

**THE TRELLIS  
AND THE VINE**

THE MINISTRY MIND-SHIFT THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

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AND TONY PAYNE**

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While we're acknowledging the friends and partners who

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TP, August 2009.

# The trellis and the vine

We have two trellises in our backyard.

The one attached to the back wall of the garage is a very fine piece of latticework. I wish I could claim it as my own creation, but I cannot. It is sturdy and dependable and neatly designed, and the federation-green paintwork has been kept fresh. It lacks only one thing: a vine.

I imagine there once was a vine, unless the construction of the trellis was one of those handyman tasks that took so long that, in the end, no-one got around to planting something to grow on it. Someone certainly put a lot of time and care into building it. It's almost a work of art. But if there was ever a vine that laced itself around this beautiful trellis, there is now no trace of it.

The other trellis leans up against the side fence and is barely visible beneath a flourishing jasmine vine. With some fertilizer and an occasional watering, the jasmine keeps thrusting out new shoots, winding its way across, up and over the fence, putting out its delicate white flowers as the warmth of spring approaches. Some pruning is needed every now and then, and some weeding around the base. I've also had to spray it once or twice to stop caterpillars from feasting on the juicy green leaves. But the jasmine just keeps growing.

It's hard to tell what condition the trellis is in under the jasmine, but at the few points where it is still visible, I can see

that it hasn't been painted in a long time. At one end, it has been pried off the fence by the insistent fingers of the jasmine, and although I have tried to re-attach it more than once, it is useless. The jasmine has taken over. I know I will have to do something about this in the long term, because eventually the weight of the jasmine will pull the trellis off the fence altogether and the whole thing will collapse.

I have often thought of taking a cutting from the jasmine and seeing if it will grow on the beautiful but vacant trellis on the garage, although it almost seems a shame to cover it up.

### **How trellis work takes over**

As I have sat on my back verandah and observed the two trellises, it has occurred to me more than once that most churches are a mixture of trellis and vine. The basic work of any Christian ministry is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of God's Spirit, and to see people converted, changed and grow to maturity in that gospel. That's the work of planting, watering, fertilizing and tending the vine.

However, just as some sort of framework is needed to help a vine grow, so Christian ministries also need some structure and support. It may not be much, but at the very least we need somewhere to meet, some Bibles to read from, and some basic structures of leadership within our group. All Christian churches, fellowships or ministries have some kind of trellis that gives shape and support to the work. As the ministry grows, the trellis also needs attention. Management, finances, infrastructure, organization, governance—these all become more important and more complex as the vine grows. In this sense, good trellis workers are invaluable, and all growing ministries need them.

What's the state of the trellis and the vine at your church?

Perhaps trellis work has taken over from vine work. There are committees, structures, programs, activities and fund-

raising efforts, and many people put lots of time into keeping them all going, but the actual work of growing the vine falls to a very few. In fact, perhaps the only time real vine-growing work happens is in the regular Sunday service, and then only by the pastor as he preaches his sermon.

If this is your church, then there's every chance the vine is looking a bit tired. The leaves are less green, the flowers are less profuse, and it has been some time since any new shoots have been seen. The pastor keeps working away manfully, feeling overworked, under-appreciated and a little discouraged that his faithful vine work each Sunday doesn't seem to bear much fruit. In fact, he often feels he would like to do more to help and encourage others to be involved in vine work, the work of watering and planting and helping people to grow in Christ. But the sad truth is that most of the trellis work also seems to fall to him to organize—rosters, property and building issues, committees, finances, budgets, overseeing the church office, planning and running events. There's just no time.

And that's the thing about trellis work: it tends to take over from vine work. Perhaps it's because trellis work is easier and less personally threatening. Vine work is personal and requires much prayer. It requires us to depend on God, and to open our mouths and speak God's word in some way to another person. By nature (by sinful nature, that is) we shy away from this. What would you rather do: go to a church working bee and sweep up some leaves, or share the gospel with your neighbour over the back fence? Which is easier: to have a business meeting about the state of the carpet, or to have a difficult personal meeting where you need to rebuke a friend about his sinful behaviour?

Trellis work also often looks more impressive than vine work. It's more visible and structural. We can point to something tangible—a committee, an event, a program, a budget, an

infrastructure—and say that we have achieved something. We can build our trellis till it reaches to the heavens, in the hope of making a name for ourselves, but there may still be very little growth in the vine.

