

The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything

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Colin Marshall and Tony Payne. *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything*. Matthias Media, 2009. 196 pages.

It is too easy to lose focus, to become distracted, to forget why we committed our lives to pastoral ministry. We can so easily become overwhelmed by the daily tasks of ministry. At most churches there are emails to return, there are services to plan, there are reports to read, there are letters to write. Some of this work is hugely important. It is difficult to oversee a church without doing the work of administration. Still, I don't know any pastor who signed up for this ministry because he wanted to see letterhead and logos change—he committed his life to the ministry of the church because he hoped to see lives change!

Colin Marshall and Tony Payne of Matthias Media (an excellent, Christian, Australian publishing company) have given the church a great gift with their recent book, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything*. Here, they clarify the goal of Christian ministry. It is, they argue, both simple and measurable: "Are we making and nurturing genuine disciples of Christ?" (14) Too many Christian workers are involved in "trellis" work—building the structure of the church, when they should be involved in "vine" work—personally investing in the lives of others.

Don't we know this? I've never met a pastor who intentionally puts programs in front of people. Then why should Christian leaders read this book? Here are five reasons:

1. We are too tempted to create flash-in-the-pan growth. Well-intentioned attempts to bring people into the church can quickly distract us from the more laborious work of training disciples who will go into the world and make disciples. It is not always easy to find a balance between "bring them in" and "grow them up." Certainly both can take place. But Marshall and Payne are right when they argue that it is easier to plan an evangelistic event than work to make the culture of a church more evangelistic.

2. Because in an attempt to plug people in we can wear them out. Marshall and Payne mince no words: "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" (20). Are you sure you never do this? Let me ask you a question: do you love the members of your church for what they do: help in the nursery, keep problems away from you, go-with-the-flow, or for who they are: sinners saved by the blood of the Lamb?

3. We talk more about church growth than gospel growth. Every pastor needs to be convinced that God will not ultimately judge the success of our ministry on the size of our church but on the spiritual vitality of the sheep in our care. "We talk these days about church growth. And when we think about our lack of growth, we think of the lack of growth of our particular congregation: the stagnation or decline in numbers, the wobbly state of the finances, and possibly the looming property issues" (37). These are real problems facing most pastors. But how often do we fail to measure gospel growth: the spiritual fruit growing in people's lives, an increased passion for God, a growing fidelity to truth, a renewed commitment to evangelism?

4. We are tempted to withdraw into public ministry when we should persevere in private ministry. Perhaps this sounds strange, but the reality is pastors can hide behind public preaching and teaching just as they hide behind a stack of papers in their office. If the pastor doesn't give himself to training others he runs the risk of creating a church that is merely a reflection of his own personality. Marshall and Payne put it this way:

Perhaps the most striking disadvantage of this way of thinking about ministry is that it feeds upon and encourages the culture of 'consumerism' that is already rife in our culture. It

perfectly fits the spirit of our age whereby we pay trained professionals to do everything for us rather than do it ourselves (95).

What a danger! Public preaching and teaching is the God-ordained means of growing the church. But it does not replace every pastor's responsibility to see every member involved in doing the work of the Lord. Yes, the pastor must preach. "But crucially, the pastor is also a trainer. His job is not just to provide spiritual services, nor is it his job to do all of the ministry. His task is to teach and train his congregation, by his word and his life, to become disciple-making disciples of Jesus" (99).

5. We want to make disciples but may not always know how. Discipling is better "caught" than "taught." Still, if anyone can teach discipling it's the people at Matthias Media. Materials like Two Ways to Live and Just for Starters are fantastic, easy-to-use, theologically rich resources that pastors can implement in one-on-one or small group environments.

Every pastor, every Christian is faced with the question, "how should I best use my time?" There is no simple answer, it will differ from person to person. Still, Marshall and Payne used Scripture to remind me how valuable it is to meet regularly with new and growing believers who can eventually turn around and meet with others. They explained the importance of giving over a portion of my schedule to discipling individuals and small groups. It may take time for me to see the fruit, but I have every reason to be confident that it is time well spent.

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