

The background of the book cover is a complex, abstract composition. It features a central black horizontal band. Above and below this band are areas with organic, painterly textures. The top section has warm, reddish-orange and yellow tones, with some circular, sun-like motifs. The bottom section has cooler, green and blue tones, also with circular patterns. The overall effect is one of depth and artistic richness.

to encourage your heart.

Devotions

for Church Communicators

Yvon Prehn

DEVOTIONS
FOR
CHURCH COMMUNICATORS
THE HEART OF CHURCH COMMUNICATION

BY
YVON PREHN

A book of short essays and devotions
written to provide a Biblical basis for,
and commentary on how to create
church communications, while keeping
our hearts focused on the Lord and
on fully fulfilling the Great Commission.

FROM
EFFECTIVE CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS

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Devotions for Church Communicators, the heart of church communications

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO
THE
"GREAT ONES"

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT'S INSIDE YOUR HEART WILL COME OUT IN YOUR COMMUNICATIONS

*Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.
(Matt 12:34,35)*

*With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from
thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might
not sin against thee.
(Ps. 119:10,11)*

*Above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life.
(Proverbs 4:23)*

OUT OF THE ABUNDANCE OF THE HEART not only does the mouth speak, but our church communications are created.

The quality of what we produce in print and online never ultimately depends on circumstances outside ourselves. It's easy to blame tight deadlines, inadequate equipment, and the difficult, sometimes unappreciative people we work with for doing less than our best, but ultimately the quality and impact of our church communications reflects our hearts.

We always have choices within circumstances. Tight deadlines can challenge us to streamline our methods, to focus our work. Inadequate equipment can challenge our creativity to see just how much we can get out of outdated machines. Difficult people can drive us to prayer and force us to learn interpersonal skills.

It's in our hearts that we decide whether or not we believe that "God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

If what is inside our heart is the key, how can we make it overflow with what is pleasing to our Lord?

Overflow comes from an abundance of what is already inside. Fill your heart with the things of God. Spend time in his Word; read your Bible daily; listen to Christian talks and music; be with other Christians in church and conversation. Think about God's promises and challenges; write his encouragements and promises on cards to post by your computer.

If you consciously work to fill your mind with the things of God, if his Word and will are your priorities, your heart and work will naturally and joyfully reflect it.

Much easier said than done isn't it?

I wrote the section above in the early 1980s when desktop publishing was still new to many churches and computers were often viewed with fear and loathing. I had already been teaching seminars on writing and church communications for about ten years, but when I began to teach people in churches how to create communications with the computer, many of my seminar attendees were having a very hard time making the transition.

Most of the problems were because of inadequate or nonexistent training. A frequent story I heard went something like this: a computer would arrive unannounced on a church secretary's desk and she'd be told that by next week she was to be creating the bulletin with it. No training supplied. Somehow it got done, but seldom without tears and resentment.

It seemed to me that the lack of training, the change in publications or the arrival of new equipment wasn't nearly as damaging as what happens inside people during transition times. For some it seemed the arrival of the computer justified any actions needed to get it functioning in the church office.

As we shifted to new ways of creating church communications, as unimaginable opportunities to produce communications that were impossible for churches to produce in the past now became possible, I felt it was important to remind people that though technology might be new, our calling as servants and representatives of Jesus Christ never changes. We are to care for one another with concern and compassion; we are to do our work with a sense of ministry and mission no matter what the tools. When I saw the tools of technology creating as many people problems as they did beautiful publications, I wrote a little booklet: *Devotions for Desktop Publishers* to remind people that all our work, with the computer or not, is work for the Lord, to be done in *his* way.

The little booklet immediately became popular with my seminar attendees and the Lord graciously used it to help and encourage many.

In the same vein, in my seminars I reminded people that what they were doing was first and always a ministry to the Lord and that prayer and a focus on God's Word were essential tools in successful church communications. I was constantly surprised (and still am) at how many people would come up to me after the seminar and say something like, "I never looked at this work as a ministry before."

I'm not sure why this has happened, but the computer tempted even some church workers to think that communications produced by high tech means aren't as spiritual or godly as an old-fashioned type-written bulletin might have been. The typewriter is gone and with it some seem to assume that digitally produced church publications and the office environment that produces them don't fall under the same commands of scripture for holiness, grace, and peace that other church work does. I realized that though difficult challenges in technology will continue, in all of this, we must always walk worthy of our calling as disciples of Jesus in all we do in our church communications ministry.

It seemed time to revisit the little devotions booklet and to update it for church communications work today. That little booklet is the core of this book. The devotions have been revised and updated;

additional ones have been added that previously appeared as editorials or commentary written for past blogs, articles, or newsletters. Some are new.

Technology changes, our minds and hearts shouldn't

Our technology-driven, secular culture, while it can be invigorating and exciting, will most likely not inspire you to think in a Christ-like way in your work. The characteristics of servanthood, sacrifice, humility, love, and relying on God to help us create communications of eternal value, do not come naturally.

The concept of “referent others” is useful here. This term means that we will tend to order our lives, often unconsciously, by values or a group of people we have chosen as a standard. What is important in this context is that we must be intentional about filling our minds and hearts with God’s Word and doing our work with biblical standards, not the changing challenges of technology if we want to do work pleasing to the Lord. The Bible is the only life and work reference that is appropriate for those of us doing church communications.

In this book, I’ve tried to make this conviction practical. I take situations in church communications and suggest ways to bring your focus back to the Bible in how you should react to them. In looking back over the entries, written over the course of over twenty years, I’ve found I repeat a number of themes. My three most important ones could be summarized as follows:

#1 We serve a holy and sovereign God. Our lives and our work should reflect who we belong to and our reverence of him.

#2 Ours is a job of unimaginable grace—the Creator of all things has honored us with the job to create communications for him to share the good news of salvation in Jesus and to help people grow in their Christian faith.

#3 Ours is a job of unimaginable future glory—the eternal destinies of people are changed and heaven will be different because of the work we are doing today in church communications.

These themes are approached using different situations and examples, with some repetition in ideas and examples, but always with the goal of bringing your heart to focus on the words of God before you attempt to communicate his message to your world.

There are 52 entries, one for each week of the year. You can read through them sequentially or jump around. You can use them in your devotional times, share them with a church communicator's group, read through one when your work needs a spiritual boost. After most of them, there is space for you to journal your thoughts and prayers.

As I close this introduction, I can see your faces. I remember you from my seminars, from discussions at breaks, from emails and letters. I remember the samples you shared and the times I cried when I looked at a sample, though sometimes simple and unpretentious on the surface, that touched my heart because of the obvious love, care, and time put into it. I remember your questions and frustrations, your successes and stories.

As I remember, I'm praying for those of you church communicators I can see in my mind's eye and for those of you I haven't yet met, that the Lord will give you peace, joy, and strength today. I'm praying your heart would be pure, holy, and focused on Jesus and that out of a heart overflowing with love for Jesus and his church, you will create communications pleasing to him and that will change lives for eternity.

*Blessings, joy, and peace to you as you serve
our Lord in church communications today,*

Wyon Prehn

Note of clarification: I am no longer traveling to teach seminars, but am home in Ventura, California creating resources and teaching online webinars and training through my website, www.effectivechurch.com. Much of my writing was created while traveling and doing seminars, and it would be awkward to change those references. At the same time I wanted to clarify that the majority of my teaching is online currently, hence this little note.



WEEK 1

REALITY OF OUR SITUATION — CHALLENGING SPIRITUAL WARFARE

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

(Eph. 6:12-13)

WORKING FOR THE LORD in church communications is hard. The bottom-line reality is that we are in a war. And in any war, one of the first things the enemy tries is to knock out the communications equipment of their opponent. You aren't just "doing the bulletin" or some other isolated project. You are the communication center for spiritual warfare for your church. When you got into communications work for your church or ministry you entered one of the most intense areas of spiritual warfare raging today. Satan wants to knock you out.

Troubles with hardware, software, and co-workers are to be expected. Especially people problems should be no surprise because Satan is "the accuser of our brothers" (Rev. 12:10) and one of the easiest ways to cripple you in the battle is to get you fighting with your fellow soldiers. Don't let him win; don't take on his job.

Remember also that you are in a war that has already been won. When Jesus died on the cross, he said, “It is finished!” When he rose from the grave, he conquered sin and death.

Because of Jesus’ finished work, our battle resembles the fighting of the resistance fighters in France at the end of WW2. The allies landed on D-Day and basically the war was over, but until Paris was liberated, the war wasn’t over for the French Resistance. The resistance army still had to fight. If you study the history of the resistance, you find that one of their primary weapons was communications. “Freedom is coming—the war is over—hold on until the victors arrive!” That was their message and ours is the same.

We may be involved in spiritual warfare, but we don’t have to fight alone. We can expect help for the battle. Our help never comes ultimately from new equipment, or a more peaceful work situation, or more considerate workers. Our help comes from our Lord and from doing our work according to his Word.

Learn to encourage yourself from the Word of God. If you don’t train yourself to look at the battle you are in as spiritual warfare, if you don’t draw your strength from Jesus, your job will be much more difficult than it should be.

God did not put you in your work to simply survive. Do your work with joy and passion, with your eyes on heaven and know that though the daily battles might be difficult, the war is over, victory is assured, and your King is coming.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

REAL 24/7 SUPPORT

“Call to me and I will answer you.” (Jer. 33:3)

MANY COMPUTER AND SOFTWARE COMPANIES PROMISE support 24/7. It sounds good, but in reality that “support” is often an endless series of automatic messages, referrals to canned answers, or a suggestion to go to the web site and there try to figure out the answer yourself. In response you can either keep pushing buttons in frustration or give up knowing it is almost impossible to talk to a real human being.

In contrast, God’s promise of support is personal, immediate, and unconditional. If we call, he answers.

We can call out to him for wisdom. When our work in church communications seems overwhelming and we don’t know what to do next, we need wisdom. James 1:5 promises when we ask for wisdom, he will give it to us. Often, we have the skills to do the tasks we need to do, we just can’t figure out the order or the process. God can give us that wisdom to put the process in order to successfully complete our projects.

We can call out to him for encouragement. We need it when working with computers. Computers never tire; a computer can work around the clock. People aren’t like that, but an odd thing has happened in offices since the advent of the computer. In subtle ways we tend to compare ourselves to the computer. We think we need to

be a machine who never wears down or quits or gets discouraged. Sometimes the Lord is the only one who can lift your spirit in an office that, perhaps unconsciously, views people as machines.

We can call out to him for perseverance. Sometimes we think we simply can't learn a new program or figure out one more project. Yet, if we just stay with it an hour or a day longer (praying at the same time for insight and strength) suddenly things become clear.

Train yourself to always call out to God first. So often we ask him for help as a last resort. He is merciful and kind and answers no matter when we remember to ask him, but we could save ourselves a lot of frustration by asking for his help first.

We can call out to him—sometimes not for anything specific at all. Some days it seems like nobody on earth pays attention or cares. That may or may not be true, but no matter. Call out to your God. He cares about you and is ready to listen and help with every concern you have, 24/7.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:



WEEK 3

YOU ARE ACCEPTED AND LOVED BEFORE YOU CREATE YOUR COMMUNICATIONS

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

(Matt. 3:16)

JESUS BEGAN HIS MINISTRY SECURE IN GOD'S LOVE. Before he had performed a miracle or preached a sermon, long before he died on the cross, he was "well-pleasing to God."

Remember that acceptance as you work. You are accepted, beloved, and eternally secure in your God because you belong to Jesus. You were chosen for this work because of God's sovereign choosing, no matter what earthly circumstances brought the job of church communications into your life.

Remember that acceptance when discouragements come. Our value does not change depending upon the reactions of others to our work or to the seeming success or failure of our projects. It's part of good stewardship to measure tangible results: how many showed up after what kind of promotion you do for an event, cost of various print or online church marketing options, the difference it makes if you send out a reminder postcard or email. While doing that important

recording and evaluation, at the same time remember only in eternity will you have a true sense of how your work touched people.

Until then, do your best in your work—pray for wisdom in choice of words and format; pray for insight into the hearts of those who will receive your communications; pray for openness to your message; pray for protection from problems in production.

Most of all, so fill your life with a knowledge of God’s Word that your words will be permeated with his love and truth. Having done all of that, trust his promise, “So is my word that goes out forth from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11).

Remember that acceptance when you feel you know so little about computers, publication design, website creation, and the multitude of new technologies you are required to master. Jesus had much ahead of him when he heard these words of assurance by his Father. Humanly he had no idea how he would feed 5,000, heal the multitudes that followed him, or have the strength to die on the cross. He simply trusted his Father.

Rejoice that the same Father who foreknew every step of his son knows what is ahead of you today and that you are well-pleasing and well-loved by him.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

♥
WEEK 4

VERSES ON PRAYER

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

(Matthew 7:7 KJV)

We love to read the passage above on how God answers our prayers, but with these, as with all of the Bible, we must put these promises in the context of the entirety of God's Word. The next three passages remind us that for God to answer our prayers, he has certain requirements for us.

First we cannot expect answers to prayers based on wrong motives or selfish desires.