The concentration on trellis work that is so common in many churches derives from an institutional view of Christian ministry. It is very possible for churches, Christian organizations and whole denominations to be given over totally to maintaining their institution. One church I know of has 23 different organizations and structures functioning weekly, all of which are listed on the weekly bulletin. All of these different activities started as good ideas for growth in church life at some point in the past, and they certainly result in lots of people being around the church building during the week doing lots of things. But how much actual vine work is taking place? How many people are hearing God's word and by the power of his Spirit growing in knowledge and godliness? In this particular church, the answer is very few.

Whatever the reason, there is no doubt that in many churches, maintaining and improving the trellis constantly takes over from tending the vine. We run meetings, maintain buildings, sit on committees, appoint and look after staff, do administration, raise money, and generally tick the boxes that our denomination wants ticked.

Somehow, this tends to happen particularly as we get older. We start to tire of vine work, and take on more and more organizational responsibilities. Sometimes this may even be because we are perceived to be successful vine-growers, and so we get out of vine-growing and into telling other people about vine-growing.

But it's even worse than that when we pause to consider the commission that God has given all of us as his people. The parable of the trellis and the vine is not just a picture of the

struggles of my own local church; it's also a picture of the progress of the gospel in my street and suburb and city and world.

### **The vine and the commission**

In 1792, a young man named William Carey published a booklet entitled *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*. In it, Carey argued *against* the prevailing view of the time that the Great Commission of Matthew 28 had been fulfilled by the first apostles and was not applicable to the church in succeeding generations. For Carey, this was an abdication of our responsibility. He saw the Great Commission as a duty and privilege for all generations, and thus began the modern missionary movement.

For most of us, this is no longer controversial. Of course we should be sending out missionaries to the ends of the earth and seeking to reach the whole world for Christ. But is that really what Matthew 28 is calling upon us to do? Does the commission also apply to our own church, and to each Christian disciple? These famous verses are worth a closer look.

When the slightly overwhelmed disciples saw the risen Jesus on the mountain in Galilee, they fell down before him with a mixture of awe and doubt in their hearts. And when Jesus came and spoke to them, his words would have done nothing to calm them down.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”, he tells them (Matt 28:18). This astonishing claim has overtones of Daniel 7 about it. When “one like a son of man” comes into the presence of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7, he is given “dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” (Dan 7:13-14).

“This is who I am”, Jesus is telling his disciples. And for the past three years, the disciples have seen it for themselves. Jesus has walked among them as the powerful Son of Man, healing

the sick, raising the dead, teaching with authority, forgiving sins, and saying things like this:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” (Matt 25:31-32)

And now, in the presence of the Son of Man on the hillside in Galilee, they are seeing the fulfilment of Daniel’s vision. Here is the Man before whom all peoples, from every nation and tongue, will bow.

It is on this basis—the unique, supreme and worldwide authority of the risen Son of Man—that Jesus commissions his disciples to make disciples of all nations. Sometimes our translations may give the impression that ‘go’ is the emphasis of the command, but the main verb of the sentence is ‘make disciples’, with three subordinate participles hanging off it: going (or ‘as you go’), baptizing and teaching.

‘Baptizing’ and ‘teaching’ are the means by which the disciples are to be made. Whatever else baptism might symbolize or involve, here it refers to the initiation of disciples into repentance and submission to the authoritative Jesus, the reigning Lord of the world.

The ‘teaching’ that the disciples are to do reproduces what Jesus himself has done with them. He has been their ‘teacher’ (cf. Matt 12:38; 19:16; 22:16, 24, 36; 26:18), and as Jesus has taught them they have grown in knowledge and understanding. The disciples are now, in turn, to make new disciples by teaching them to obey everything commanded by their Master. This ‘making-disciples-by-teaching’ corresponds to preaching the gospel in the parallel mission mandate in Luke, where Jesus says “repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his

name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

But what about the ‘going’? Traditionally (or at least after Carey), this has been read as a missionary mandate, a charter for sending out gospel workers to the world. However, this can lead local churches to think that they are obeying the Great Commission if they send money (and missionaries) overseas. But the emphasis of the sentence is not on ‘going’. In fact, the participle is probably better translated “when you go” or “as you go”. The commission is not fundamentally about mission out there somewhere else in another country. *It’s a commission that makes disciple-making the normal agenda and priority of every church and every Christian disciple.*

The authority of Jesus is not limited in any respect. He is the Lord and Master of my street, my neighbours, my suburb, my workmates, my family, my city, my nation—and yes, the whole world. We would not ever want to stop sending out missionaries to preach the gospel in places where it is yet to be heard, but we must also see disciple-making as our central task in our homes and neighbourhoods and churches.

