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# PLANTING & WATERING (1 Corinthians 3:6)

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Dear Friends,

## A WISE PATTERN FOR INTRODUCING CHANGE (2)

One of the joys of writing this newsletter is when it produces positive and thoughtful responses from those who read it and who are in the front-line in church life – in this case actually being the people who introduce changes in the churches which they lead. I want to respond to the helpful response below:

Just on the change thing- I think there is another issue here; who will the change impact? Not all change is of the same kind. If you are changing things in a way that will impact people and they need to embrace it then you need a good percentage “buy in”. If you want to start something which does not require people to change you simply need “permission”. I think a classic example is a midweek programme; you can try and reform what you have or you can start something new alongside the old.

This raises the very important issue of the nature of change because not all change is the same in the way in which it impacts the church and so different types of change may be handled in different ways. Let us suppose that the leaders of a church become aware that a meeting within the church, perhaps for older people, is no longer fruitful – what should we do? Do we need to oppose and get rid of what we disagree with or are there ways round this which may better serve unity within the church?

To remind us Stuart Briscoe’s rules about change were:

- Don’t be hasty in introducing change
- Don’t knock down a fence until you know why it was put up in the first place
- Do present solid biblical and commonsense reasons for change
- Do present change as a proposal, not a fait accompli
- Do allow time for reaction, and don’t fail to listen to objections
- Do invite suggestions, and don’t hesitate to incorporate the best ones
- Do give people a chance to take ownership of the change
- Don’t be disappointed by naysayers, and don’t forget you’re still their pastor

Almost every one of the rules can be applied to such a situation but I think we could also add one of our own which may sound really commonplace but can be worth asking:

- Is the proposed change worth the hassle?

By which I mean, is the unhappiness the change will bring about going to be counter-productive in the church and mean that the problems caused will outweigh the benefits of the change? Or is there another way forward which will simply mean that the meeting you are concerned about will continue and, unless the Lord surprises you which is hardly impossible, eventually wither and die? In some cases it may be right that the closing of a meeting is never actually raised and discussed, except possibly confidentially at a Leaders’ meeting, because even to do that will sometimes create problems that will be extremely unhelpful and potentially cause serious division within a church.

In which case are there creative ways in which you could address the needs that the existing meeting was intended to address and is now not addressing? If it was to provide fellowship and support for older people could they be integrated into house-groups within the church? If it to evangelise is there another way that older people could be reached, for example by running ‘Holiday at Home’ which many churches have done and have found effective? In neither case does this mean that the existing meeting must be continued but you will probably find that addressing the same needs in a different way enables people to have their enthusiasm rekindled.

Often conflict arises because those in leadership become fixated on a problem and consequences come from this:

1. The problem comes to appear to be far bigger than it actually is and so while the problem may actually be having a 5% impact on the church it gets 95% of our attention which means we cannot simply let it go which may sometimes be the wiser path.
2. This imbalance means that we feel we must remove the problem and confront the issue directly rather than work around it until it comes to a natural end which may be the wiser and more helpful path.

Yours in the Lord,

Mike Plant

## BOOKS ABOUT PREACHING

**The Need to Differentiate** Recently I have been discussing preaching with a number of friends. One of the things we have agreed on is that there is a real need to differentiate between two essentially different genres of books about preaching. Another is that what is helpful to a preacher at one stage of his life may be less valuable at another point and that the type of book being read is relevant to this.

If we accept these points we will need to establish which books will be helpful to a preacher as he starts out in preaching, when he will need to establish a workable preaching method, and which books will be helpful in stimulating and encouraging a preacher to keep developing and growing as the years pass.

**Starting Out in Preaching** Obviously we will want to start out with convictions about preaching so books like Lloyd-Jones' 'Preachers and Preaching' are really helpful here. I think the same applies to Tim Keller's 'Preaching – Communicating Faith in an Age of Scepticism' although I will have some further comments to make on this book. If we don't develop strong convictions then the fact that authoritative preaching is profoundly counter-cultural at the present time will mean that we will become discouraged and probably disillusioned.