You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

(James 4:2,3)

Second, we need to be in his Word and allow his Word to saturate our lives. When we do that and our desires are based on God's Word, we know we are praying in a way that, if God chooses, he can then answer.

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

(John 15:7)

Third, the following passage shows us that to expect answers to our prayers we must put away malicious talk and accusations of

others (even silent ones in our minds) and spend ourselves helping those in need before we come to God with our prayers.

*Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.
If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.*
(Isaiah 58:9-10)

The verses above may be a bit intimidating, and we might think we'll never get an answer to our prayers if we don't pray properly, but we aren't left alone to do that. We are to pray anyway and always. The Holy Spirit is with us to help us pray in ways that are pleasing to God, and the Lord wants to hear our prayers.

And the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress. For we don't even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will.
(Romans 8:26-27 NLT)

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
(1 Thes. 5:16-18)

We are told to pray continuously and from that continual conversation with our Lord, he can help transform our lives into ones pleasing to him and in which he is able to answer our prayers.

♥
WEEK 5

**A CLEAN HEART IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF
PREPARING FOR CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS WORK**

*My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has
chosen you to stand before him and serve him, to minister
before him and to burn incense.*

(2 Chron. 29:11)

IN THIS VERSE KING HEZEKIAH CHALLENGES the priests in their service before God. Things had not been going well for the priests prior to this time. Hezekiah's father, the former king, had turned away from God. The temple had been closed and desecrated.

When Hezekiah became king the temple was reopened. However, before the public worship of God could take place again, two things had to happen. First the priests had to reconsecrate themselves and second they had to purify the temple. They accomplished both tasks and the result was great joy in renewed worship of God.

The lessons for us in our work today are challenges of purification. What do we need to get rid of both internally and externally so that we can function best in our calling as church communicators?

We may not have a temple, but we have a computer. It may not be defiled with idol worship, but we must be very careful not to use software, images, or files of any kind that are illegally copied. Years ago (when typefaces cost hundreds of dollars each) I was offered a pirated version of the entire Adobe type library. I had very little money, was trying to get a Christian design business started and wanted it

badly, but doing desktop publishing for the Lord with pirated software would not have been right. It wasn't easy to say no.

Today, I have more typefaces junking up my hard drive than I know what to do with. Seems like a little thing now, but it was a difficult battle at the time. For me it's been a good lesson to remember that some things I think I can't do without right now aren't worth the price of compromising my values.

Like the priests we must also purify ourselves. Each of us knows the garbage inside that keeps us from functioning at our best. Sometimes it's a complaining or fault-finding spirit; sometimes it's envy or anger; sometimes it's cowardice of not trusting God when we know we need to say "no" to a project. Whatever it is, we can confess our shortcoming to the Lord and he will "cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

With the external and internal housekeeping done, like the priests of Hezekiah's time, we can then do our church communication duties with joy.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:



WEEK 6

MAKE YOUR COMMUNICATIONS A JOY TO RECEIVE

The large crowd listened to him with delight (Mark 12:37 NIV). And the common people heard him gladly (Mark 12:37 KJV). And the great crowd enjoyed listening to Him. (Mark 12:37 NLT)

DID YOU EVER THINK ABOUT HOW MUCH FUN IT WAS to listen to Jesus? We sometimes think Jesus sounded like some professional radio announcer with a deep, serious voice and an always condemning message—but the Bible presents a different picture. As these three translations show, he was someone people heard with delight, enjoyment, and gladly.

What a wonderful example and challenge for our church communications. Our message is the gospel—that is *good news* and our challenge is to communicate it in joyful ways.

Desktop publishing, the web, and social media gives us great flexibility in our work. We can do things with type, illustrations, sound, color and motion that would have been impossible a few years ago. We can send instant encouragements, humor, prayers. We can be with fellow believers and uplift their spirits no matter where we are or they are.

Spend some time brainstorming with your communication partners about what it means to create communications that your audience will “hear gladly” either in print or on the web.

It doesn’t mean we have to always do wild and crazy things with

graphics, sound, and motion, but if we are working with jr. high students, what some folks consider *too much* might just start to get their attention.

Wild and crazy isn't for everyone. Communications create joy when they meet needs. For the mothers of preschoolers it might mean putting together a special calendar with all the events for kids, times, places, and contact names in a large-print format that's easy to read when taped on a refrigerator door.

For businessmen in your church it might mean putting together an upscale, high quality on-line newsletter that highlights some seminars your church offers as an outreach to their peers.

For young professionals it might be a mobile phone app or site that provides short Bible devotions to encourage them in the midst of crazy days.

Whatever it might be, ask the Lord to give you a light heart as you create your communications so that people might "hear gladly" the messages you share from him.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:



WEEK 7

DIFFICULTIES AND TESTING ARE AS MUCH A PART OF GOD'S PLAN AS BLESSINGS

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. (Deut. 7:13)

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. (Matt. 4:1)

THese are difficult words. We like to focus on God's promises of provision and joy in our lives. To be reminded that difficulties and testing are also allowed by our God—we'd rather not think about that option.

But difficulties are a part of life, especially a life spent working on church communications. The world of computer-created communication will never stop changing; it will never become less complex and demanding. Temptations to despair, frustration, and anger are part of our work.

Sometimes the team of people we work with doesn't make our load lighter, but heavier. Sometimes we can't explain why we aren't able to produce what they want and we don't know how to fix the problems. Sometimes we are shocked by the anger and resentment that wells up in response to what we consider an unreasonable demand.

At those times, these verses can comfort us because even our troubles have a good purpose. We never know how strong a rope is until a weight is hung from it. We never know how genuine trust in God is until it's tested in the daily grind of projects and deadlines. We might assume we rely on God in every area of our lives, but until we absolutely cannot handle a technology or communication team issue without Him, we may not realize how we have left this part of our life out of His guidance and control.

In the same way that we can't correct a problem in a manuscript until we see it, it is hard to grow in our faith until we are aware of our shortcomings. So our Lord allows the testing to come, often in the midst of our work for him, so we can learn and grow. If we haven't taken time to learn the skills we need, a technological challenge might force us to learn a skill we have put off learning. If we don't see the sin that lingers in our souls, we aren't challenged to grow in our Christian life so that we can respond with gentleness and kind words under pressure.

Not only will our growth benefit us, but we can be an encouragement to others and remind them that God cares just as much about helping us create an effective newsletter with the computer or other church communication team tasks, as He does about helping us teach a Bible lesson effectively.

The context of these verses also gives us hope. Neither Jesus or the children of Israel stayed in the desert of tempting. Jesus came out of the desert into a life of ministry. The children of Israel went into the promised land.

Our trials prepare serve the same purpose. We aren't destined to stay in them, but to learn from them to be better equipped for the communication ministry our Lord has given us.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

VERSES ON DISCIPLINE

THE FIELD OF CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS IS CHALLENGING, in part because there are so many things to do and so many potential distractions in life, in the church office, and online.

The following verses, mostly from Proverbs, remind us of the importance of building the character trait of discipline into our lives. As you read through them, think about how you might apply them to your work in church communication.

*The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:
for attaining wisdom and discipline;
for understanding words of insight;
for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life,
doing what is right and just and fair
(Prov. 1:1-3)*

*He who heeds discipline shows the way to life,
but whoever ignores correction leads others astray
(Prov. 10:17)*

*He who ignores discipline despises himself,
but whoever heeds correction gains understanding
(Prov. 15:32)*

*Like a city whose walls are broken down
is a man who lacks self-control.
(Prov. 25:28)*

*One who is slack in his work
is brother to one who destroys.
(Prov. 18:9)*

*Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise,
making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.
(Eph. 5:15 -16)*

Discipline is an essential skill for church communicators.
Consciously work to make it part of your life.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

♥
WEEK 9

**YOU ARE THE GREAT ONES AND FAR MORE +
IMPORTANT THAN YOU MAY REALIZE**

Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

(Daniel 12:3)

OFTEN WHEN I ASK SOMEONE who has come to one of my church communication seminars what they do in the church, they often respond by saying something like: “Oh, I’m just the church secretary” or “Oh, I just help work on the church newsletter” and similar self-deprecating statements.

My heart is broken when I hear that because the person who says it (and you may have thought similar things about yourself) has no idea of their true worth. Let me explain what I mean by sharing a story from a scene in C. S. Lewis’ book , *The Great Divorce*. In this scene the main character is being escorted around heaven. He sees a woman coming toward him, who is magnificently clothed and attended to by a great procession. The book goes on:

*“Is it? . . . is it?” I whispered to my guide.
“Not at all,” said he, “It’s someone ye’ll never have heard of. Her name on earth was Sarah Smith and she lived at Golders Green.”*

*“She seem to be. . . well, a person of particular importance?”
“Aye. She is one of the great ones. Ye have heard that fame in this country and fame on Earth are two quite different things.”*

I often think of this passage as I teach my seminars and meet many of you who work day after day, week after week getting out the bulletin, preparing the flyers for the youth programs, putting together the newsletter one more time, updating the website.

Those of you doing church communications are the great ones of the kingdom of God. This book is dedicated to you and the work of eternal glory you do each day.

That bulletin you faithfully create may be the first and only piece of Christian literature a visitor has seen. Your care in layout, your welcome in it, your explanation of how to find the nursery, and an invitation to coffee, might cause her to listen a bit more openly to the sermon and find Jesus in it.

That flyer for the youth program may be shared with a teenager living with his single mom. He might not have anybody to talk to, to struggle with through the questions and temptations all teenagers face. But that flyer might bring him to an event where he can meet a church family who cares, a youth leader who will listen, and be introduced to a Father who will never leave.

That newsletter or updated website that you stayed late to put out might contain a devotion that helps a shut-in manage through another day of pain. Or it might have a schedule that brings a newly single person to a potluck and helps ease the hurt of a recent divorce.

Lives are changed for time and eternity because of what you are doing today—with that contrary computer, a crushing work load, and those impossible deadlines.

The Lord took dust and made humanity. You follow in his image as you take words and type, images and clipart and form them into messages that come alive and minister in the world in which he's placed you.

Sit tall, smile, work encouraged today—you are one of the Great Ones in the kingdom of heaven.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

OFTEN THE ONLY THANKS WE GET FOR OUR COMMUNICATIONS WORK COMES FROM THE LORD

The LORD said to Aaron, "You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites." (Numbers 18: 20)

A CHURCH SECRETARY RECENTLY SHARED with me that she had spent great effort redoing her church bulletin. She showed me the before and after. The new version looked fantastic. It was much easier to read, her choices in typography and layout were clear and professional-looking. But, she said, almost nobody noticed or commented on the changes.

Though it didn't seem like it, her experience was actually a great compliment. As the experts in design and typography continuously affirm, the best graphic design and typography should be invisible. The best designed bulletin, newsletter, website, or church communication in any form, should never cause our audience to say at first: "What a beautiful design!" Or "What an unusual typeface." The first response should be a clear understanding of the message and a proper response to it.

It is often an over-designed piece that gets noticed. Sometimes a piece might be beautiful to look at but if the text was printed over complex graphics, the actual message can be very hard to read. If

something is hard to read, people might comment on how good it looks but put it aside and never read the message. A website might have an unusual interface that is entertaining to look at, but if you want to know what time the church picnic is and where the beach baptism service is taking place, a simple, standard interface may serve better.

It isn't that we shouldn't work hard to make our communications artistically pleasing and the very best in design and beauty, but those considerations must always be secondary to choosing type, layout, and graphics that work best to communicate the message and that make it easy for the reader to access the message.

Simple and functional doesn't always get a lot of complements, yet simple and functional are often the best ways to communicate a message. When your church communications in print and online are functioning best, no one will notice and no one will thank you—but your church will grow and lives will be changed.

At those times, like the priests in the Old Testament, the Lord himself and his favor is often our only reward. Like the old hymn says, we are “channels only.” In our work, not only will our audience often not notice work well done, but even if they do, they won't even know who did the work, because much of what we produce will be unsigned.

But our Lord knows. And like the priests of old, he is our inheritance. And it is in *his* approval we find “the path of life” and “fullness of joy.”

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:



WEEK 11

PRIDE: A TEMPTATION WHEN WE FORGET THE REAL REASONS FOR THE SUCCESS OF OUR WORK

These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood. (Prov. 6:16-17 KJV)

Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. (Prov. 16:18 KJV)

Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord. (Jer. 9:23, 24 KJV)

MOST OF THIS BOOK IS FILLED WITH ENCOURAGEMENTS—but this entry is a caution. It is a warning about pride, which C.S. Lewis described as “the essential vice, the utmost evil.”

Why, you may wonder, would I be talking about the sin of pride to church communicators? Outside the reality that all of us are capable of any sin at any time, in most instances, in the church, especially small and medium size churches, I’ve seldom seen pride as a danger

in church communications. For an overworked church secretary or administrative assistant, for the pastor of a church too small or poor to afford paid help, for the volunteer putting together a flyer or Facebook site for the youth group at the end of a long day—most often these valiant workers are so aware of their limitations in communication production that pride is seldom a temptation.