Jesus’ instruction to “make disciples” in Matthew 28:19 is not just a specific word to the apostles gathered around him at the time of his final resurrection appearance. The first disciples were instructed to “make disciples” of others. And because these newly-made disciples were under the universal lordship of Christ, and were to obey everything that Jesus had taught, they fell under exactly the same obligation as the original twelve to get on with the job of announcing the lordship of Christ; as did their hearers, and so on “to the end of the age”.

Don Carson concludes that “the injunction is given at least to the Eleven, but to the Eleven in their own role as disciples (v. 16). Therefore they are paradigms for all disciples ... It is binding on *all* Jesus’ disciples to make others what they themselves are—disciples of Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

To be a disciple is to be called to make new disciples. Of course, Christians will receive and exercise differing gifts and ministries (more on this in the chapters that follow). But because all are disciples of Christ, standing in relation to him as teacher and pupil, master and follower, all are disciple-makers.

Thus the goal of Christian ministry is quite simple, and in a sense measurable: are we making and nurturing genuine disciples of Christ? The church always tends towards institutionalism and secularization. The focus shifts to preserving traditional programs and structures, and the goal of discipleship is lost. The mandate of disciple-making provides the touchstone for whether our church is engaging in Christ's mission. Are we making genuine disciples of Jesus Christ? Our goal is not to make church members or members of our institution, but genuine disciples of Jesus.

Or to return to our parable—our goal is to grow the vine, not the trellis.



THE IMAGE OF THE TRELLIS AND THE VINE RAISES ALL THE fundamental questions of Christian ministry:

- What is the vine for?
- How does the vine grow?
- How does the vine relate to my church?
- What is vine work and what is trellis work, and how can we tell the difference?
- What part do different people play in growing the vine?
- How can we get more people involved in vine work?
- What is the right relationship between the trellis and the vine?

In the following chapters, we will be suggesting that there is an urgent need to answer these questions afresh. Confusion

reigns. Everyone wants their churches to grow, but most are unsure how and where to start. Church growth gurus come and go. Ministry methods fall in and out of favour like women's fashion. We troop from one new technique to the next, hoping that this one (at last!) may be the secret to success.

Even among those godly, faithful pastors who avoid the trendsetting fads of Christian marketing, there is confusion—most especially between what Christian ministry is in the Bible, and what Christian ministry has become in the particular tradition or denomination of which they are part. We are all captive to our traditions and influenced by them more than we realize. And the effect of tradition and long practice is not always that some terrible error becomes entrenched; more often it is that our focus shifts away from our main task and agenda, which is disciple-making. We become so used to doing things one way (often for good reason at first) that important elements are neglected and forgotten, to our cost. We become imbalanced, and then wonder why we go in circles.

#### **Endnote**

1. DA Carson, 'Matthew' in Frank E Gaebelein (ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1984, p. 596.



# Ministry mind-shifts

Over the course of this book, we are going to suggest that most Christian churches today need to undertake a radical re-evaluation of what Christian ministry really is—what its aims and goals are, how it proceeds, and what part we all play in its exercise. In the chapters that follow (particularly chapters 3-5), we will be digging into the Scriptures to lay the foundations for this re-think, and to argue for its necessity and urgency.

However, before we make the argument in detail, we thought it would be worth providing a glimpse of where we're heading. We will be arguing that structures don't grow ministry any more than trellises grow vines, and that most churches need to make a conscious shift—away from erecting and maintaining structures, and towards *growing people who are disciple-making disciples of Christ*.

This may require some radical, and possibly painful, changes of mindset. Here are some examples of the mental shifts we might need to make. Each of them touches on a different aspect of structural thinking that inhibits people ministry. Once we make the transition, however, this will open up new vistas for ministry and ministry training.

## 1. From running programs to building people

When planning ministry for the year ahead, there are two

broad approaches we could adopt. One is to consider existing church programs (such as Sunday meetings, youth work, children's ministry and Bible study groups) and then work out how such programs can be maintained and improved. The other approach is to start with the people in your church, having no particular structures or programs in mind, and then consider who are these people God has given you, how you can help them grow in Christian maturity, and what form their gifts and opportunities might take.

This is a revolutionary mind-shift: when we think about our people, it moves our focus to putting them first and building ministries around them. In the course of doing so, it may become apparent that some programs no longer serve any worthwhile purpose. It may also become apparent that a program is no longer viable because the people who once made it work are no longer available. So the program can be done away with. This might be painful for those attached to them (it takes guts to shoot a dead horse!), but new ministries will begin to arise as you train members of your congregation to use their various gifts and opportunities.

