

Pastor's Corner: 1-26-2019 – Swing and a Miss

Sometimes you have what seems like a good idea floating your way so you step up to the plate and swing for the fences. Once in a while you'll hit a home run and everyone will cheer, but more often than not it'll be a big ol' whiff (and maybe some boo's). Such was the case a couple weeks ago when I wrote a Pastor's Corner suggesting that there might be a better way to approach new ideas that come to the board. The feedback from this little article was quite strong and it has become clear that my thoughts produced more heat than light.

I do take some of the blame for the strong reactions. Communication is a tricky thing. People who study these things will tell you that there are several stops on the communication journey where a message can be derailed.

The first stop is when the communicator tries to take an idea and put it into words. Ideas and images that are fully formed in our mind may not make it onto the page or out of our mouths quite like we had planned. Sit down and try to describe on paper the sights, sounds, and smells of your childhood home and you'll see what I mean. Words are clumsy things and it is not uncommon for the words we say or write to be imperfect reflections of what we were thinking. Such was the case with the Pastor's Corner. I had an idea in my head and when I tried to write it down it didn't come out quite like I thought it had. Communication breakdown number 1. My bad, I'll one that one.

The second stop is when the receiver hears or reads the message. There are times when you might not hear clearly or don't read carefully and end up receiving the wrong message. This is aptly illustrated in the "telephone" game where one person whispers a message to someone who then whispers it to someone else who in turn passes it on to another. On and on it goes until you get to the end when the last person reveals the message and what started as "I'd like a piece of chocolate cake" has become "purple sprinkles cartoon bisquick."

The third stop is when the receiver translates what they read or heard into thoughts in their own head. In order to do this translation they pass the message through their own filters and experiences. It's easy for those filters to dramatically change the intent of the delivered message so that what they receive is not at all what was intended to be communicated. The outcome is that you have situations where someone says, "you said so and so" and you just scratch your head and say, "I've never even thought that, let alone said it." There's a good chance you didn't actually say the thing, but that's what they heard after they passed your words through their filters.

Incidentally, this is why it's important in Bible study to try and really figure out what the original author intended and how the original audience would have understood the message. When we receive communication, we should try to really listen to what the other person is saying – from their perspective. Make sure you understand their intent before you comment.

With all these stops in the communication journey it's a wonder that we're ever able to get our point across.

Now that that lengthy pre-amble is out there I'd like to revisit the ideas presented in the Pastor's Corner from a couple weeks back to see if I can clarify a few things.

1. I wasn't intending to single out any individual or cabal on the board that wields some kind of despotic power over the church. In my mind I was making an observation about how boards work – in general. In my mind I was trying to illustrate how the process we follow (as a denomination) tends to stifle creativity and collaboration. I think that the negative experience some people have when bringing ideas to a church board is often a process problem, not a people problem. My apologies to those who thought it was a personal attack. That wasn't in mind when I sat down to write.

2. I offered a suggestion for a different kind of process. I suggested that we should assume an idea presented by our members had Godly origins and then accept the idea before moving on to discussion. I see now that this was poorly conceived and needs clarification. First of all, when I say we

should consider that an idea comes from God I am talking about ideas presented in good faith that are designed to build up the church. Say someone has an idea for a new ministry or a suggestion for how we could better care for our shut-in's. That's the kind of idea I think we can assume is from God. I'm not talking about hair-brained, wild or stupid ideas. Or negative ones. I'm just talking about creative ideas that come from Godly people that might help expand our mission or improve our effectiveness. I don't think it's a stretch to believe that God will speak to members of his body by inspiring them with an idea (even if that idea seems half-baked or incomplete when presented).

Second, I don't think voting yes and then moving to discussion is a good idea (which is what I originally suggested). That was poorly thought out on my part. In a collaborative environment that kind of weakness would be quickly identified in a positive way (hopefully with no hurt feelings).

3. I think our Bismarck Church Board does a pretty good job navigating things. I think there is a respect and cordiality among members. I don't see big fights over power and authority. If that was something that came across, it was not intended. Again, apologies.

To summarize. I still believe the process of addressing new ideas has significant weaknesses. I think that the process puts people with suggestions in the role of a supplicant while the board (that's everyone else, not a select few who secretly wield all the power) take on the role of judge. Maybe that's how it should be. I don't know. But I think there's got to be a better way. So, here's a new suggestion. It's just a thought experiment, not a board proposal. It's something to discuss, nothing more.

What if we decided that when a ministry suggestion comes to the board we don't explore the weaknesses of the idea until after we worked together to flesh it out and build it up? What if the first discussion we had was about how to make that idea work, how to make it great, and how to support the person who brought it up? What if we took time to collaborate and build before we said a single disparaging word? Then, once everyone has taken part in the creation of the idea, we can have an honest discussion about whether it's a good idea or not. Not all ideas are good ones, not all good ideas should be adopted, and some good ideas that should be adopted might not be the top priority for the church. After that process and discussion we could vote whether or not to adopt the new proposal.

Look, all I'm saying here is that I think we should strive to be collaborative on our church board and in our committees. Our goal should always be to build up. We should support one another and strive to make God given ideas work. We're all a part of the same body working for the same God. Let's have our discussions be filled with support, encouragement and collaboration. Collaboration takes a bit more time, but I think the end result is worth it. I think we can do far more good for God if we work together in this way. Thoughts? Feedback? Feel free to share but only if it's in a collaborative and helpful manner. Otherwise...zip it! 😊

Happy Sabbath

Pastor Tyler

Discussion Questions – James 2:14-26

1. What kind of faith is condemned in vs 14? In what ways does this still happen today?
2. What is the relationship between faith and deeds, according to James?
3. In what way is "faith without deeds" dead?
4. What are the lessons from Abraham's and Rahab's examples? When has your faith been put to the test? What happened?
5. In what way should the lifestyle of a Christian verify their faith?
6. Why is Abraham such a good example of faith in Action?
7. If you were arrested for being a Christian, what evidence would be used to prove the point?