How Should We Treat the New Preacher?

Matthew 7:12; Ecclesiastes 7:10

Introduction:

1. When a new preacher comes to a congregation, it is a time of transition.
2. It is often difficult to accept the new person without unfavorable comparisons to the previous preacher.
3. Maybe by talking about it we can improve the relationship of Central and John.
4. I will give you my points, illustrated by many e-mails I received from preachers I asked to help with this lesson.
5. TREAT THE NEW PREACHER LIKE YOU HAVE TREATED ME.
   1. You have treated Gail and me well.
   2. Three things I think of that you have done well:
      1. Communication. 1 Corinthians 2:11
         1. When I came, I told you I had in the past had people not to tell me what they needed and I didn’t do what they wanted because I didn’t know about it.  Some would later want me to feel guilty.
         2. I told you I hoped you didn’t do that, but if you did, I wouldn’t cooperate.
         3. Please tell me what you need.
         4. You have done that well.
      2. If you treat John like me, you will have to treat him different from me. Romans 12:4
         1. You have not required me to be like Stephen Sutton, Ron Trim, Leon Cole, or any other preacher.
         2. Thank you.
         3. I could not have done that.
         4. Your next preacher may not be a runner, ventriloquist, or tell your children they are powerful.
         5. But he will have great things to contribute.
         6. Let him be himself.
      3. You have encouraged me.
         1. Words. Ephesians 4:29
         2. Letters.
         3. Concern.
         4. Compassion. Galatians 6:2
         5. Meals.
6. TREAT THE NEW PREACHER LIKE YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE TREATED. Matthew 7:12
   1. What do you need when you are in a new position, confused, disoriented, maybe questioning whether you should have made this move or not?
   2. Get to know him; help him get to know you.
      1. Introduce yourself by name until he starts calling you by name.
      2. Have a meal with him.
   3. How do you like to be compared with someone else?
      1. I have been discouraged by those who, in years gone by, continued to tell me about preachers who were much better than I.
      2. I become uncomfortable and suspicious of those who have continually told me how much better I am than previous preachers.  At first I believed some of the people.  The longer I stayed at each place, the more I respected, appreciated, and/or had compassion for my predecessors.
7. TREAT YOUR NEW PREACHER LIKE YOU WOULD TREAT JESUS IF HE WERE THE NEXT PREACHER AT CENTRAL.
   1. Someone said, “Don’t suggest that.  They crucified Him.”
   2. But not everyone did.
   3. There were those who loved Him and helped Him.
   4. In effect, we are treating Jesus as we treat others. Matthew 25:34-40
8. PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FROM PLENTY OF PREACHERS.
   1. Article written by a preacher to the congregation where he had served several years:
      1. Realize that each minister and his family will have their own talents and interests.  Allow them to be themselves and resist the temptation, however natural, to make comparison or expect him to do things a “certain way”, especially based on past ministers.
      2. Resist the temptation to quickly get him “on board” with your particular desires for the church, or to have him immediately “line up” with you on some church issue.  Let his view of the congregation and his decisions on where to act initially come from the elders of the church.
      3. “Adopt” his family quickly.  Take them out for Sunday lunch.  Encourage him.  Show hospitality.
      4. Expect him to preach the Word, and, when he does, do not assume it was meant only for your personal situation.  Remember, even if it fits, it may have been just what the Lord wanted you to see, and was probably done with your best interest in mind.  Consider the things said according to how they match with scripture, and resist the temptation to allow emotions to determine your perception.  Do not be looking for his mistakes.  Of course he’ll make them, as he’s human.
      5. Pray continuously for the strength and growth of the church here.
   2. From preachers who have had a very difficult time following long ministries.
      1. Realistic Expectations.
      2. Let him be his own man with his own style and way of doing things.
      3. Encourage the flock to invite the new guy to their homes for coffee, pie, or a meal.
      4. Welcome his wife not as “the preacher’s wife”, but as a new member to the flock with her own needs and gifts.
      5. Pray for him and with him.
      6. Lots of encouragement.
      7. Let him know you appreciate him–Often.
      8. If he says something that can be taken two ways, assume he meant it in the best possible way.
      9. If he says, does, or writes something you don’t like or don’t understand go to HIM FIRST and not the elders.  Give him a chance to clarify or explain what he said, did, or wrote.
      10. I can’t live up to the legend.  I am not sure how he made 20 visits a day, wrote 25 cards of encouragement, prepared all of his lessons, wrote books, built building, etc.  He worked 12 hours a day 7 days a week.  You get the picture.  I guess again it gets back to realistic expectations.
      11. When a preacher publicly addresses a difficult subject (in a sermon), I’d encourage the eldership to follow the lesson with a few words of support.  “The truth was spoken here today.  The eldership endorses this message” or words to that effect.   I not good at being alone.  Folks in the pew need a model for how to respond to sermons.  I hear a lot of criticism, but little (if any) public endorsement when the hard subjects are talked about.   I’m not Nathan or John the Baptist.