## **2. From running events to training people**

Churches typically adopt an 'event-based' approach to evangelism. They use a variety of events to proclaim the gospel: church meetings, guest services, mission meetings, men's breakfasts, women's suppers, and many other creative gatherings. In order to appear successful, they keep on running more and more of these events.

However, at one level, this tactic is failing. In our post-Christian, secular age, most unbelievers will never come to our events. Even our members are patchy in their attendance. The 'event' tactic relies partly on the appeal and gifts of a guest speaker, and this means we're limited by the availability of such

people in what we can run. For the church pastor, and for key lay people, setting up and running events can end up dominating life, with all our time being spent on getting people to come along to things. Yet, despite the work they involve, in some respects events are a centralizing tactic: they're convenient and easy to control for the leader/organizer, but they require unbelievers to come to us on our own terms. In the end, an 'event approach' distracts us from both training and evangelism.

If we want our strategy to be people-focused, we should concentrate on *training*, which increases the number and effectiveness of gospel communicators (i.e. people who can speak the good news both in personal conversations and in public settings). This sort of strategy involves identifying and equipping more speakers, thereby increasing the number, variety and effectiveness of events. In addition, you can use events to train your workers. If all the members of your congregation are given the opportunity to be trained in evangelism, more unbelievers will attend our events.

But please note: this is a chaotic strategy—an inconvenient strategy. It takes time to train evangelists. It takes time for young evangelists to build their own ministries as they go about preaching the word. It will mean we will have to relinquish control of our programs for, as the gospel is preached, Christ will gather his people into all kinds of fellowships that may or may not fit into our neat structures.

### **3. From using people to growing people**

Volunteers are the ones who maintain and expand church programs. Under God, volunteers are the lifeblood of our churches: they pour their evenings and weekends into Sunday meetings, children's work, youth group, Bible studies, committees, looking after church property, and so on. The danger of having such willing volunteers is that we use them, exploit

them and forget to train them. Then they burn out, their ministry is curtailed, and we find that we have failed to develop their Christian life and ministry potential. Instead of using our volunteers, we should consider how we can encourage them and help them grow in the knowledge and love of Christ, because service flows from Christian growth and not growth from service.

For example, one committed, keen couple I know served faithfully as Bible study leaders for six consecutive years, while also juggling significant study and work commitments. In the seventh year, with the encouragement of their pastor, they took a ‘sabbatical’—a break from leading Bible study to refresh themselves; to simply belong to a group and recharge their batteries. After their year off, they plunged back into leadership again.

We need to care for people and help them to flourish and grow in ministry, not squeeze them dry in the interests of keeping our programs running.

#### **4. From filling gaps to training new workers**

One of the immediate pressures upon ministers is to fill gaps left by leaders who leave our programs. But if we just focus on gap filling, we’ll never move out of maintenance mode: we’re just keeping existing ministries afloat instead of branching out into new ones.

We should start with the people that God has given us, not our programs. We need to consider each person as a gift from Christ to our congregation, and equip them for ministry accordingly. So instead of thinking, “Who can fill this gap in our personnel?”, perhaps the question we need to consider is “What ministry could this member exercise?”

We could recount many examples from our own experience of where this has and hasn’t happened. Take Sarah, for example, an elite sportswoman converted as an adult through sports ministry. Sarah was well followed-up and established in her faith,

and her church provided a strong and edifying environment. What's more, Sarah had a passion for Christ and for evangelism, and had a large network of non-Christian friends, teammates and acquaintances with whom to share the gospel. However, instead of training and encouraging Sarah to pursue this evangelistic ministry, the church strongly urged her to become a member of the church management committee, because there was a gap and a need, and Sarah was enthusiastic and willing to help. The church was gap-filling, not building ministry around the gifts and opportunities of people.

A more positive example was Dave, a young man who suffered from schizophrenia. Dave was a very intelligent and able person who loved the Lord, but his illness meant that nearly every common avenue for ministry was closed to him. He didn't have the mental stability or strength to lead Bible studies or follow up new Christians or contribute to other church events or programs. However, in his lucid and rational periods, Dave had enormous potential for evangelism and ministry among his many friends and contacts who also suffered from mental or emotional disorders. His pastor trained and encouraged Dave in this ministry, and had other Christian friends support him, back him up, and help him with follow-up. It was a marvellous instance of seeing the ministry potential of a unique person, and helping and equipping him to make disciples.