A new type of church communicator creates new dangers

But the advent of the computer, the growth in skills and tools available for creating church communications, and the development of larger churches, have created a new type of church communicator: the “professional.” Sometimes the professional works at the church; sometimes it is a person hired at an outside design firm, or a design or PR professional who volunteers as a consultant. Though many wonderful people work in these positions, I have found this is often the person who is in danger of what Lewis describes as the heart of the matter of pride where he says: “Pride is essentially competitive. . . . Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man.”

Those in danger of pride in the work of church communications are those who seem to believe that because of their professional or technical expertise, their computer savvy, or the kind of computer they have and the software they use, that somehow those things make them a better church communicator. I have seen it at times in my seminars—the superior look, the knowing smile, the patronizing dismissal of any suggestion that does not involve high end software or advanced graphic arts techniques—and it always saddens me. Usually that look is followed at the break by the bestowing upon me of some admittedly often gorgeous samples.

What really matters in our church communications

That the samples look great (from an earthly design standard) isn't at question, but I when I ask, “How are people responding?” I often get a blank stare. I repeat, I'm not asking if your audience thinks

these pieces are beautiful or not, obviously you've got that covered — but the only two criteria that count in church communications are:

#1 Are people coming to know Jesus as Savior?

#2 Are they growing in their Christian lives?

Again, I ask, “Are these two essential purposes of church communications being accomplished by your work?”

Often these questions are answered by silence.

It does not take extravagant design or production to make significant spiritual impact

A simple postcard, sent out regularly and with a repeated email to remind young Christians to come to a discipleship Bible study, perhaps one with few or simple graphics, but a verse added for encouragement, can accomplish measurable, eternal results. So can a gorgeous bulletin if it moves people to the next step of coming to know Jesus or of Christian maturity. *It's the response, not only the look,* that matters most in church communications.

As I have often said in my seminars, I never heard anyone, when giving their testimony of how they got saved said something like, “It was the typeface that drew me to Jesus” or “Their use of white space was so impressive, I knew their God had to be fantastic.” Great graphic design is a good thing, please don't misunderstand me, but it is not the most important thing.

Meeting needs is what makes the most effective church communications

People respond to church communications that meet needs. Meeting people's needs is always the most important thing, not how great something looks or what it cost to produce the piece. Often, in the church we don't have the time or money to always create gorgeous, perfect publications. Things go out with typos because there wasn't anybody around to proof it and if we didn't get it out, people wouldn't know about an event in time. Volunteers might create a flyer that is flat out ugly to a professional designer, but if it is the only thing the

church has time to produce and if it lets lonely, fearful people know the church loves them and offers programs that meet their needs, we need to learn to be thankful for the volunteer and put aside our pride on the “quality” we wish we could always produce.

The bottom line is we have no reason for pride in our communication products, no matter how they look or don’t look—because it is only by the gracious hand of our Lord, not by how impressive our software or our graphic design quality, that lives are changed. Remember he, who could at any time command the stones to praise him, can use anything to accomplish his message—MS Publisher or Adobe Creative Suite; PCs or Macs. It is never our tools, but our heart, that is most important to Jesus in accomplishing his work.

If he graciously allows us to be in the ministry of church communications, pride can never be a part of our work. Doing our work with an attitude God hates, will never result in communication pieces he can bless.

*However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you,
but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*

(Luke 10:20 NIV)

*Not what you do for God but what God does for
you—that’s the agenda for rejoicing.*

(Luke 10:20 MSG)

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

♥
WEEK 12

**OUR COMMUNICATIONS SHOULD REFLECT THE
REDEEMING NATURE OF OUR LORD, NOT
CONDEMNATION**

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:17)

THIS VERSE IS A CARING CHALLENGE to our attitude as communicators. What is the overall tone of our ministry—is it to condemn or to save?

Look at the ministry of Jesus. This verse is part of his talk with Nicodemus, the teacher of the Law who came to Jesus at night asking questions. I wonder if Nicodemus might not have left more confused than when he came. Here was a man people were calling a prophet, but he wasn't like any prophet who went before him.

He didn't call down fire from heaven; he turned water into wine at a wedding—good wine and quite a lot of it. He didn't part the sea or send plagues; he played with children and set out picnics on the beach for his disciples.

When Nicodemus asked Jesus about his message, he didn't retell all the shortcomings of the world he had come to straighten out. Instead he told him that God loved the world, and that he did not come to condemn but to save. He didn't demand Nicodemus do penance for his sins; he invited him to be born again. He didn't even chide Nicodemus for his cowardice in coming to Jesus at night. He

graciously answered questions at a time and in a way this fearful leader needed.

Do our communications reflect this redeeming nature of our Lord? How easy it is to take pen in hand (or today, mouse and keyboard) and to pile on guilt. Not that there is never a time to point out error, but for the most part we do well to remember it is the Holy Spirit's job to convict of sin (John 16:7-9). It is our job to share the good news of salvation and the joy and fulfillment of living for Jesus.

Most people today know they fall short. They aren't sure quite what of, but a pervasive sense of guilt fills many lives. Alcohol, drugs, food in excess, unhealthy relationships, and overwork are some common attempts to medicate the pain.

People don't need more bad news from the followers of Jesus. They need examples of hope and love. They need clear directions to events that can change their lives and clear communications on what they need to do. We need to pray for clarity in all we create. We need to pray that our tone (in ways we may not even be aware of) always reflects the welcoming, saving love of Jesus.

May your communications be filled with messages of salvation, of the grace and love of your Lord.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:



WEEK 13

YOU ARE AN AMBASSADOR IN ENEMY OCCUPIED TERRITORY; BE PREPARED TO BE MISUNDERSTOOD

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Heb. 11:13-16)

We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. (2 Cor 5:20 KJV)

I OFTEN FEEL SORRY FOR THE GOVERNMENT SPOKESMEN on the evening news. They are attempting to explain government policies and actions to a frequently hostile audience.

Though often obviously uncomfortable and frustrated at their inability to communicate as well as they would like, the government spokesmen don't condemn the press, or shout unkind judgements. With professionalism they explain their positions, answer questions, and offer sources for more information.

We're in a similar situation—spokesmen for a heavenly kingdom no one can see and many don't believe exists.

In communicating truth about this kingdom, if we feel out of place, if we feel our values have little to do with the values of the world around us, if we feel our perspective is wildly at odds with that of our audience, there isn't anything wrong with us. It is the proper assessment of reality. We are out of sync; we are out of place.

Like the old hymn says, "this world is not our home." But just because it isn't home doesn't mean we don't have a job to do in it.

As C.S. Lewis reminded us in *Mere Christianity*, "Enemy-occupied territory—that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage."

Our sabotage work, as it is for any resistance army, is to create communications that let people know the rightful king is coming back and that this world will not always be under the present deteriorating management of sin and sadness. The early Christians were known as people whose faces were turned toward the dawn. Our communications should reflect that perspective as we look for the public return of our king.

As we speak and write for the "rightful king," pray to do it as an ambassador worthy of his calling, someone with whom God is not ashamed to be called your God.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

VERSES ON SERVANTHOOD

SERVANT, BOND-SLAVE—ONE WITH NO RIGHTS OF OUR OWN, one whose purpose in life is to serve another—that is our core identity as church communicators. Just reading those words, how our human nature wants to fight it. We want to be recognized for our brilliance and creativity and sometimes we grouse in private that we “aren’t appreciated.”

We probably aren’t—not being appreciated is what being a servant means. We can’t change that reality, but when we stop fighting it, when we submit and serve, we find peace and satisfaction in our work.

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them . . . Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

(Mark 10:42-44)

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

(John 13:14-17)

For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many."

(Matthew 20:28 NLT)

Jesus doesn't ask us to do anything he has not done.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

but made himself nothing,

taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

and became obedient to death--

even death on a cross!

(Phil. 2:5-9)

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

(Galatians 6:2)

Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.

(Eph. 6:7 NLT)

Finally, he who asks us to serve will help shoulder the load of service with us, enabling us to be the kind of servant who is pleasing to him.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

(Matthew 11: 28-30)



WEEK 15

DO ALL YOU DO WITH LOVE OR IT'S JUST NOISE

If I could speak in any language in heaven or on earth but didn't love others, I would only be making meaningless noise like a loud gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I knew all the mysteries of the future and knew everything about everything, but didn't love others, what good would I be? And if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, without love I would be no good to anybody. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would be of no value whatsoever. (1 Cor. 13:1-3 NLT)

WORDS WITHOUT LOVE ARE JUST NOISE is Rick Warren's commentary on these verses from one message in his *40 Days of Community* series. Though these words apply in every interaction we have in life, I think they are especially true in the world of church communications.

I've often said in my seminars that I can tell when I look at publication samples if the person who was doing them was having a grumpy day or not. People often laugh. But it really isn't a joke.

Who we are, the mood we are in, and how much we care for the people for whom we are creating the print or digital piece comes through loud and clear in church communications.

Not that long ago, I was shown a sample of a church bulletin still produced on a typewriter. The tiny church was very poor and it was the best they could manage. But it was organized clearly and was complete in the facts communicated. The person doing it obviously took time and care putting it together, but there was one more thing

about it that brought tears to my eyes. The church secretary hand-collated and folded each one so she could fold them in an off-set way and then on the top sheet, she hand cut each page with the sort of scalloped scissors used for scrapbooking. She did that she said, so that “people would feel special” when they got the bulletin. I’m sure on some level, people not only felt special, but knew they were loved.

I’ve seen other examples of love in church communications in many ways. I remember a church bulletin from a Greek Orthodox Church, where a retired lady in the church took time each week to research and then to write little stories of the saints of the church so members would understand their heritage of faith.

At a large church I visited in California, there was a table on the patio that had cards on it done up for all of the small groups in the church that described each group, told what they were studying, and invited newcomers to attend. The cards included upbeat photos and maps and were created in a positive, welcoming way. Keeping a project like that current is a huge labor of love.

One of my favorite responses to visitors was from a pastor in Canada whose welcoming letter included two free coupons for latte and an invitation to *Latte with the Pastor* and along with that an invitation to “ask any question you’d like about God.”

I’ve seen humorous expressions of love, like the one from a lady who tore the edges of announcements for the ladies events and then scattered them on the floor, because as she told me, the ladies in her church were very tidy and this way she knew they would pick them up and read them.

There are lots of ways to express love in your church communications. You know your people best. Create your church communications with creativity and love and your words will be much more than “just noise.”

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:



WEEK 16

DOING NEW THINGS IN CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS IS SOMETIMES LONELY WORK

Noah did everything just as God commanded him (Gen. 6:22) . . . The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD shut him in. (Gen. 7:16)

LIKE NOAH, SOMETIMES WE CAN BE DOING ALL GOD WANTS and then what reward do we get? We get shut away with a difficult job.

Church communication work can be like that. We have the reward of working with great new technology that can enable us to communicate more effectively than ever, but like Noah, sometimes with new tools our world changes. In the past a publication designer, typesetter, editor, writer, and graphic artist were all required to what you and the computer can do all by yourself. It may have been a challenge having to work with all those people, but now, you often have to do it all by yourself. You do much of your work alone.

Like Noah, sometimes we can't explain what we are building, but we trust that God has an end in mind and we keep working on our communication project until it takes a recognizable form.

Like Noah, sometimes we must smile when people make light of or look down on our work. You may work with folks who still don't believe that a website is necessary or that you really do need high speed internet access, new software or a computer upgrade to

do all you are expected to do. Or you may work in an organization that believes that there is no need to learn new web skills and that no one would be interested in blogs, Facebook, podcasts, social media, or any other new technology. People may nod knowingly with polite disdain when you tell them that your book will be published through a print-on-demand website and you're only working out the cover details before it will be done. When these responses come, simply smile, pray, and be prepared for surprises. Remember, nobody had seen rain until the flood came.

Few people imagined what personal computers or the internet would do to the church communication world until they arrived. Sort of like the flood however, the old ways of creating communications are being buried under the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of desktop publishing and the internet and whatever else may be coming.

Finally, like Noah also, the whole purpose of being shut away to learn and do new things in your communication ministry isn't to punish you or make you miserable. Sometimes being shut away is an opportunity for you to draw near to the God who can make all your church communication ministry a blessing in ways you never imagined before the flood of work you are now doing came. Hang on—the flood of communication work that seems like it might drown you, might be the cause of renewed revival in your church.

The rainbow is coming.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

HAVE YOU CLOSED WITH JESUS? SOMETHING TO CONSIDER IF CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS SEEMS IMPOSSIBLY DIFFICULT

And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. So whoever has God's Son has life; whoever does not have his Son does not have life.

(1 John 5:11, 12 NLT)

Not all people who sound religious are really godly. They may refer to me as 'Lord,' but they still won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The decisive issue is whether they obey my Father in heaven. On judgment day many will tell me, "Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name." But I will reply, "I never knew you. Go away."

(Matthew 7:21-23 NLT)

My sheep recognize my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them away from me. (John 10:27-28 NLT)

IF YOU'VE READ THE SELECTIONS OF THIS BOOK IN ORDER and if you have been doing church communications work for any time at all, you may have one of two responses. Either the words here have been an encouragement and a challenge to your in your work as a church communicator or perhaps they seem empty and your job remains a frustration.