      12. Don’t assume the preacher knows what is happening.  I’ve missed a funeral and numerous hospital visits because folks never called or told me about what was happening. I’m not omniscient.  “Is anyone among you sick, let him CALL...”
      13. Realize that to be an effective preacher, I must be an ardent student.  Good study takes a lot of time.   I’m not inspired.
      14. I wonder how Israel felt about Joshua after Moses had died?  “I liked the old preacher better.”  Folks mourned a long time after Moses died.  My experience has been that people tend to mourn the moving (i.e., passing) of the old preacher, and then mourn over the fact that the new man is not like the old one. I get tired of competing with a ghost.
      15. I’ve never had a successful work after immediately following a preacher with a long tenure.  (I’m told the average “stay” after following someone who’s been with a congregation for a long time is less than three years).   I’m not a clone.
      16. I’d encourage the church to allow the new preacher to hire new staff.  I’ve spent a lot of time “fussing” with secretaries from the previous administration who said, “HE (the old preacher) did it this way.”  When George Bush went into office, he didn’t keep Bill Clinton’s staff.
      17. Realize (but don’t sanction) that the preacher will occasionally make poor decisions in terms of wisdom.  There’s a difference between choosing to do wrong and making a decision based upon the available information at the time.  I’m not Solomon…and Solomon made some bad choices during his preaching career.  I’m not asking for a license to be immature, I’m just saying I usually learn to do things differently after I’ve done them poorly.
      18. Preaching is like fishing.  Great fishermen take years to learn how to catch fish in all weather/seasons.  I’m better at fishing today than I was when I was a small boy, but I’m trying to do better every time I get in the boat.  I hope I’m a decent preacher today, but if you’ll be patient with me, I’ll get better at it as time passes. I’m not done learning – in either study or delivery.
      19. If you’re disappointed in my behavior (and sooner or later you will be); if I’ve actually sinned against you, please come and talk to me. I can’t repent unless and until you come to me (Matt. 18:15).  I can’t deal with a whole congregation of folks who are upset at something I’ve allegedly done.   I can’t fight a hundred Philistines at one time.  It’s not fair to “gang up” on anybody, including and especially the preacher.  “Go and tell him his fault between you and him ALONE . . .”
   3. From a preacher who served as an “unintentional interim.”
      1. Let the new preacher have a part in funerals and weddings.  Many say, “I just don’t feel close to the new preacher.”  The new preacher may be a contrast from one you have known over a decade.  The way you feel close is to let him be a part of your life – joys and sorrows.  I preached in a congregation where we had a funeral about every three weeks.  In the first two years, I had a funeral and a half.  I never became the preacher for that congregation.  I was always an outsider.
      2. Don’t expect to have the same relationship with the new preacher that you had with the previous preacher after several years.
   4. Application.
      1. John cannot have the same friendship with you that you had with your former favorite preacher after many years.
      2. John may do better and be more effective that any preacher you have ever had.
      3. But don’t be disappointed that he is not them.
   5. From a preacher who has had a good transition and is happy in his relatively new position.
      1. Suggest that they endeavor to keep their love affair with the preacher up-dated to the present.  Some are always stuck on someone who is now gone and fail to appreciate or encourage the current servant.  It will help the new guy if they do not fill him with how great the predecessor was…all the time…and quote the former minister all the time.  It helps too if the other guy knows to move on and not be hanging around all the time.  If he can’t wean himself, the people have more difficulty.
      2. A series of cards to the new family in the interim between the decision and the arrival is always encouraging too.  Then the cards, with assurances of support and prayer do not have to stop, for years to come.
      3. It is helpful if the local people remember to extend the “honeymoon” by continuing to do the things they did to lure the man to come and to make him feel welcome initially.  A happy marriage works that way.  Eventually there is comfort in being able to take each other for granted to the extent that there is assurance of compatibility and sincere commitment on the part of both.  Until that time comes, reassurance is always helpful.  The “little things” mean a lot initially.
   6. Thoughts from a preacher who recently (2013) responded to my requests for suggestions.
      1. **Do not develop the habit of saying, “Good lesson” as a matter of habit each week.** First, I know they are not all good and this standing “good lesson” can loose all meaning. Rather, when a lesson is beneficial, say so. When it produces thought provoking reflection, let it. When you disagree, or feel there is a Biblical conflict with what was preached, find an appropriate time and vehicle to express that. This will not be at the back door after dismissal, with others waiting in line to overhear.