If we begin viewing things in these terms, it will open up new areas of ministry centred on the particular gifts and opportunities of our members. Instead of filling a vacancy on a committee, one of our members might start a ministry to his/her ethnic community, or a Bible study group in his/her workplace. Furthermore, focusing on people will help us to discover and train potential candidates for full-time word ministry (more on this in chapters 9 and 10).

## **5. From solving problems to helping people make progress**

A common feeling among Christians is that they only get prayed for and visited when they're sick or out of work. Of course, our churches will always contain people with problems; God's people have many needs, just like the rest of the population. And as ministers of Christ, we need to love and welcome everyone, whatever their individual needs and situations, and not dismiss their problems with cheap words (Jas 2:14-17).

However, we don't want to create the kind of ministry environment where the only way people can relate to one another is by discussing their problems. If ministry in our churches is based on reacting to the problems people raise, many will receive no attention because they are more reserved in sharing their problems. The goal is to move people forward in holy living and knowledge of God, whether they are facing problems or not; this is why we proclaim Christ, "warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ" (Col 1:28).

So ask yourself whether your ministries are reactive or proactive. If you are mostly reacting to people's problems, you won't have the energy to put into proactive training and growing new work. If you take a problem approach to ministry, people with the most critical needs will dominate your programs, and these needs will wear you out and exhaust you, and reduce the effectiveness of your other ministries.

## **6. From clinging to ordained ministry to developing team leadership**

Denominations are quite right to ordain or accredit ministers to be faithful shepherds of Christ's flock. However, there are a number of ways in which the practice of ordination hinders ministry training in churches. Firstly, if the only 'real' ministers

are people ordained by the denomination, our churches will not have any incentive to encourage others who are not ordained to test their gifts of preaching and teaching. Secondly, if the policy is limited to filling ministerial gaps in vacant churches, why look for evangelists and church-planters who could grow new work? Thirdly, we will tend to select people for training who fit the mould of the ordained minister, ignoring the fact that some gifted people may not fit comfortably in traditional ministries, and that their gifts could potentially lead them to break new ground for the gospel outside existing denominational structures.

In traditional thinking, the ordained minister of a church is expected to exercise all the public ministries of word and sacrament, pastoral visiting, evangelism, school Scripture classes and more. But if we are going to focus on training, this implies team ministry. Church members are often opposed to team ministry for a variety of reasons. Firstly, training appears elitist as only the few are selected. Secondly, some Christians only want the ‘real’ minister to preach or visit, and are not happy when his place is taken by a trainee or lay minister. Finally, the time that the minister spends training the team is often perceived as a distraction from his pastoral duties. However, the benefits of team ministry are many, so it’s well worth freeing up our ministers so they have the time and space to build themselves a team.

## **7. From focusing on church polity to forging ministry partnerships**

Issues concerning how churches are governed often dominate local ministry. At one level this is to be expected, because all denominations are partially defined by their distinctive understanding of church government, and it’s important for a church to be faithful to its evangelical heritage. However,

inflexible commitment to a particular polity can destroy training. Churches can find themselves spending too much time debating questions like “Where do trainee ministers and ministry teams fit into our structures? Are they elders, deacons, ministers or members of the church committee?” It’s probably more helpful to think of these things in terms of ministry partnerships rather than political structures.

Another way to think about it is that elders and congregational leaders should be active vine-growers themselves before we consider giving them responsibility for oversight. They should be the kind of people who are reading the Bible one to one with others and sharing Christ with their neighbours.

## **8. From relying on training institutions to establishing local training**

Bringing together gifted and scholarly pastors to provide rigorous theological and academic training in a college setting is a wise strategy. This sort of training is essential for both lay and ordained ministers. But a college cannot be expected to provide total training in the character, conviction and skill that is required for ministers and co-workers. Much of this ought to be done through training ‘on the job’ in church life. So it’s ideal if education in colleges and training in churches can work together hand in hand. This may not always be possible concurrently. For example, in our part of the world it is common for formal theological education to be ‘sandwiched’ between a ministry apprenticeship before college and in-service practical training after college. (For more on local ministry apprenticeship, see chapter 11.)

There are also lots of opportunities for churches to integrate formal or external training into their regular training and growing of people—for example, participating in a distance education program to train lay people in theology alongside other training.