If your job seems a constant frustration, beyond any solutions in technology or work setting, I would be remiss if I didn't ask you to take a few minutes to examine your personal relationship with Jesus. Church communications is ultimately and at its core communication about Jesus. Unlike other kinds of communication work, you will have a hard time doing church communications work if you don't know Jesus. Knowing him, listening to our shepherd's voice, is essential if our work is to pass the test of eternal value and to be bearable as we do it day-by-day. But how can we be sure if we have this kind of a relationship with Jesus?

Please now, take a few minutes by yourself, without distractions, to read this section, think, and pray about it.

One way to evaluate your relationship with Jesus

Evangelists in the past used a term that we don't often hear today when they would ask, "Have you closed with Christ?" Their use of the term "closed" was taken from real estate back then and they used it just as we do today. You can look at a house, walk through it, admire it, want it, even invest time in getting a loan on it, but until you "close" on it, the house is not yours.

What happens when you close? On closing, only then does the house then become truly, legally yours. For that closing to take place, you have to give up something, usually a considerable amount of money, and you have to make a commitment to keep investing in the house for it to one day be yours completely.

No analogy is ever perfect, but this is a pretty good one to explain what it means to know Jesus personally. You can look at Jesus from far away, you can even get up close, perhaps visiting or regularly attending a church to examine his teachings. You might even work at a church and do communications work in his name. But unless a personal transaction takes place, unless you know Jesus personally and he knows you, you haven't "closed" with him.

That act of closing with Jesus is a serious commitment. That closing takes place between you and God, in prayer, where you admit your

sins have kept you from God and you recognize that Jesus death on the cross paid a penalty for those sins that you could not, and you ask that Jesus become the forgiver and leader of your life.

The cost of the transaction

If you do that you have closed with Jesus and you move into a eternal relationship with him. Though there is no monetary cost to this transaction, meaning there is nothing you can do to earn or deserve a relationship with Jesus, at the same time, before making that closing transaction, the Bible does encourage you to count the life cost. The Bible is clear that the cost involved in closing with Jesus is that you now turn over the control of your life to Him: your priorities, your time, your focus, your decisions are now all to be under the leadership of Jesus. You aren't asked to make monthly payments (though giving regularly to your church and those in need is an expectation of all Christians), but you are required to give up your time regularly in the study of God's Word, in prayer, and in service to your world in the name of Jesus. In return the Christian receives much more than an earthly house that will deteriorate—the Christian is promised an eternal home in heaven and on earth peace, strength, and joy for whatever life God gives.

I'm bringing this up because at this point in this book, because as I've said earlier, doing Christian communication work is one of the hardest jobs imaginable and to last in it, you need every resource available in Jesus. You have to have a personal relationship with Jesus for his strength to flow through you to do this work; you must be on good terms with him to do it happily. Our relationship with our God is personal—more than a theology or belief system or set of rules—one with much more, but no less than the personal qualities of a relationship with an earthly friend.

If you have not closed with Jesus, count the cost of following him and if you are prepared to commit your life to him, close with Jesus by praying the prayer that follows.

A prayer of “closing” with Jesus

Dear Jesus,

I admit that though I've known about you for a long time, I've kept you at arm's distance. I don't want to do that anymore. I admit that I need forgiveness for things I have done. I realize that in coming to you I acknowledging that you died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins and I want you to come into my life and be my forgiver and leader. I realize that in doing this I turn over the control of my life and eternity to you and I pray you'd help me to live a life that is worthy of you. Thank you for your salvation and for being willing to have a personal relationship with me for all eternity. Amen.

If you sincerely prayed that prayer, welcome to the family of God! More than ever before you will have Jesus beside you as you do your work for him. Be sure to read your Bible every day and go to a church that preaches the Bible and you will grow and experience the reality of a friendship that will never end.

Evaluate your ongoing relationship with Jesus

If you are in a relationship with him, how is it? We take time to evaluate our human relationships and it is very important to give time and attention to our relationship with Jesus. Is it the happy, peaceful time you want it to be? Is a bit of resentment festering? Talk about it to Jesus. Is there sadness inside you that you don't feel will ever end? Share it. Have you forgotten to be thankful for the blessings of food and shelter that so many of our brothers and sisters around the world are without? Catch up on your thanks. Do you forget he wants to help you in every detail of your life? Invite him to share this moment.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” the apostle Paul said (Phil 4:13 KJV). Now that your relationship is right with Jesus, charge into your day in his strength.

REPETITION IS AS IMPORTANT IN COMMUNICATIONS AS IT IS IN GODLY LIVING

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. (Galatians 6:9)

ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT THINGS TO DO in church communications is to repeat a message often enough for it to make a difference in people's lives. Advertising theory tells us that people need to see something at least seven times for it to make an impression, but to get any church or ministry message out, seven times is a real challenge.

Following are some possible reasons why this is so hard to do along with selected solutions to each reason:

Reason #1: we forget how well we (those of us in the church office) know the message and assume everyone else knows it as well as we do. For most major activities we advertise in the church, the staff has talked, planned, prayed and strategized about them for months. By the time the activity is in a form to be passed on to the rest of the congregation, the staff is on to the next planning project. Without thinking, we assume that we don't need to tell people about it because we know so much about it.

Suggested solution: remember your people haven't heard a thing about it yet. They weren't in the planning meetings; they didn't share your prayer times. Remember nobody knows about the event as well as you do. To fight the urge to only send out one notice, have a set plan

on ways to advertise events, e.g. for youth events we always do a postcard, bulletin insert, announcement in the bulletin, put it on the calendar on the website, add a description and links to the website. If you have a preset checklist, you won't be as tempted to cut corners and leave out communication pieces because you are tired of even thinking about it.

Reason #2: we think that repetition means the message has to be different every time we put it out there and we don't have the energy to be that creative.

Suggested solution: a repeated message about an event not only does not have to be original each time, it shouldn't be. Copy and paste the same core information into different formats and print and send out the same ones several times. That is what professional marketers do and it works.

Reason #3: we're tired; we have way too much to do; and can't give that much attention to each event.

Suggested solution: take time to stop and pray as a staff for your church communication ministry. It doesn't do any good to plan and host great events if no one attends. There are a number of possible solutions to this situation: fewer events, but making sure each one is well advertised; recruiting volunteers to help with the communication; sending out simple communications that don't require a lot of work on each one.

Whatever your solution, remember the verse above. The Lord would not have put that encouragement in the Bible if weariness in continuing to do good was not a constant danger. Recognize that weariness and a desire to quit too soon before a message has impact are ever-present dangers in church communications, but don't let weariness stop you from continuing to get your message out there until people respond and lives are changed.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

OPEN YOUR EYES—TRAINING FOR CREATIVITY IN COMMUNICATIONS IS ALL AROUND YOU

*Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice
in the public squares; at the head of the noisy streets
she cries out, in the gateways of the city she makes her
speech. (Prov. 1:20,21)*

DO YOU EVER FEEL DISCOURAGED because there is so much to learn in church communications in print and online and you don't know where or how to learn it? When you began this work nobody told you you'd have to become an expert in design, typography, writing, publication design, and production scheduling. Just when you think you've learned a few things about print, you've now got the web and email communications to master. Maybe you draw the line at learning HTML or podcasting. But to do your job well, you've got to learn many of these things, and the new technologies will keep on coming.

Read this verse with great encouragement—what you need to know, the wisdom required in your work, is all around you. You don't have to get a university or art school degree in design. You don't need the latest in software and the most powerful hardware. Ask the Lord to open your eyes to see lessons in good design and communication that are everywhere.

Look at magazines, books, wander around the local bookstore with a latte. Surf the web. Go to the libraries, in town and online.

Evaluate what works, what doesn't; what looks good and what looks awful. Walk around Target—it's got some of the greatest design and color combinations in their house wares—seeing what colors they combine is a great free lesson in contemporary color theory.

Talk to friends doing the same work. Ask them how they handled a project; what are their best tips for a certain software package or piece of hardware. Swap samples—don't worry about copying—everyone always adds their own twist to any design they find inspiring. Advice from friends is free and often each of you knows something the other person needs to learn.

Look at a garden, the beach, or mountains for color combinations—our God is a marvelous artist.

Talk to the Lord. Computers and the web don't baffle him. He knew the names of a billion stars and had counted every hair on your head long before the first database was created. Ask him for clarity as you work on projects, for insight into the hearts of your audience, for new ideas and creativity.

The Lord's wisdom is all around you, in your world and in the people near you—search it out and receive it with thanks.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

SATAN IS THE ACCUSER OF THE BRETHREN, DON'T DO HIS WORK

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8 KJV)

And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. (Rev. 12:10 KJV)

I AM ASTOUNDED AT THE DREADFUL THINGS that can come into my mind about my brothers and sisters in the faith when I'm working on church communications. Do any of these sound familiar?

"He deliberately turned that in late, just to mess up my layout and schedule."

"How dare she say that about the bulletin? I worked so hard this time and no one seems to care for real creativity."

"Nobody appreciates all of the hard work involved in creating these communications. Instead of 'thank you,' all I get is 'redo this,' 'correct that.' They think I'm a machine."

And on it goes.

If this happens to you, as it does to me, I remind myself to STOP. I remind myself that Satan is the accuser of the brethren and he will

put those thoughts into my mind continuously. He is the accuser; I must not do his job for him. His goal is to devour my love for others in a pity party of slander and resentment.

I have to remember that this is no small thing. We are involved in spiritual warfare for the souls of people. If Satan can cause us in the church to be fighting each other, we are crippled in our battles with the true enemy.

I have to remind myself that maybe the other person didn't mean what they said; maybe they were tired or stressed or upset about something I have no idea about. I also have to remind myself that they are sinners like me and maybe they meant exactly what they said and maybe they did want deliberately to make my day miserable. But either way, my response should be the same: mercy and forgiveness.

I expect that mercy and forgiveness from the Lord. Sometimes I am rotten to people because I'm stressed out and sad. Sometimes I'm rotten because I want to intentionally make someone look bad and show the world what a dreadful hypocrite they are. When I see in myself these dreadful actions I plead with the Lord for forgiveness. He promises to grant it, but with one little condition.

I have to forgive the people who, intentionally or not, have treated me badly. I need to forgive in the free and grace-filled way the Lord forgives me. I have to trust that they are the Lord's servants, not mine, and he will deal with them as is necessary. When I do that, I can work in freedom, remembering we are all pilgrims, still a long way from home. The journey is much more pleasant when we are kind to each other on the way.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

**WILD AND CRAZY, CONSERVATIVE AND PROPER —
THERE IS ROOM FOR EVERY COMMUNICATION STYLE
IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you:
Do not think of yourself more highly than you
ought Just as each of us has one body
with many members, and these members do not all
have the same function, so in Christ we who are many
form one body, and each member belongs to all the
others. We have different gifts. (Rom. 12:3-6)*

WE ARE ALL CALLED TO DIFFERENT KINDS OF WORK as we do communications work for the kingdom of God. That should give us tremendous peace and comfort as we go about our calling.

There is incredible variety and diversity in the Christian communication world of ministry. Some enjoy weekly projects at church or consistent monthly newsletters. Others are challenged by illustration projects for Christian album and book covers. Others work for magazines or publishing houses. Others can develop multimedia, web designs, or interactive learning materials.

In addition, we all have different styles in our computer-created design. Within the parameters of good design there is tremendous freedom. Some digital designers have a formal, austere style, others are flamboyant and wild. There is a place for everyone.

All the different styles of creation are appropriate for different

audiences. Educators have long known that people learn in different ways and similarly different people respond best to different styles of communication. That's why it's sort of silly to argue what style is "best." There is no objective "best" in church communication—best is what works best for the audience you are called to reach. What is "best" for the church board would not be "best" for the middle-school event.

What is important is that you spend time before the Lord discovering who you are and your gifts and calling in this area. Let the Lord help you see and value your unique gifts. Once you've done that, keep in mind these two things:

First, be who you are and work in your areas of strength. If you like to design wild and crazy illustrations, producing a monthly, primarily text newsletter for a very conservative church may not be a good match. Be honest, ask around, and pray God will link up your interests and talents with the exact church needing them.

Second, let other people be who they are. Don't hire or sign on as a volunteer the wild and crazy digital artist and think you'll make him into a lover of classic church prose and design.

But no matter what the overall style of your church, if you have a communication team, be sure to have a variety of people with a variety of design skills and approaches so you can match them up with the variety of ministries in your church. One style or skill is not better than another—aim to place people into projects that match their God-given abilities with your various ministry groups and the whole church will benefit.

Celebrate and learn from each other's differences in design style and technology skills and pray that your work together will reflect the unity and purpose we are called to illustrate in the body of Christ.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

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WEEK 22

LEARN HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR TOOLS FOR CHURCH COMMUNICATION PRODUCTION

Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds. (Prov. 27:23)

THOUGH THE COMPUTER MAY HAVE REPLACED flocks and herds as a means of livelihood, the above advice to know the condition of the producer of our means of our livelihood, now often a computer, is still valid today.