However if as beginning preachers we are to preach effectively one of the things that is absolutely essential for us to do is to develop a working method for preaching. I feel my own training was better at encouraging convictions on the centrality of preaching than in imparting how it was actually to be done. So I and, as I discovered later, some at least of my contemporaries got out into the ministry and then had to sort out how we were to preach. The books I found most helpful in providing 'how to' on the subject of preaching were Jay Adams' 'Preaching with Purpose' and Haddon Robinson's 'Expository Preaching'. I realize that time moves on and people are now reading different books so I will include one or two later books, and if you have helpful titles please let me know what they are. Derek Newton's 'And the Word became a Sermon' and Alec Motyer's 'Preaching – Simple Teaching on Simply Preaching' (both CFP) are both good examples of this genre.

I think the rule I would want to inculcate is that you must make whatever you read your own and then develop your own method based on what you have read. Some preachers write everything out word for word and others simply outline their flow of thought. Some preachers prepare an outline and then go through it again seeking helpful illustrations but others naturally apply and illustrate as they initially prepare. The simple truth is that you must do what works best for you and, more importantly, for those who listen to you.

A second rule is that you will need to develop what you do as time goes by. This will apply to your preparation and delivery of messages. Regarding delivery of messages I started using a fairly full manuscript but soon found out that I inevitably deviated from it and then found great difficulty getting back to it. So I then moved to more succinct

outline notes. I then decided that preaching with absolutely minimal notes was the best way to communicate and connect with a congregation so for several years my headings were jotted in the margin of a Wide-Margin Bible. I now have an outline which covers a side of A5. Provided someone preaches effectively and holds people's attention, then the details of how they best do it are a matter for them alone and we shouldn't prescribe unnecessary rules.

**Keeping Going in Preaching** While I agree with Tim Keller that learning to preach is best done by doing plenty of it, and probably preaching 3 or 4 times each week is ideal in early ministry, there is no doubt that this kind of workload can too easily lead to over-tiredness and staleness. How do we ensure that we are enthusiastic and stimulated about the task of preaching?

Here are some suggestions:

**Firstly: Listen to Other Preachers** Ideally holiday where you can listen to a preacher who has a really worthwhile ministry. You will learn from what he preaches but also from how he preaches it. Ecclesiastes 12: 9 – 11 makes it clear that there is skills that we are to learn in communicating the truth and we should consciously and conscientiously set out to learn them. The same applies to downloaded MP3 or Videoed sermons – although there is always something lost by not actually being there in the gathering where the sermon was preached.

**Secondly: Go to Conferences** Conferences vary greatly in what they offer but you will be able to appreciate the communication skills of good preachers and be stimulated by their thinking. Ministers need to be refreshed and encouraged and the loneliness and solitary life of the ministry, some of which can be self-inflicted, needs breaking into at some points.

**Thirdly: Read Other People's Sermons** It is good and helpful to read other people's sermons but there are cautions to think about. Effective oral style and written style are not the same and to reproduce the methodology which produces good written sermons and preach them may not be as effective as you would anticipate it would be. However you can learn a lot from observing how a master craftsman works.

**Fourthly: Read Books which Stimulate You to Preach** There is a tremendous range of books which may help you here.

1. These may be how-to books which pick up a particular subject like how to preach the different Biblical Genres. Graham Goldsworthy's 'Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture' surveys the whole field but there are numerous books on preaching which concentrate our attention on the Old Testament or on the Gospels. The longer we are in preaching the longer the list of questions we want answering about our occupation and our passion will become. How for example do we preach Christ and the gospel from different genres of Scripture? How do we move from the apparently remote context of Old Testament Law to our own situation?

