to act crazy that’s your business, but you can’t do it in front of me. Either you leave or I’ll walk away.

You can spoil your fun, your day, your life – that’s your business – but I won’t let you spoil my fun, my day, or my life (page 200).

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## Smile of the Month

The district attorney was cross-examining the murderess.

“And after you had poisoned the coffee and your husband sat at the breakfast table partaking of the fatal dosage didn't you feel any qualms? Didn't you feel the slightest pity for him knowing that he was about to die and was wholly unconscious of it? As you sat there didn't you feel for him at all?”



“Yes, she answered. There was just one moment when I sort of felt sorry for him.”

“When was that?”

“When he asked for the second cup” (*3,500 Good Jokes for Speakers*, by Gerald F. Lieberman, page 120).

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## Barber Clippings

I am trying to learn about transition during transition. Changes that I pray for, work for, and get excited about can still be challenging.

Gail and I rented an apartment last week. Although we living only twenty-six miles from Hendersonville – a thirty-five minute drive, we wanted to be in the community so we could be involved in the work of the congregation. I have not perfected the new rhythm. On the mornings I go to Hendersonville, I get up at 4:30 a.m. However, I don’t get in bed for the magic eight hours. This should improve after we get

in the apartment. It is 1.4 miles from the building – 3 minutes, 44 seconds driving time. This will give me an extra hour a day.

Interim ministry is not *fill-in preaching*. It involves helping the leadership and the congregation learn from what is happening. We are organizing a *Transition Monitoring Team*. It will consist of twenty members. The elders selected ten. Ten are volunteers. They are to facilitate communication during this process.

We are enjoying the part-time work. I start preaching the first Sunday in January. I appreciate this opportunity.

Jerrie Barber

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John Parker

Paul Seawright and I are working on the final stages of our book on the great British hymns, due out in the spring. This spring I will be on sabbatical from Lipscomb University working on Shakespeare teaching materials for home and private schools with an emphasis on faith and learning.

John H. Parker

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