Our computing lives can operate much more pleasantly the more we know about and take care of the hardware and operating systems of our computers. Think of this learning as an additional, not a hated chore, in your work of doing communications for the Kingdom of God. Learning about hardware and operating systems—how your computer actually stores things, how disk drives work, and how to keep your files organized, what to do when crashes and freezes take place—none of these things are as hard to learn about as they first seem. The internet isn't nearly as scary after you learn how to access resources, use search engines, and download the free utilities on it.

Like taking vitamins and exercising, the time spent learning about these areas can prevent painful problems later. Get a simple book, watch over the shoulder of or ask questions of the computer expert at your church. Take time to watch free demos or classes online. Take a class at the local community college or block out an hour or

two a week to work through the tutorials that came with your software.

Whenever things start to get unorganized and messy in my computer files and office I like to remember the way *The Message* words this passage from I Thessalonians 4, “God hasn’t invited us into a disorderly, unkempt life but into something holy and beautiful.” I also am reminded that our Lord likes us to do things “decently and in order.”

If these are our Lord’s desires, then we need to trust that time taken out to learn about our operating system, to organize our resources, or back up files isn’t lost, wasted time. It’s time we spend trusting that our Lord will help us find the time we need to accomplish our projects, when we do them in the way that honors him.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

THE WORD “NO” IS HARD TO SAY, BUT ESSENTIAL FOR CHURCH COMMUNICATION SANITY

“I tell you the truth,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”

(Luke 4:24-27)

ONE OF THE HARDEST WORDS TO SAY when you are involved in church communication is “no.”

There is always another project to be done, always someone you could help by putting together a flyer, newsletter, or web project for them. There is always a way to do a project better, a better photograph, or illustration, or clip art we know we can find if we just take the time to search. But we need to follow our Lord’s example and learn to say “no.”

It is never easy. After Jesus shared these words the people of his hometown tried to kill him. Hopefully the reaction to our refusal to do a project or to make another revision won’t be quite as harsh, but we shouldn’t be surprised at negative reactions.

What makes it difficult is that we have to learn to say “no” to good things. For many of us in the Christian life, we’ve spent so much time learning to say “no” to evil. Learning to say “no” something that is good and needed—that’s tough.

What a good example Jesus is for us here. There were many things he said “no” to—people he didn’t heal, places he didn’t go to preach, people he didn’t go after.

What he did do was his Father’s will. He knew only his Father had the big picture and knew exactly what Jesus needed to do to accomplish that plan. Jesus could say “no” in peace because he spent intense and intimate time with God.

Time with God, confirming his will for us, is the only way to determine what good things we must say “no” to in our lives and church communication ministries.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

USE YOUR IMAGINATION TO COMMUNICATE THE DEEP TRUTHS OF YOUR FAITH

Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." (Rev. 4:6-8)

PICTURE THAT IMAGE IN YOUR MIND FOR A MOMENT. If you've ever played or seen some of the images in the current computer games this one would fit right in. But though the imaginative game form of the image would fit, its message is far different than most fantastic video games. It isn't about blood and destruction, it's about worshipping God.

Recently a Christian writer was critiquing the communication in current media and computer arenas. He stated that since much of the communication did not take the form of logical, linear thought, that truth could not be communicated. I disagree. Though the importance of truth cannot be denied, there are many ways to communicate it.

Linear, logical arguments are one way—but look at the book of Revelation, and many of the visions of the prophets in the Old Testament (Ezekiel, Daniel). Fantastic visions, time shifts, conversations between heaven and earth—many parts of these books hardly qualify as linear, logical communication. But that doesn't make them less true.

I wonder if they wouldn't be great illustrated on a computer screen? Sometimes I think we'd understand prophecy so much better if we could just *see* it as the writers did.

If the Apostle John and the Prophet Ezekiel were around today, they would probably feel right at home with 3-D computer modeling and virtual reality to communicate their messages. Instead of limiting the ways God can communicate, let's encourage those blessed with imaginative gifts to use computer tools today to the fullest, so that by every means possible we can reach our generation for Jesus.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

PASS ON YOUR STORY WELL AND LEAVE BEHIND A GODLY HERITAGE

After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the LORD to anger.

(Judges 2:10-12)

TELLING THE STORY OF OUR SALVATION CLEARLY and completely is not an option if we care about our children. Whether our spiritual or physical children, if we want them to walk with God, our spiritual heritage must be communicated to them.

One wonders why the descendants of the people who God had delivered from bondage in Egypt in such miraculous ways, “knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.” Obviously they didn’t know because their elders didn’t tell them. But why didn’t they?

Were the leaders too busy building their new homes? Were they bitter about the times in the desert and did that overshadow the victories? Were the daily battles too all-consuming? Or did they just

quietly tell themselves that they would record the stories and write the histories when they had more time?

Whatever the reason, they did not tell the story of God's intervention in their lives and their descendants suffered and sinned because of it.

Today is no different. We have battles to fight, land to conquer, bitter and sad memories to forget. Our days are full. At the same time God is at work in our lives. Our personal deserts are crossed; refreshment comes to us out of rocky places. Our needs are met as miraculously as the manna appeared each day in the desert.

You will never "have time" to do what is essential to pass on the lessons God has given you. You have to carve out that time from some valid, important, necessary activity that you think you can't do without to tell your story. Make the time to do it. Give your descendants in your church and family a godly heritage.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:



WEEK 26

VERSES ON PERSEVERANCE

“When he said, ‘Be perfect,’ He meant it. He meant that we must go in for the full treatment. . . . The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less.”

C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

WHEN WORKING IN CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS, not only do you need to persevere and grow in job skills, but the Lord will also use your work to grow your spiritual life to maturity. There is nothing that happens to you that is outside the Lord’s control—ask him to make the most of every work challenge to grow you in your faith.

*If you falter in times of trouble,
how small is your strength!
(Prov. 24:10)*

*For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.
(Prov. 24:16)*

*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.
(Galatians 6:9 NIV)*

*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.
(1 Cor. 15:58 KJV)*

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish.

(Hebrews 12:1-2 NLT)

You must live in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ, as citizens of heaven.

(Phil. 1:27 NLT)

However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.

(Acts 20:24)

Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

(1 Peter 1:13)

I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

(Rev. 3:11)

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:



WEEK 27

TELL STORIES THAT ARE UNIQUE TO YOUR MINISTRY, SO THOSE WHO NEED YOU CAN FIND YOU

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John1:14)

EACH ONE OF OUR CHURCHES OR MINISTRIES EMBODIES some part of the incarnation of the continuing work of Christ. Part of our task in our ministry and church communications is to make that message take on flesh and blood to the people who need our help.

But how do we do it? We do it in the same way Jesus did. When he wanted to communicate the messages of the gospel, when he wanted to tell us what God was like, he didn't do it by sharing long, theological arguments—he told stories.

When you plan your story telling, first spend some time thinking about what makes your church or ministry unique and focus on telling these stories. Don't be afraid to communicate what makes you different. Jesus never apologized for declaring that he was the one way to God. We need to imitate his boldness.

You won't be the one and only son of God, but if you are a group that ministers to AIDS sufferers in your community, if you don't state that clearly in your communications, how will people find you? If you provide shelter for the victims of domestic violence, do people

know how to reach you 24 hours a day? If you make some generic statement about “ministering to those in need,” but don’t tell what specific needs you minister to, a person with AIDS or a domestic abuse victim might be too fearful to call and ask.

This is not to say that you don’t do your communication wisely and gently. I recently saw an excellent little communication for a ministry that helped women who were victims of domestic abuse. It was a small business card, placed in holders inside the stalls at the women’s restrooms at church. It’s message was clear, but it was shared in a private, sensitive way. When I shared that story, a gentleman in my seminar said his church has similar cards in the men’s restrooms for men who have addictions to pornography.

The Lord has specific people he wants you to reach, but if you aren’t clear about who you are, the people needing your help might not ever find you.

Yes, if you are following a controversial call and publicizing it, you may get some negative responses. But if you are at peace in your calling from the Lord, don’t let them bother you—Jesus’ message wasn’t 100 percent popular either.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

EXPAND YOUR CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS MINISTRY BY TRAINING OTHERS

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave, just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matt. 20:26-28)

WHEN YOU'VE BEEN DOING CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS for awhile, you probably realize you are involved in a servant ministry. Few of the projects we do are ones to please ourselves, we do them so the messages and ministry of others will be promoted and grow.

But what happens when the requests become more than you can handle? The typical response to successful communications in churches or ministries is that once a department or two gets a great-looking brochure, newsletter, email or on paper, or a website, then everybody wants one. It can become overwhelming and far more than any one person can manage.

The only way to survive and to accomplish all you need to is to create a communications team. That means your job will change. The person who previously did all the work now has the opportunity to become a teaching servant. Some churches give that person the title "Communications Coordinator." Instead of continuing to take on more and more jobs that person can now say, "Let me teach you how to do that project."

One church was able to set up a spare computer with graphics

software and a high speed internet connection in an office where church department members or volunteers could do projects. The communications coordinator personalized templates in MS Publisher for various ministries and communication volunteers could simply update their material and then send it back to church office to be printed. Coupled with frequent training sessions in communications, the church has moved from one overworked person to a communication team. Many ministries of the church benefit and no one person burns out.

Pray about expanding your church communications ministry. Think of ways you can train and inspire others. Make it your goal not only to serve with your publications, but to become a servant of many servants who glorify God with the tools of technology in church communications.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

VERSES ON GOOD ADVICE FOR CHURCH COMMUNICATORS

GOD IS ULTIMATELY THE SOURCE OF ALL GOOD ADVICE. Ask him first. Then search his Word and be willing to listen to others. Always test earthly advice by the Bible and never do anything contrary to it.

That night the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream, and God said, "What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you." Solomon replied, "...O Lord my God, now you have made me king instead of my father, David, but I am like a little child who doesn't know his way around. . . . Give me an understanding mind so I that can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong. For who by himself is able to govern this great nation of yours?"
(1 Kings 3:5-9 NLT)

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.
(James 1:5)

*Pride only breeds quarrels,
but wisdom is found in those who take advice.*
(Prov. 13:19)

Fools think they need no advice, but the wise listen to others.
(Proverbs 12:15 NLT)

If you listen to constructive criticism, you will be at home among the wise. If you reject criticism, you only harm yourself; but if you listen to correction, you grow in understanding.

(Proverbs 15:31-32 NLT)

Intelligent people are always open to new ideas. In fact, they look for them.

(Proverbs 18:15 NLT)

Though good advice lies deep within a person's heart, the wise will draw it out.

(Proverbs 20:5 NLT)

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

**YOU CAN DO WHAT IS REQUIRED OF YOU IN
CHURCH COMMUNICATION, NO MATTER WHAT
YOUR FEARS**

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are those who mourn. . . .blessed are the meek. . . .blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. (Matt. 5:3-6 KJV)

DO YOU EVER FEEL YOU AREN'T GOOD ENOUGH for your work? That you don't have the skills, the training, or the strength to do your job? Do you ever feel too depressed or unspiritual to produce communications for your church? Or like the verses above, do you feel poor, mourning, hungry, and meek?

If so, that's great! In God's economy if you haven't got it—you're in!

We've all felt like we couldn't do the job we've been called to do, all felt unworthy of the responsibilities and trust we've been given. But at the times when we hear the negative voices in our heads, we need to remember that Satan is the accuser and to tell him to be quiet.

It is Satan's opinion that we can't do the job. The enemy would love it if we'd quit, wait until we're better qualified, or until we have updated equipment to do a communication job that will tell people about Jesus or help them grow in their faith. When we hear that

accusing voice in our heads, we need to shut our ears to it and to listen to our God. Satan accuses; God accepts. True, we may not feel strong on our own, but we can affirm with the Apostle Paul, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13 KJV).

Paul wrote this when he was in prison chained to a Roman guard. When work on our church communications, we may not have the latest computer and software needed; we may feel our training isn't what it should be, we may feel it doesn't look nearly as “professional” as we wish it did, but we don't have a Roman soldier attached to the hand moving our mouse.

Wherever you are, whatever your skills, if you feel God is asking you to create and communicate for him, thank him for his adequacy and work in his strength.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:



WEEK 31

DON'T ALLOW DISTRACTIONS TO KEEP YOU FROM USING YOUR TIME WISELY

*Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise
but as wise, making the most of every opportunity,
because the days are evil. (Eph. 5:15)*

ONE OF THE GREATEST CHALLENGES to successful communication work for the kingdom of God is the challenge to use our time wisely. Using our time wisely often means staying focused on the work we have to do. That isn't easy. Today our computers and the internet are filled with distracting temptations.

There is always another program we'd like to try or an article to read or a tutorial that would help us use the software we have more effectively. It's easy to never be satisfied with the clip art we have or the typefaces or the illustration we found on the web—we keep searching because we know there is something better if we search just a few more minutes.

Then, of course, the volunteer projects we'd like to do for various groups in our church somehow always seem more interesting than work we need to do for our own jobs or ministries.

Even email can be a huge distraction—if we open it first as we start our day, it is easy to let other people set the agenda for our work. We can spend so much time reading interesting things or responding to requests and needs we never get done what we planned to do.