2. Often when a prominent minister retires there will be a book published with articles by his friends and other distinguished evangelicals. Some of these are very helpful – one I think particularly valuable is ‘Preach the Word’ which is a volume on expository preaching published in honour of R Kent Hughes. Of course the books and the contributions vary but the essays within them can be very stimulating and helpful – and easier and quicker to read than a whole book.
3. Then there will be books on particular aspects of preaching. Murray Capill’s ‘The Heart is the Target’ is very helpful on the subject of application. Tony Sargent’s ‘The Sacred Anointing’ deals specifically with the preaching of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones but J I Packer writes of it: ‘Preachers will gain from these pages a searching health check, and perhaps a needed course correction.’ One book I particularly find challenging is ‘The Power of Speaking God’s Word – How to Preach Memorable Sermons’ by Wilbur Ellsworth which Phil Swann recommended to me. I’ve read it several times and keep returning to it. It deals with the apparently obvious fact that sermons are spoken not written. I have rarely read anything so challenging and thought provoking.
4. Some books are simply very stimulating and Tim Keller’s ‘Preaching – Communicating Faith in an Age of Scepticism’ fits this description although it is written as a general introduction to preaching with advice on actually preparing a sermon as an appendix. However there is so much in it that moves the heart and instructs the mind that I found it one of the most helpful books on preaching that I have encountered. Obviously there are areas where he is particularly gifted so the chapter on ‘Preaching Christ to the Culture’ is really helpful to people like me who are uneasily conscious we haven’t thought about this enough and aren’t very good at it. However his chapter on ‘Preaching Christ to the Heart’ moved me deeply and I trust would move every preacher to desire to preach Christ more fully and more effectively.

We are tremendously privileged in the riches available to us in the English speaking world every preacher has resources which should enable him to develop real effectiveness in developing and using his gifts.

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## EVEN ANWOTH WAS NOT HEAVEN-EVEN PREACHING WAS NOT CHRIST (2)

Recently dipping into Tony Sargent’s ‘The Sacred Anointing – The Preaching of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ I came across two telling quotations from DMLJ. The first is early in his ministry: ‘I have seen

men who have been indefatigable in the work of the kingdom suddenly laid aside by illness and hardly knowing what to do with themselves.’ The second is from his closing years: ‘our greatest danger is to live on our activity; the ultimate test of a preacher is what he feels like when he cannot preach.’

It is obviously true that such concerns are not just for preachers and that any active Christian faces the same danger of living on his activity and not feeding on Christ. What we need to recognise is that we can unwittingly and unknowingly find motivations and drive in the ministry which have legitimacy but only in the context of also having right motivations and sources of drive and effort in the ministry.

What are the motivations for ministry which we need to watch carefully so that they do not replace right motivation? I have some suggestions although doubtless there are many, many more:

1. **Professionalism** For some people professionalism in the ministry is almost a swearword but it is not that for me. Professionalism at its best is someone having learnt to do a job competently and in a way that is most helpful for those who are being served. So if a minister dresses inappropriately for the setting in which he ministers, fails to connect with his congregation or speaks so quietly that people cannot hear him properly he is not doing his job properly and should learn to do so. Professionalism which means we do a job competently and helpfully is fine. However it is possible for professionalism in the ministry to countenance spiritual coldness and prayerlessness whilst still maintaining a pride in doing our job well. Al Martin has a wonderful illustration for this dangerous spiritual condition. He talks of driving his car on a winter’s day and being warm in the bright sunshine – when he touched the window it was icy cold. Like the window we convey warmth without being warmed ourselves.
2. **Activism** Many of us thrive off being very busy and working hard – even strangely in actually being overworked. We do not thrive on having to stop and think and pray and soon become bored and want to become active again. This may not be a danger to all but generally effective ministers are very hard working and active people. We need to learn to feed off Christ through faith in him rather than feeding off our own busyness and activity. If forced inactivity is hard for you then heed the advice of a church magazine editor who had a period of enforced inactivity because of back problems. He wrote: ‘Sometimes God puts us on our backs so we will look up at him!’ Take it to heart.
3. **Position and Prestige** Some ministers love to be ministers because this gives them the recognition and respect that their hearts long for. I don’t want to deny that ministers should be respected and loved but we have to recognise that many of us, probably all of us ,

are scarred by life's experiences and may well very easily feel rejected and vulnerable. If we are like that then the position of minister and being called 'pastor' or called Mr when everyone else is called by their first name may become something we rely on. We revel in the attention we get when we are preaching and leading services and sadly forget what is central to us. In reality there is really nothing greater than being a child of God and knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God freely given to us in Christ Jesus our Lord. Our trouble is that we actually harm and weaken ourselves through our reliance on other means to boost ourselves and to make ourselves feel loved and appreciated. When you break a leg and due to muscle wastage during convalescence struggle to walk again then it is hard to grit your teeth and manage without wheelchairs and crutches but is it needed for proper long-term functioning. For the Lord to make us face up to our false reliance so we may turn to him may be tough love but it is nonetheless real and genuine love.

