

SUMMARY

THE TRELLIS AND THE VINE

by Colin Marshall and Tony Payne

- Key Insights
- Best Quotes
- Study Questions

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The Trellis and the Vine



MAIN IDEA

We often see vine and trellis vegetation in the world around us. This imagery can be used as a strong metaphor to how we do local church ministry. “The basic work of any Christian ministry is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of God’s Spirit, and to see people converted, changed, and grow to maturity in the Gospel. That’s the work of planting, watering, fertilizing, and tending the vine.” (p. 8)

The ‘trellis’ work of church ministry is often the most visible that we do with our time as church leaders. This work involves the structure and support of church ministry. Management, programs, and finances also are included.

It is important to not fall into this trap however, but to keep the trellis work simple. Focusing on the ‘vine’ work of spreading the gospel message and ministering to people is the main priority.

It is time to make the major shift in the ministry mindset of the local church. Church leaders must change the focus from trellis-focused programs and events such as Awana or mid-week dinners, to vine work of equipping others and simplistic, organic discipleship to form healthy church ministry.

“Our goal is not to make church members or members of our institution, but genuine disciples of Jesus.” (p. 14) All Christians will benefit from this ministry mindset because it puts us on the great journey of making disciples for the glory of God.



Motivation for Change

There must be a willingness for church leaders to reconsider our ministry models, looking at what God's Word says to guide us to healthy change.

One thing that people don't like to talk about is change. There is no exception for the church when it comes to shifts in ministry mindset. Far too many churches get stuck in a rut of doing things the traditional way things have been done. How can change happen in the local church context?

It starts with a ministry mindset shift that is motivated by the Bible. We must turn to God's Word as our authority and to the Spirit's working in our lives to help us discern the changes that need to be made. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." What is the mindset shift that the Bible calls us to?

If we are to see healthy changes in the way we do ministry in our churches, the trellis and vine work that is being done must be evaluated. There must be a movement from being driven by the idea of events or programs to the idea of training disciples. “If we want our strategy to be people-focused, we should concentrate on training, which increases the number and effectiveness of gospel communicators.” (p. 19)

Far too often we get caught up in the daily routine of doing church ministry in our personal contexts, and lose sight of those that we are ministering with and too. This squelches any chance of us identifying the mindset issues which prevent us from making healthy changes in the way we work for the glory of God in our local churches.

KEY QUOTES

- “The basic work of any Christian ministry is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of God’s Spirit, and to see people converted, changed, and grow to maturity in the Gospel. That’s the work of planting, watering, fertilizing, and tending the vine.” (p. 8)

- “We will be arguing that structures don’t grow ministry any more than trellises grow vines, and that most churches need to make a conscious shift away from erecting and maintaining structures, and towards *growing people who are disciple-making disciples of Christ.*” (p. 17)
- “If we want our strategy to be people-focused, we should concentrate on *training*, which increases the number and effectiveness of gospel communicators.” (p. 19)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- What mindsets need to change for the ministry of your church to be more biblical and healthy?
- What is the biblical model for our local church ministries?
- How would training others for doing ministry have an impact on the current culture of your church?



Priority of Vine Work

Our local churches need to change their ministry mindset from the trellis work of events, meetings, and programs to the vine work of ministering to and equipping people for ministry work.

Far too many churches do church the way it has been done traditionally. Avoiding hard work and conflict, we keep things moving by focusing on the trellis work of the church. “And that is the thing about trellis work: it tends to take over from vine work. Perhaps it’s because trellis work is easier and less personally threatening.” (p. 9)

Once we have made the commitment to change how our local church ministers, we must turn to the Bible’s focus on vine work as our guide. This focus should also be in the vision and bigger picture of what our church is trying to accomplish. We should avoid getting bogged down by trellis work. This work is an important supplement to vine work, but it shouldn’t take up the majority of our thoughts and time.

“The vine is the Spirit-empowered word, spreading and growing throughout the world, drawing people out of the kingdom of darkness into the light-filled kingdom of God’s beloved Son and bearing fruit in their lives as they grow in the knowledge and love of God.” (p. 37) It is vital to the health and success of our ministries to focus on equipping others through the teaching of God’s Word, modeling, and training for God’s glory.