None of these distractions are evil or bad. But we need bring them before the Lord and ask him if they are the best use of our time. Just because something is good to do (web research and lengthy emails might apply) doesn't always mean it's God's present will for you.

When the Bible encourages us to make the most of our time because the days are evil, I think part of that caution is to realize that the enemy of our souls can deceive us in our use of time. We can respond to the urgent and fill our hours with the trivial. We might be very busy, but are we actually getting anything done? Are we focused on what the Lord would have us to do?

You are unique in your calling. Ask Lord to help you use your time wisely today as you stay focused on the work he wants *you* to accomplish.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

**TRUST THE LORD TO TURN CHURCH
COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES INTO
OPPORTUNITIES FOR HIS GLORY**

*He divided the sea and led them through; he made the water stand firm like a wall. He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night. He split the rocks in the desert and gave them water as abundant as the seas; he brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers.
(Ps. 78:13-16)*

OUR GOD SPECIALIZES IN MAKING A WAY through what is impossible. Sometimes the very thing that seems like it may destroy us can be a means of salvation.

It was like that for the children of Israel. When they faced the Red Sea with Pharaoh's armies at their back their two options seemed to be death by drowning or death by the sword. But God opened the sea and what could have destroyed them became the means of conquering their enemies.

Sometimes I think the computer that faces me is a bit like the Red Sea. There are days when I feel like it will do me in—it brings more work and complications into my life than I ever dreamed possible.

But then I am reminded of what God can do with impossible situations. With the computer we can accomplish many ministry objectives that were impossible or impractical in the past.

A small counseling ministry publishes a brochure about its services, distributes it to churches, and hurting hearts hear of a place for healing. A church sends a direct mail piece, created cost-effectively in the church office to newcomers in town telling them about exercise classes, 12-Step programs, day-care for single parents, and invites them to come. A website reaches homebound people with Bible studies and across the globe apologists can answer thoughtful questions about the Christian faith.

Without the computer, desktop publishing, and the web, these communication pieces probably would never have been produced and the lives touched may never have realized that Jesus Christ cares about them.

Out of the sea of work facing you today, do your work with expectation as you watch how the Lord can turn difficulties into opportunities for his glory.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:



WEEK 33

VERSES ON POSITIVE WORDS, ON WHAT SHOULD CHARACTERIZE OUR COMMUNICATIONS

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

(Col. 4:6)

*The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,
but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked.*

(Prov. 10:11)

*Reckless words pierce like a sword,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

(Prov. 12: 18)

The advice of the wise is like a life-giving fountain; those who accept it avoid the snares of death.

(Prov. 13: 14 NLT)

*A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

(Prov. 15: 1)

*Pleasant words are a honeycomb,
sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.*

(Prov. 16:24)

*The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue,
to know the word that sustains the weary.*

(Isa. 50:4)

*But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things,
which is the head, even Christ.*

(Eph. 4:15 KJV)

*Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to
his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.*

(Eph. 4:25)

*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only
what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it
may benefit those who listen.*

(Eph. 4:29)

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

VERSES ON NEGATIVE WORDS, ON WHAT SHOULD NOT CHARACTERIZE OUR COMMUNICATIONS

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

(James 1:26)

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge.

(2 Tim. 2:16 NLT)

*Like a madman shooting
firebrands or deadly arrows
is a man who deceives his neighbor
and says, "I was only joking!"*

(Prov. 26:18-19)

*Would a wise man answer with empty notions
or fill his belly with the hot east wind?*

(Job 15:2)

Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?

(Ecc. 5:6)

*Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious,
but a fool is consumed by his own lips.
At the beginning his words are folly;
at the end they are wicked madness-and the fool multiplies words.*
(Ecc. 10:12-14)

*Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his
neighbor: for we are members one of another.*
(Eph. 4:25 KJV)

*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along
with every form of malice.*
(Eph. 4:31)

*Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are
out of place, but rather thanksgiving.*
(Eph. 5:4)

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

THE HARD WORK YOU DO TODAY WILL EARN YOU PRAISE FROM JESUS

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matt. 25:21)

WHEN OUR COMMUNICATION WORK SLIPS from creative challenge to daily grind, it helps to be reminded that we are doing this for an upcoming job review with Jesus. But at that meeting, our performance will be judged differently than with human standards. We can rest in the knowledge that primarily we aren't called to be successful, but to be faithful.

When we meet Jesus, we don't have to worry that he won't be impressed with our designs, or disappointed that we didn't do a motion-filled multimedia presentation every Sunday, or that we never quite got the website the way we wanted it to be. We may never do award-winning work or print on anything other than the church office copy machine, but that isn't what matters to Jesus.

What matters to him is that we are faithful on the computer before us, doing the jobs he gave us to do today. What matters to him is not the software you used, but how you loved your people. Not how you wowed your communication peers, but how you prayed that your church communications would encourage your

congregation and grow them in the Christian faith. What matters to him is not that you can't figure out a complex layout, but how you did the best you knew how to get a clear, caring, and complete communication piece out on time.

These things more than matter to him—these acts of faithfulness in your work today will someday earn you commendation from the creator of the universe.

When the reality of that permeates our insides it's like a hot fudge topping all over the plain vanilla of our everyday work. The week after week of typing up the same order of service, the checking one more time that the names on the birthday list are spelled right, the meetings with the staff to make sure everybody learns how to update their part of the website so people will always know the correct schedule—faithfulness in these things is noted by heaven.

Above my desk is a little plaque my grandmother gave me, it says "Only one life will soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last."

Our job, our computers, and all the things we worry about today will be gone someday, but what we do faithfully for Jesus today in our church communication work and for all our tomorrows, he will remember forever.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:



WEEK 36

PRESENT YOUR MESSAGE RESPONSIBLY AND THEN TRUST GOD FOR EXTRAORDINARY, ETERNAL RESULTS

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself. (Ezekiel 33:7-9)

THERE ARE TWO LESSONS IN THIS PASSAGE for Christian communicators— one of responsibility and one of trust.

In the area of responsibility, we must present the message of the good news of Jesus Christ clearly and completely. We tell the salvation story in our publications in print and online by the messages we share, by the lives we profile that exhibit principles of faith. We use our church communications to bring people to church events where they can hear the gospel message and experience our church family. We use every means we can—clear writing, appropriate typography, and quality graphics to communicate our message.

Having done all we can in the tangible world of church communication creation we must then move into the more intangible area of trust. We might be able to change the design of our bulletin,

newsletter, or website, but we can never change hearts. Only God can do that.

We also may never know the extent of the influence of our publications. We can and should take reader surveys and solicit feedback, but we may never know how a newsletter message passed on to a neighbor or a forwarded email Bible study may have changed a life. We may never see how a written article or email devotion was saved and read again and again by a person alone.

When the little boy gave his small lunch to Jesus, he had no idea his Lord would use it to feed 5,000 people. In the same way we offer, in faithful service, our bits of words and type. He determines how they will be used—our job is to do our best and then to offer our work to him.

We may some day be surprised by the tap on our shoulder in heaven and hear the story of a life changed because we had the courage to be a faithful watchman and shared the gospel message or a word of hope and encouragement in our church communications.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS

WORK HARD; PRAY HARD—BOTH ARE NEEDED FOR CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATION SUCCESS

So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. (Exodus 17:10, 11)

IN HIS DEVOTIONS, CHARLES SPURGEON comments on the passage above, “So mighty was the prayer of Moses, that all depended upon it. The petitions of Moses discomfited the enemy more than the fighting of Joshua. Yet both were needed.”

From this passage in the Bible and Spurgeon’s commentary we are reminded that our work in church communications always has two sides—the spiritual and the practical. It benefits us to keep them in balance.

The workings of a computer and web are not beyond the realms of prayer. We can ask for wisdom to understand tutorials, to remember to slow down, to execute computer commands in their proper order, to keep working on a problem until we come to a solution. We can pray about what software to purchase and when, where to get training and for the resources to afford it. We can pray that we might learn all we need to complete our present tasks without overwhelming ourselves.

Once we are comfortable and capable with our tools and the

practical aspects of our work, if we want to accomplish goals of eternal value, we must move beyond praying for skills in our technology and tools. We must pray for insight as we create communication pieces and that the Lord would prepare the hearts of those who read our message. We must remember that the changing of lives is always, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6 KJV) and we must pray for wisdom to create communications pieces that are worthy of the Lord’s blessing.

At the same time that we commit the spiritual success of our communications to the Lord, we must remember “both were needed.” Joshua had to actually fight a bloody, dusty, horror-filled battle. There will be days that our work in church communications doesn’t feel spiritual at all but is mundane, disciplined, hard work. To do our jobs well we must apply every earthly skill of business organization, communication, and computer training that we have to succeed in the battle entrusted to us, while remembering to pray that the Lord use our work in a way not possible based on our skills alone.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS

BECOME A WRITER AND CARRY ON THE TRADITION OF THE GREAT WRITERS OF THE PAST

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1-2)

WHO HAS INFLUENCED YOUR LIFE through the written word? Maybe contemporary writers—C.S. Lewis, John Stott, Josh McDowell, Lee Stobel, Max Lucado. Maybe writers from the past—Luther, Augustine, Calvin, Wesley.

Whoever they might be, few of us would be where we are in our walk with the Lord without the written encouragement and teachings of those who have gone before us in writing about our faith. Do you feel that you might be called to join in this “cloud of witnesses” in Christian writing? If so, and if you aren’t producing the communications on paper or online that you feel you should, what are you waiting for?

With your computer, you have on your desk the tools to produce everything from pamphlets to newsletters; blogs to books. With the web you have on demand printing and distribution systems

necessary to get it to people (www.lulu.com, the company who produced this book, is one source). You don't need the permission and support of national publishing companies to produce materials to teach and encourage your brothers and sisters in the faith. However, to actually make your writing dreams result in tangible products, you may need to get rid of a few misconceptions about writing:

Often, it isn't fun—actually finishing a writing project, that is. It's fun to think about it. It's fun to plan, fun to imagine what it will be like when it's done. Fun to fantasize about being a writer or blogger. The work of drafts, rewriting, and publication itself, is often not fun.

I sometimes hear the phrase, "If it isn't fun, why do it?" Obedience to the call of God is only one of many answers to that question. Whether writing is fun or not has absolutely nothing to do with whether God is calling you to do it. If the fun quotient is the determiner for if you write or not, you will most likely produce little of lasting value.

You'll never have the time to do it. You'll probably never be able to take off for a month to a secluded cabin to finally get done the writing you want to. You will always have to fearlessly carve out the time out of a schedule that already seems too full.

You'll never be rested enough to do it. If you're involved in ministry and have something to share, creating publications isn't what will be first on your list when you get some rare time off. But, if you are called to write, be warned that the Lord will often not allow you to rest until you create what he has called you to create. Most likely as you create the publications you need to create, be aware that obedience to that calling may not energize you, it may exhaust you. Keep writing anyway.

If you feel called to write, fix your eyes on Jesus and create your publications. Obedience to him will make all your efforts worth it, fun or not, tired or not, now and forever, in ways your most extravagant dreams of being a writer cannot imagine.

YOU AREN'T A COMPUTER, TAKE TIME TO REST

*So let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I move along slowly at the pace of the droves before me and that of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.
(Genesis 33:14)*

JACOB WAS SENSITIVE TO THE POSSIBILITY of driving his flocks and children too hard. A present-day application is that we need to remember in all our church communication work that human beings have limits.

The computer doesn't. You keep it plugged in and it doesn't stop. It doesn't get tired or need to stretch or take a coffee break. It will do repetitive tasks again and again without wearing out and it doesn't get bored.

People aren't like that. People get tired and bored. They complain and get sick. If pushed too hard they may break beyond repair.

Some studies suggest that people look at themselves and other people differently after working with computers. They are harder on people and less tolerant. They push themselves beyond healthful levels in time spent working on computer projects. They do this because they begin to confuse people with computers.

To not fall into this trap can be a strong area of witness for Christians. We know the true value of people. They are not machines, but precious creatures of God to be cared for.

We know the true value of time and work. We know our times and success are in God's hands. We know God commanded rest every seven days to remind us that there is a time to stop working and trust him.

When you are tempted to work past your physical limits, remember you don't work for a god of technology that never tires but one who said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

In addition to monitoring our own church communications schedule, monitoring that people are not treated like computers is a huge challenge for those who are in management positions in church communications. You must understand what you ask for in terms of human effort and time and what it costs your employees to accomplish your requests. This may not be easy. We forget we are in the midst of a communication revolution and what seems like an easy task ("Make the website look like this great example I saw at the national conference and have it done by next week.") may in fact be an immensely time-consuming and difficult task. Keep in mind the person assigned the task may be afraid, for all sorts of reasons, to let you know the difficulty of what you assigned.

How are you to know? Ask. Watch. Listen. Understand what you are asking for. Care for those under your care as gently as Jacob led his people.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS

THE MEDIA ISN'T OUR MESSAGE — OUR MESSAGE IS JESUS

Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

(Luke 10:40-42)

WHEN MARSHALL McLUHAN, early pioneer of electronic media, pronounced in the early sixties, that "the media is the message," he was predicting that the means of communication would be more important than the message it carried. For his time, the primary media was television; more and more in our world it is computers, and in the resulting forms of digital communication: desktop publishing, the internet, cell phone and small screen communications.