Currently I love doing my work as well and effectively as I can and I love being busy. Doubtless I find to be well regarded a support and help, because I certainly find the reverse damaging and helpful. I am aware that a ministry in which we fail to reflect properly on our motivation is a danger and that the subtleness of the temptation to replace pleasure in Christ with pleasure in our ministry and service makes this a real danger. However while I long and pray that I may be as useful as I can be in what remains of my ministry I am increasingly aware that Christ will last forever and my ministry will last for a season. I am also very aware that in eternity that Christ will be all and long to make a beginning of enjoying that reality now.

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## THE OFFER OF THE GOSPEL

Recently reading Sinclair Ferguson's 'The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism and Gospel Assurance' I came across a quotation from Samuel Rutherford which sums up what I believe and which could revolutionise our gospel preaching:

REPROBATES HAVE AS FAIR A WARRANT  
TO BELIEVE IN CHRIST AS THE ELECT  
HAVE.

If you wonder what on earth I am going on about and how I can find this exciting and liberating let me spell it out to you. The whole book is dealing with the nature of the gospel and spelling out its implications. One of questions that arises among Calvinists in particular, but also amongst other Christians, is how the gospel is to be preached and how people are to be encouraged to respond to it. A tension comes not specifically because of a belief in limited atonement (that Christ died for the elect alone) but because of the clear biblical teaching that Christ's death is effective in saving all whom God has chosen for salvation in him. The tension is because in preaching the gospel to everyone we will be preaching to those for whom Christ's death will not be effective in saving

them and who will be lost. I have known a non-Christian adamant in the belief that she couldn't repent and believe because she was non-elect – what could be said to her? Samuel Rutherford is saying that God's offer of salvation is not made to the elect as elect but as sinners who are part of a sinful world. We may tell everyone then that God is willing to save them and that Christ's death is for them.

The language may be antiquated but the truth is vital – this is may be summed up in an appendix to the book which is what Thomas Boston wrote about saving faith:

1. 'That Jesus Christ is yours,' viz. By the deed of grant or gift to mankind lost, or (which is the same thing in other words) by the authentic gospel offer, .... , which offer is the foundation of faith.
2. This act of faith is nothing else but to 'believe God' ..... not as devils believe the same, knowing Christ to be Jesus, a Saviour, but not their Saviour, but with an appropriating persuasion, or special application believing him to be our Saviour.
3. The great sin of unbelief lies, not in not believing that God hath given eternal life to the elect ... but in not believing that to lost mankind, and to themselves in particular, God hath given eternal life by way of a grant, so as they, as well as others, are warranted and welcome to take possession of it.
4. 'That whatsoever Christ did for the redemption of mankind he did for you.'

This isn't universalism because the gift must be accepted. An illustration he uses is a poor man being offered a gift of money – the giver says 'it is yours' but for all that – if it is refused the poor man will still starve, 'and that so much the more miserably, that he hath slighted the offer and refused the gift.'

In hearing the gospel we do not look at our qualifications to receive it but at the promise that is freely given. There can be a tendency to think of preparedness (fitness) for the gospel but that is an illusion – the only preparedness we can have is a sense of need. Joseph Hart sums it up movingly:

Let not conscience make you linger,  
Nor of fitness fondly dream;  
All the fitness He requireth,  
Is to feel your need Him:  
This he gives you;  
Tis the Spirit's rising beam.

I am very conscious I am just touching on a huge subject and heartily recommend this book for all gospel preachers.

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## MIKE'S ITINERARY

April 10<sup>th</sup> Neither Kellet am + pm  
April 17<sup>th</sup> Orange Street am + 3pm  
April 24<sup>th</sup> St Stephen's am  
May 1<sup>st</sup> Cannon Park am + pm  
May 8<sup>th</sup> Morley am and Cannon Park pm  
May 22<sup>nd</sup> Gendros am + pm  
May 29<sup>th</sup> Hyde am and Cannon Park pm