## **9. From focusing on immediate pressures to aiming for long-term expansion**

We are easily consumed by keeping ministry programs running. The urgent crowds out the important, and everyone thinks that their agenda should be dealt with first. We know that training leaders will help to maintain and expand our ministries, but it takes all our energies just to keep the wheels turning. However, if we take our focus off our immediate pressures and aim for long-term expansion, the pressures we face will become less immediate and may eventually disappear.

## **10. From engaging in management to engaging in ministry**

Ministers do need to be responsible managers of the resources entrusted to them, and therefore they will always have a certain amount of administration to do. But the trap for them is that they become so caught up in the management exercise, they weaken the ministry of teaching and training. How many hours per week does your minister spend attending committees, managing property, organizing programs or conducting church business? Could you train others to take over some of this work? Could your minister be relieved of some of his administrative workload so that he can devote time to training one or two new leaders?

## **11. From seeking church growth to desiring gospel growth**

Once we've spent time and resources training our leaders, we soon fear losing them. However, one of our goals in training people should be to encourage some of them into further formal training in theology so that they might progress into denominational or missionary ministry. We must be exporters of trained people instead of hoarders of trained people. In a

resource-poor church, this can be very hard to do. Even in churches with many leaders, regular turnover and re-training is demanding. But our view of gospel work must be global as well as local: the goal isn't church growth (in the sense of our local church expanding in numbers, budget, church-plants and reputation) but gospel growth. If we train and send workers into new fields (both local and global), our local ministry might not grow numerically but the gospel will advance through these new ministers of the word.



LET US TRY TO ILLUSTRATE WHAT THESE MIND-SHIFTS MEAN IN practice with just one nitty-gritty example.

Imagine a reasonably solid Christian said to you after church one Sunday morning, “Look, I’d like to get more involved here and make a contribution, but I just feel like there’s nothing for me to do. I’m not on the ‘inside’; I don’t get asked to be on committees or lead Bible studies. What can I do?”

What would you immediately think or say? Would you start thinking of some event or program about to start that they could help with? Some job that needed doing? Some ministry that they could join or support?

This is how we are used to thinking about the involvement of church members in congregational life—in terms of jobs and roles: usher, Bible study leader, Sunday School teacher, treasurer, elder, musician, song leader, money counter, and so on. The implication of this way of thinking for congregation members is clear: if all the jobs and roles are taken, then there’s really nothing for me to do in this church. I’m reduced to being a passenger. I’ll just wait until I’m asked to ‘do something’. The implication for the pastoral staff is similar: getting people involved and active means finding a job for them to do. In fact, the church growth gurus say that giving someone a job to do

within the first six months of their joining your church is vital for them to feel like they belong.

However, if the real work of God is people work—the prayerful speaking of his word by one person to another—then the jobs are never all taken. The opportunities for Christians to minister personally to others are limitless.

So you could pause, and reply to your friend, “See that guy sitting over there on his own? That’s Julie’s husband. He’s on the fringe of things here; in fact, I’m not really sure whether he’s crossed the line yet and become a Christian. How about I introduce you to him, and you arrange to have breakfast with him once a fortnight and read the Bible together? Or see that couple over there? They are both fairly recently converted, and really in need of encouragement and mentoring. Why don’t you and your wife have them over, get to know them, and read and pray together once a month? And if you still have time, and want to contribute some more, start praying for the people in your street, and then invite them all to a barbeque at your place. That’s the first step towards talking with them about the gospel, or inviting them along to something.”

Of course, there’s every chance that the person will then say, “But I don’t know how to do those things! I’m not sure I’d know what to say or where to start.”

To which you reply, “Oh that’s okay. Let’s start meeting together, and I can train you.”

Now if you’re a pastor reading this book, your reaction at this point might be something like this: “Okay, right. Now I really know these guys are living in a dream. In their fantasy world, I’m supposed to have time to meet individually with all the members of my congregation, and personally train and mentor them so they can in turn personally minister to others. Have they seen my diary? Do they have *any* idea of the pressure I’m under? If that’s what they mean by a mind-shift, it sounds

more like a brain-explosion to me!”

Well, we haven’t seen your diary, but if it’s anything like most pastors’ diaries, we know very well the pressure you’re under. And in due course, we’ll get to the nitty-gritty of how these sorts of mind-shifts play out in the day-to-day life of real churches.

However, there is some vital biblical work to be done first. To understand the scriptural foundations for re-focusing our ministries around people rather than structures, we have to go back and re-examine our core assumptions about what God is doing in our world, how he is doing it, who he is using to do it, and what it all means for Christian discipleship and ministry.