Though it is easy to get caught up in the complexity and power of digital communications, as Christians we must constantly remind ourselves that these incredible innovations, and any that are to come, are only tools. The power doesn't come from the tool or media—the power comes from the message.

As the apostle Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,

for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16). The word “power” used in this verse comes from the Greek word, *dunamis*. It’s the same root for our world dynamite and it means a “miraculous, mighty, wonderful power.”

Our message, not our media, is the source of true power. It was the same for the early disciples writing with pens on parchment, it will be the same for us if we are creating virtual reality holograms to illustrate Bible stories in the years to come.

We live in an age where the pace of change is incredible. Many of you started out communicating with pencils, progressed to typewriters, and now operate computers on your desk more powerful than the ones used to put a man on the moon. This pace will not slow down.

We need to always remember that no matter how powerful, overwhelming or impressive the technology, there remains, “only one thing that is needful”—sharing the good news salvation found in Jesus.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

TELL TRUE STORIES THAT ENCOURAGE AND INSPIRE

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble,
whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely,
whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or
praiseworthy—think about such things. (Phil. 4:8)*

WHEN WE APPLY THIS VERSE to our church communication projects, we can help make the Lord's command reality in people's lives. We can do this by telling stories that exemplify the virtues in this verse.

We can begin by telling stories that are true. We don't have to look outside our own church or ministry to see God working in lives. When you have a message you want to communicate ask the Lord to give you fresh eyes to see that message lived out in the lives around you.

To write about nobility, talk to the home-bound lady who calls and emails twenty other shut-ins regularly to encourage them. Interview some of the people she touches with her love.

For an example of what is right, talk to the business people in your church who abide by the local laws even if it costs them profit. Explore how they represent Jesus in a world of competition and cut-throat pricing.

To show purity, interview some of the high school students who have taken the "True Love Waits" pledge. Take their pictures and

share their stories with your church that these are kids who have fun and friends like other kids, but who also decided to take Jesus seriously.

To share the lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy, follow around the nursery helpers on a Sunday morning and tell how many diapers were changed and tears calmed. Or retell the schedule of the youth pastor preparing for, attending, and cleaning up after an overnight event for 45 teenagers.

There may be a lot of negative in our world that we can think about and be depressed over. But our world is also filled with lives that shine brightly with the characteristics of this verse. You'll find your heart encouraged as you share them. The power of your communications in print and online gives you the ability to share this encouragement with your church. Find the great stories and tell them.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:



WEEK 42

JUSTICE, MERCY AND HUMILITY SHOULD CHARACTERIZE OUR COMMUNICATIONS

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

(Micah 6:8)

WHAT MAKES GOOD CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS in our digital age? Though the answers are different for the different groups using digital tools to accomplish their goals, the checklist provided by this verse is useful for us doing communications for the church and the kingdom of God.

What does it mean in our communications “to act justly?” We might feel led to deal with issues of local or national justice and to call our church to involvement. We might use our skills in communication to speak out for the homeless and abused. Rants and raves are common today as everyone has access to the ability to webcast their opinions all over the world. The people of God can use those tools to promote acts of justice for those truly oppressed. Pray for wisdom to speak with kindness and truth and to never rant and rave in a way unworthy of our Lord.

In addition, this command has more mundane implications. Have we been careful not to use copyrighted material in either text or software? Have we been just in our treatments of issues and people?

What does it mean in our communications “*to love mercy?*” Are we kind to the people we write about? Have we been careful to understand why people act and react as they do before we come to conclusions? Mercy must partner with justice because justice alone can be destructive. For example, if, as in the section above, we only rant about injustice without suggesting merciful and practical solutions, our rants might make us feel better, but they won’t have any lasting effect.

Are we merciful to the people we work with? Are we overly harsh and demanding on deadlines or corrections? Have we created backup systems and cross-trained people on projects so that time off for church communicators doesn’t cause major trauma?

Are we merciful to ourselves? Do we take needed breaks? Have we invested in a chair or keyboard that is kind to our body?

What does it mean in our communications “*to walk humbly with our God?*” Do we do our best and then let it go trusting that God will accomplish his purposes with our work? Do we take the time to humbly research answers to technological questions we can’t figure out?

Do we ever allow spiritual pride to enter in if we have a bigger web site or more powerful computer or a super-smart techie working for us when the churches around us struggle with outdated technology? Do we ever forget that all we accomplish of value is because the Lord has stooped to bless our work and not because we are indispensable and deserve it? Remember Jesus could use the stones in the parking lot to proclaim his message better than we can, if he chose to do so.

Allow the Lord to grow you spiritually as well as professionally in your work on the computer as you do your work—justly, mercifully, and walking in humility before your God.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

**IF YOU DON'T THINK YOU'VE GOT ANYTHING LEFT
TO GIVE, LET GOD GIVE THROUGH YOU.**

And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. (1 Kings 17:8-9 KJV)

GOD'S PROVISION CAN COME from sources we might least expect. In the story that follows the verse above, the prophet Elijah, fleeing for his life, takes refuge with a starving widow and her son.

She has only enough food left for one meal and then she says they will die. Elijah asks her to trust God by feeding him first. She does that, and following her obedience, the food lasts for her, her son, and Elijah for the many remaining months of the famine in the land.

There are many times when we are asked to do a church communication project and we're tired, stressed out, juggling many things, and we feel if we take on one more project—we'll die. Perhaps not physically, but emotionally or spiritually, it feels like there is nothing left in us.

But sometimes, when we believe the project comes from God, when we press ahead and do it, it's amazing what happens. Not only does the project get done and people are blessed by it, but somehow we find strength to continue our work when we didn't think there was anything left in us.

In one of her devotions Ann Ortlund talks about how much of the work of the kingdom of God gets done by very tired people. She reminds us that Jesus got tired and had to rest; she acknowledges we get tired in our work for him. I imagine the widow was very tired the day Elijah came to her and asked to be fed. I imagine it crossed her mind, how dare he ask for the last food she had? But despite her tiredness and questions, she obeyed.

The application for us doing church communications work today is no matter how tired we are, no matter if we feel we have nothing to give—God can still use us. *His* provision can flow through us in ways we can't foresee or understand to bless, build up, and encourage his children. When we experience that, it is both a humbling and an exhilarating time.

Allow yourself to be encouraged that the success of the projects you do doesn't depend ultimately on your physical and emotional strength. Your success in your communication projects comes from his strength and sovereignty flowing through you—and that never wears out.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

CHOOSE TO COURAGEOUSLY USE THE TOOLS OF TECHNOLOGY IN POSITIVE WAYS

*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.
(Isa. 43:18)*

HOW WONDERFUL IT IS THAT OUR GOD is a God of newness, of constant creation of innovative ways of service.

Just as he enabled the slaves of Egypt to serve him as free people in the promised land, he continuously provides new ways for his people to serve him in church communications. Working with computers has been an entirely new way of doing things for many churches and ministries. Desktop publishing is now the common tool of church communication creation; the web is an ever-present part of many people's lives, and new forms of digital communication are continuously combined and created.

In this explosion of communication tools there is great potential freedom. In the same way, when the Israelites came out of Egypt as free people, they could do whatever they wanted. With the plunder they received from the Egyptians they could either build a golden calf or an ark for the tabernacle.

Technology provides a similar freedom and choice. In themselves gold and all forms of digital communications are neutral. We can either produce communications that fill real or virtual mailboxes with junk, ones that show off our opinions and vanity, or we can create

communications that call people to salvation and train them to Christian maturity.

In addition to wise and worthwhile content, we need the Lord to help us with the new ways of relating to people that technology brings about. Because one person can do so much with one computer, organizations of all kinds and sizes are undergoing massive changes. When the people came out of Egypt, a shepherd replaced a Pharaoh, a slave became a general. Today the computer sometimes causes a person who had little responsibility in the past suddenly to be in charge of an entire publication or web-enabled ministry. Just as Moses used his leadership for the good of his people, we must remember that any technological communication skill we have is always to be used to serve people and build them up.

Finally God can give us the courage we need to deal with these new responsibilities in technology. Remember how he empowered Moses and Joshua. If your work today in digital communications seems overwhelming and impossible, don't dwell on the past, but look with excitement to God who continuously inspires his people to conquer new lands for his glory.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:



WEEK 45

TRUST GOD DAILY TO GIVE YOU THE SKILLS, TOOLS, AND WISDOM TO DO YOUR COMMUNICATION WORK FOR HIM

This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread." (Matthew 6:9-11)

HOW CAN ANYONE WORK SANELY in the digital age of church communications if they do not pray these verses?

Impersonal technology is overwhelming. The developments in technology hardware, the new tools and toys, seem to have taken on a mind of their own. A recent technology magazine said that on average, most equipment is considered "outdated" within three months of its release. In another magazine a technology columnist recited the stories of a number of phone calls he had gotten recently from individuals who were experiencing confusion and frustration over their latest technology purchases. He then confessed all of them were fellow technology columnists for national magazines.

In addition to changing hardware, just when you get software figured out, they upgrade it. It may be an "upgrade" for the company, but it is often a frustration for those of us who have to now modify all the projects we finally seemed to have figured out. Just when we get a paper-based project working well, we're told it now has to go

out on the web, and if we can manage, also configured for cell-phone and small screen communication.

The change in the technology industry is constant and intense. And it won't stop. For the rest of our lives we will live in this river of ever-changing, ever-overwhelming innovation. What can we do?

We can trust in our Father who sees the whole picture from beginning to end. Not only does he know where technology is going, but he knows us. He knows what we need to do our jobs, he knows what we need to learn, and the equipment we must have to do what is required of us. He knows when we need help and rest.

Two thousand years ago, our Lord told us to ask that we be supplied with our daily bread. With technology changing daily, we need this prayer in our work. Whether it is for hardware and software that will be adequate for our tasks, for necessary training to prepare us for what comes next, or for the information and insight we need today to plan wisely for tomorrow, we can ask that we be supplied daily and that daily we will be prepared for the church communication work we will need to do tomorrow.

Having asked, we need to trust that his answers are what we need. We may not get every tech innovation we want, but we will have what we need to do the jobs he has assigned us to do.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:



WEEK 46

THE LORD WILL HELP YOU TO COMPLETE THE CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS WORK HE HAS CALLED YOU TO DO

*Being confident of this, that he who began a good work
in you will carry it on to completion until the day of
Christ Jesus. (Phil. 1:6)*

DO YOU EVER FEEL LIKE YOU WON'T MAKE IT to the end of the day, let alone to the completion of a major church communication project? If so, remember this verse. If you are in church communication and Jesus is your Lord, he got you into whatever you are working on and when he gets us into projects of his calling, he carries us through to completion.

I'm reminded of the story of the disciples in Luke 8 who panicked when the storm hit their boat when they were out on the lake. Jesus calmed the storm and rebuked them for their lack of faith. They lacked faith because when they got into the boat Jesus had said, "Let's go over to the other side of the lake." He didn't say, "Let's get into the middle of the lake and drown."

He didn't promise them an easy ride, it says "the boat was being swamped and they were in great danger." But he had promised them safe arrival on the other side.

No matter how much we might feel God has led us into our church communication work, there are times when we all feel "swamped

and in great danger.” We need to always remember that the difficulty encountered in a project is no predictor of whether or not the Lord wanted us in it.

In working to communicate the gospel with digital technology, you’ll often find yourself taking on an entirely new project you never imagined possible. We can plan on making mistakes. We may promise too much because we have no idea how much time a project will take. Some of our fellow passengers in the boat may be a bit disagreeable and not do their share of work. We panic. We may not fear losing our lives, but we sometimes fear for our jobs and sanity.

It’s our choice how to respond in these situations. We can hold on and trust. We can give thanks in all things, keep working, and get through it. But if that isn’t possible, remember the one who calmed storms for the disciples, calms them now for us, even when our faith is lacking. No matter how great our fears, our Lord is in control and able to get us safely to the other side of our current project and through all the days of our service in church communications.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

NO MATTER WHAT TECHNOLOGY BRINGS US, THE LORD ALWAYS SEES IT AND IS IN CONTROL

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God,
"who is, and who was, and who is to come, the
Almighty." (Rev.1:8)*

SOME OF YOU READING THIS GREW UP WITH COMPUTERS, but many of you doing church communications today started your job at the church long before computers were invented. Do you remember the first time you used an electric typewriter if you learned to type on a manual model? Or when you used a correcting typewriter for the first time? Remember how odd a word-processor felt initially and what it was like to move whole blocks of text around without having to retype a page?

What about the computer you're using now? Did you ever dream you'd be using something like that? Ever imagine you'd be doing something called desktop publishing or publishing materials on the web? What about email? Can you remember what it was like to wait days to get a reply in the mail?

If you haven't experienced these changes, if you are young and think the nostalgia tiresome, remember you too will grow old. Younger people will become impatient with you if you hold on to your out-dated iPhone, or iPad when who-knows-what becomes the cool tech necessity.

The cycle of change won't stop and should the Lord tarry, we will all experience technological innovations we can't imagine today.