An older Christian lady of our church family, who now is shut-in, was a good barometer on most of my lessons. I found her to be honest. She could be changed by Bible truth. She could honestly say a lesson benefited her, or not. Not all her comments were positive, but she always appropriately offered constructive criticism. What she had to say, she said to me. She even wrote letters when needed. If she did compliment a lesson I knew she meant it. Her habit was not “Good lesson”, it was honesty offered at an appropriate time.

* + 1. **Conduct business with me at appropriate times.** Most likely what you tell me just before or after the assembly will either not be heard, or soon forgotten. [Especially if it is a matter that deserves more than an aisle conversation.] I have an office and three phones on which I can be reached. I have a car to drive, and I am available 80% of the time. I will not bother you with a life disturbing matter just before you walk out the door to work in the morning. Please give me the same courtesy. Emergencies are only exceptions.
    2. **Consider the huge dynamic of the Spiritual principles I am asked to explain.** To the degree I can, I’ll talk in plain black and white terms. To the degree I can I’ll talk to the middle of the congregation’s ability to comprehend. When a matter is grey, I’ll present it that way. When it is my opinion, I’ll say so. Those of you on the lower and upper end of the ability to comprehend spectrum will sometimes have to exercise patience with my presentations. As a fellow human being in this life under the sun, some concepts are hard to grasp and harder to explain. I will be and am a learner, just like you. I will study, I will try to make each lesson palatable, but I will fall short on occasion. Some lessons will be very appropriate to your needs. Other lessons will have no observable application to you. I will speak to the needs of the whole, sometimes the needs of a few, but always in a manner that can be understood. When I “swing and miss”, per your understanding of “swing and miss”, plan now to forgive me.
    3. **Love me in spite of my inadequacy, and I’ll love you spite of your inadequacy**. If loving each other were so easy, the Bible wouldn’t talk so much about it. It is the “new” command. It is evidence of our love for God. It is to be practiced in the midst of our diversity. Based on the grace offered us, it a choice we make, or not. So I’ll just decide to love you and ask you do the same for me. This will make our time together more profitable, more evangelistic, more faith building.

Conclusion:

1. I have learned from the preacher’s side not to take offense to the misstatements that people make.
   1. I have had the opportunity to serve when people resented and rejected me before they knew me; it was nothing personal because they did not know the person of Jerrie Barber.
   2. A friend at Berry’s Chapel told me that when he first saw me he said, “I’m not going to like him.”
   3. He is now a good encourager and helper.
   4. Jerrie, I have a cute illustration for you.  You might have seen the fellow in (our town) Ellijay that rides the funny looking bicycle.  He came to worship one Sunday night and as he was leaving he told me, “You’d make a better politician than you do a preacher”!  I had to ask that he repeat the statement, “You’d make a better politician than you do preacher.”  “Thank you brother, but why do you say that?”  His reply was, “ ’Cause I heard YOU preach!”  Some things are hard to forget.  I would love to have the outlines if you could email them.  I will celebrate my 27th anniversary (here) at Ellijay the first Sunday in February.  Give our love to Gail and the kids.  Your brother, Butch .
2. How should you treat John?
   1. Like a Christian should treat anyone.
   2. It comes from our habitual relationships. Mark 12:29-31
3. Do you love God?
   1. Have you shown that in action? 1 John 5:2,3
   2. Do you need to do that today? Mark 16:16; 1 John 1:9