In the midst of that reality, we need to make certain our focus is not on the tools that we use, but on the Lord of the tools and our lives. He sees the beginning from the end, He knows every technology that will touch our lives.

Because he sees all that is ahead of us we shouldn't be afraid of new technologies. Accept them with excitement and trust knowing that God allowed them into your life and will give you the resources to learn to use them. Too often the church is accused of being far behind in useful technology and too often we deserve that rebuke. Evaluate and pray, but learn to use effective new tools.

At the same time, no matter what comes into your life, hold your tools loosely. No tool is the final answer, no computer system will last forever. Learn to use the computer you have now for the jobs you are assigned in the very best way possible, but most of all, keep your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:



SUGAR WATER OR SAND? HOW TO REALLY CHANGE THE WORLD

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” (Matt. 7:24-27)

THE STORY IS TOLD OF HOW STEVE JOBS, the president of the new and struggling Apple computer company, enticed John Scully, then president of Pepsi, to come to work for him.

“Do you want to spend the rest of your life peddling sugar water?” Jobs asked Scully. “Or would you like to come and help change the world?”

Scully came to Apple and though they built a computer empire, it ultimately betrayed both of them and they were ousted from the corporation, though Jobs eventually returned. They gave their lives to a cause that may not have been built on sugar water, was literally built on sand.

Sand—the silicon chips that power the computers that run more and more of our lives—that’s all they are. And if we don’t have a reason for using them that transcends the power in that box, our lives are built on nothing but crumbling sand.

But we do have a different reason for doing what we do with computers. We’re doing our work, our church communications, for the kingdom of God. We may not have the most up-to-date equipment, we may not have the time to learn all the programs we should, we may feel like what we produce is never as good as it could be—but we do it for glorious reasons. Our structure may be a bit rickety at times, but the foundation is solid.

Because of the communications you create, lonely people will feel welcome in church when they see the cheerful message and graphics in your bulletin; hungry folks will be fed because your brochure explained a food drive well; birthdays will be remembered and people will feel they count for something because you carefully entered the names into databases and printed out calendars. And sometimes, whether in a brochure, or newsletter, or web page, you’ll clearly communicate the message of the gospel and the destiny of another soul will be changed for eternity.

Don’t be afraid to work hard, to be excited and passionate about your work—you aren’t working for sugar water or sand, but for a kingdom that can never be shaken.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

TEN IDEAS TO EVALUATE YOUR WORK AND KEEP GROWING IN YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil. May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. (1 Thes. 5:21-24)

ONCE A MONTH, QUARTER, OR YEAR, EVALUATE what you've been doing in your church communications. You can't accomplish all the suggestions below at one time, but they are ideas of ways to make practical your love for communication ministry and for your Lord.

1. Before you do anything else, spend some time in prayer asking the Lord what he would have you do next. The world of church communications is vast, but you are only responsible for your part of it. Listen to your Master to determine his focus for you.

2. Pray for and then look for someone with whom you can share your skills. Train a volunteer or other staff member and multiply your communication gifts.

3. Try to get together with people who are doing church communications once every month or quarter. Share ideas and problems, pray for each other. If there isn't a church communication group in your area, start one.

4. Try to spend part of one day each month at a local bookstore

(Barnes and Noble, with a latte in hand, is my preferred method) looking at current magazines for design and layout ideas. See what colors, typefaces, illustration techniques are being used. Buy some magazines aimed at your target ministry. Women's, mens, youth—use the advertising research of big publication firms to inspire your designs.

5. Keep an idea file, not only of the publications mentioned above, but of direct mail pieces, postcards, catalogs, mailers of any kind that you receive and that appeal to you.

6. Plan on additional training for yourself this year. Attend a webinar; view a video, buy a book, attend an on-line class, read an article. My favorite ways to learn is through www.lynda.com.

7. Go back through the software instructions that came with the programs you use. You may have never even looked at it because many of these are online, but most can be downloaded. Take time to download it and go through it. You'll be amazed at what you'll learn.

8. Find a computer users group in your area and attend their meetings. Learn more about your hardware system and the larger world of computing. If you can't find a meeting in your area or don't have time to attend, periodically do some study on the web about computer hardware. It will make your daily work easier.

9. Figure out a way to reward yourself for communication projects accomplished. One rose on your desk when a newsletter is done, a special cup of tea for the weekly bulletin printed, Chinese food for lunch with a friend after a major project is done—plan ahead for rewards. Church communications can be grinding, hard work—some of these little rewards can keep you fresh.

10. Remember to say "thank-you" every day. You have the most extraordinary job in church communications—using technology to communicate eternal truth. Remind yourself of that privilege, thank, and praise the Lord for it.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

CONQUERING ONE SKILL PREPARES YOU FOR THE NEXT CHALLENGE

And if the Lord is pleased with us, he will bring us safely into that land and give it to us. It is a rich land flowing with milk and honey, and he will give it to us! Do not rebel against the Lord, and don't be afraid of the people of the land. They are only helpless prey to us! They have no protection, but the Lord is with us! Don't be afraid of them!"

(Numbers 14:8,9 NLT)

CONQUERING GIANTS IS A DAILY TASK IN CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS. For Caleb and Joshua it meant walking fearlessly into a land of giants. For us, it might be stepping into the foreign land of an entirely new communication project. We may have the basics of the bulletin and newsletter figured out, but now we're asked to do brochures for every ministry in the church, build a website, and create social networking content for the church.

Though we feel we ought to be really excited about these new opportunities to communicate the message and ministry of our church, sometimes it seems like the church is asking a bit too much.

When this happens, we can identify with the children of Israel, who fought Pharaoh's army, hunger, and thirst to get across the desert. When they got to what was called the promised land, they didn't get to waltz easily into it—there were giants to fight.

That seemed unfair after all they've been through. Many of them quit. But not everybody. Two men, Joshua and Caleb, looked at what the others saw as overwhelming obstacles and saw them as great opportunities for God. It took them another 40 years before they saw God's promise fulfilled, but Joshua and Caleb never gave up on believing he would do it.

It can be like that for us as we stand on the threshold of a new communication challenge our work gives us. It's scary. There are giants there in terms of what we have to learn and the mountain of work we have to do. We're tired.

It might take months or years to see how well people respond to the brochures explaining discipleship opportunities. The prayer team might forget to tell you the excitement of answered prayers from the prayer line; you might not be invited to the meeting where the praise reports are shared about the families who have started to attend church and the children who accepted Jesus because of the fall festival. You might never see who your website devotions encouraged or the part your social media played in bringing a newcomer to church and ultimately to Jesus. Often all you get to see is the scariness of the new project needed.

Scared or not, the reality is that the God who conquered the land for Caleb and Joshua is the same God who walks with us through every new communication challenge. We shouldn't ever deny the reality of the giants. New projects are demanding and difficult. They take time and often cost tears of frustration. But the giants will be conquered and our church communications will win great victories for the Lord.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

♥
WEEK 51

**VERSES ON HOW GOD GIVES
VICTORY AND STRENGTH**

*For the angel of the LORD guards all who fear him,
and he rescues them.*

(Ps. 34:7)

*The righteous face many troubles,
but the LORD rescues them from each and every one.*

(Ps. 34:19)

*He may have a great army, but they are just men. We have the LORD
our God to help us and to fight our battles for us!" These words
greatly encouraged the people.*

(2 Chron. 32:8)

*There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan
that can succeed against the LORD.
The horse is made ready for the day of battle,
but victory rests with the LORD.*

(Prov. 21:30, 31)

*"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In
this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the
world."*

(John 16:33)

*Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no
longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are*

hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death? (Even the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.)"No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Rom. 8:35-40 NLT)

The LORD himself will fight for you.

(Ex. 14:14)

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:

THE ENDING TO OUR STORY

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev 1:8)

At the end of the day, in a quiet moment as you think about what you've done today and as you plan your work for tomorrow, remember why you are doing what you are doing. To help you do that, I'd like to share a few quotes from an author who greatly encourages me in my work, C.S. Lewis:

*"We do not and cannot know when the world drama will end. . . . This seems to some people intolerably frustrating. . . . We do not know the play. . . the Author knows. . . . We are led to expect that the Author will have something to say to each of us on the part that each of us has played. The playing it well is what matters infinitely." (C.S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night*)*

Always do your work with that future meeting with Jesus in mind. For that meeting to go well, as I've often reminded you in this book, it isn't the big, splashy projects that are most important. Cups of cold water, needed meals and clothes, faithfulness in small things are the kinds of things Jesus talked about when he shared glimpses of final judgement. Day-by-day, week-by-week, your church communication work accomplishes the meeting of many similar ongoing, simple, and practical needs for your church and people.

Focus on faithfulness in the little details of your work and on building your walk with the Lord. Pay attention to the development

of your Christian character as you daily go about your tasks. Lewis reminds us that these small actions have immense cumulative results:

“Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance. The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which, a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of. An apparently trivial indulgence in lust or anger today is the loss of a ridge or railway line or a bridgehead from which the enemy may launch an attack otherwise impossible.”
(C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

While you focus on the little things at the same time, don't forget that the little things that build your character and make you a better communicator of the gospel message are part of a huge undertaking:

“The glory of God, and, as our only means to glorifying Him, the salvation of human souls, is the real business of life.” (C.S. Lewis, *Christianity and Culture*)

To play your part of church communicator well, you may need tools and technology, but remember, no tool is the final answer, no technology will last forever. The computer is the sand we build with today, but it is no more lasting or important than a sand castle before the tide comes in. Remind yourself that when the computer is a dim memory in a distant eternity, you will still be celebrating the joy of people with you in heaven because of the church communication work you are doing today.

To keep our eyes healthy, we are advised to look up from the computer screen frequently and to look into the distance. In a similar way, for the health of your soul, look away often from the daily demands of your work, the deadlines, and stresses. Look away from the immediate and focus your eyes on eternity, on Jesus, and his Word. That is the way to create in you the heart of a church communicator that will enable you to play the part you are called to play infinitely well.

YOUR THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, COMMENTS:



A FINAL WORD

**Dear children,
keep away from anything
that might take God's place
in your hearts.**

(1 JOHN 5:21, NLT)



About Yvon Prehn

In addition to authoring this book, Yvon Prehn is the founder and director of the training, equipping, and inspirational website for church communicators, www.effectivechurchcom.com.

Yvon has worked in communication ministry for over 25 years. She was a free-lance newspaper reporter and religion writer for the *Colorado Springs SUN*. She was a top-rated, national trainer in desktop publishing for Padgett/Thompson, the nation's largest one-day seminar company when desktop publishing was first invented. She worked as a communications consultant and trainer for many of the ministries headquartered in Colorado Springs and was senior editor at both Compassion International and Young life International. For fourteen years she traveled full-time all over North America teaching seminars on church communications.

Yvon has written for many of the major Christian magazines. Her most recent book is: *The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications & Marketing*, available at www.amazon.com. Yvon writes extensively and creates the majority of the teaching materials for www.effectivechurchcom.com.

Yvon has a master's degree in Church History and has done additional extensive graduate work in theology and communications. She has taught high school English and was an adjunct professor in church history at Regis University.

Yvon and her husband Paul, live in Ventura, California where they are active in church ministries.



About Effective Church Communications

Effective Church Communications is a ministry that provides training, resources, and inspiration to help church communicators fully fulfill the Great Commission.

The core and foundation of our ministry is the website: www.effectivechurchcom.com. We define effective church communication as communication that helps people come to know Jesus as Savior and grow to maturity as His disciples.

Our approach to church communications includes more than design and communication construction how-tos, though we have lots of them. It includes foundational, biblical teaching related to communications, communication leadership, and church communication teams. We constantly remind church communicators that we have been entrusted with the words of eternal life and the eternal destinies of people depend on how well we communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Though we work hard to stay current with technology, we value and teach timeless communication skills and principles.

We believe churches of every size, from tiny house churches to mega-churches benefit from clear, effective communication and we strongly emphasize that churches be who they are in their communications to their unique congregation and the community they are called to reach rather than copy the latest mega-church or marketing trend. We do not allow, encourage, link to, or promote, in any way, irreverent, profane language or snarky, cynical approaches to church communication or in the discussion of it. We serve a holy God and we seek, in all we do in print and online, to walk worthy and communicate a worthy message.

We strongly believe church communicators, from any size church, who use any software, with any skill level, can help and encourage each other and can create in their churches, by their people all the communications in print and online they need to create.

Though we encourage church communicators to pour their hearts, minds and souls into the hard work of communicating the words of eternal life, we are constantly aware that our words will only accomplish eternal results because of the blessing of them and the working through them, by our eternal God.

For more information, resources, tips, challenges, and encouragement about church communications, from Yvon Prehn and Effective Church Communications:

Effective Church Communications Training website: <http://www.effectivechurchcom.com>

Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/yvonprehn>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/EffectiveChurchCommunications>

YouTube videos: <http://www.youtube.com/yvonprehn>

LinkedIn: <http://www.linkedin.com/in/yvonprehn>

Smashwords, the ebook, Kindle, other e-formats bookstore: <https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/yvonprehn>