Our ministries need to focus on doing vine work - helping people. When we understand that the idea of the priesthood of believers is all believers participating in being on mission we can better minister and equip others. We need to have occasional meetings, events, and a small amount of programs to function correctly in ministry, but it is important to stay focused on the big biblical picture of the vine work of the church.

KEY QUOTES

- “We can build our trellis till it reaches to the heavens, in the hope of making a name for ourselves, but there may still be very little growth in the vine.” (p. 10)

- “So ask yourself whether your ministries are reactive or proactive. If you are mostly reacting to people’s problems, you won’t have the energy to put into proactive training and growing new work. If you take a problem approach to ministry, people with the most critical needs will dominate your programs, and these needs will wear you out and exhaust you, and reduce the effectiveness of your other ministries.” (p. 22)
- “The fundamental goal is to make disciples who make other disciples, to the glory of God. We want to see people converted from being dead in their transgressions to being alive in Christ; and, once converted, to be followed up and established as mature disciples of Jesus; and, as they become established, to be trained in knowledge, godliness, and skills so that they will in turn make disciples of others.” (p. 152)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- Is your current church ministry leadership focusing primarily on trellis or vine work? What changes can be made?
- What would vine work look like in your local church context? How can you get involved in helping with your church's vine work?
- What is the meaning of the priesthood of believers? How does this idea help us make vine work the priority in our local churches?



Training / Equipping for the Glory of God

Human flourishing is promoted by living an examined life.

All of the members in our churches can be used as instruments of making God known in the world around us. If we are able to shed some of the trellis work that slows us down, we can begin to focus on training and equipping everyone in the church to be a part of Gospel-centered kingdom work. Ephesians 4 is the key biblical text for this drive to “equip the saints for the work of ministry.”

“In the New Testament, training is much more about Christian thinking and living than about particular skills and competencies.” (p. 70) The vine work is to equip our people with the Word of God and train them in Christian

living through modeling biblical lives. The end goal is having disciple makers in our churches that are engaged and involved in the overall work of the church.

Training and equipping shifts the way we structure our churches. Pastors and leaders must be willing to allow others to lead, train, and equip believers in order for this healthy church structure to flourish. There also must be a willingness to simplify the programming in the church, allowing for more organic discipleship opportunities to arise.

This new structure may mean less visible growth in your church. We are not in this for our glory, are we? This new structure may mean we are building up others to send them out. “A commitment to the growth of the gospel will mean that we train people towards maturity not for the benefit of our own churches or fellowships but for the benefit of Christ’s kingdom.” (p. 83) Our desire is for God’s glory to be maximized and this can be done primarily through the focus of vine work through training and equipping the believers in our churches.

KEY QUOTES

- “A pastor or elder is a vine-worker who has been given a particular responsibility to care for and equip the people for their partnership in the gospel.” (p. 67)
- “Theologically, it is an expression of the character of the church as a body with many parts. Practically and strategically, it provides support, refreshment, a sharing of the burden, and a multiplication of effective gospel work.” (p. 115)
- “If this disciple-making vision is correct, then an integral part of making disciples is teaching and training every disciple to make other disciples. This training is not simply the imparting of certain skills or techniques. It involves nurturing and teaching people in their understanding and knowledge (their convictions), in their godliness and way of life (their character) and in their abilities and practical experience of ministering to others (their competence).” (p. 154-155)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- Read Ephesians 4:11-16. What is the challenge given to church leaders here in this passage? How can believers “equip the saints for the ministry?”
- Where are the greatest resources (time, money, vision) of your church going currently? How can you personally help correctly allocate these resources?
- What are some ways you can personally get involved in being a disciple-maker in your daily life or through your local church?
- What would be the results if your local church became driven by vine work of equipping and training all believers?

CHAPTER

1

The Trellis and the Vine

Most of us have seen vines growing on trellises. This can be used as an illustration of the ministry work that is being done in our local churches. Our church ministries are quite often a mix between these two things.

The trellis work that is based on programs, events, meetings, and infrastructure is necessary, but the vine work is the most vital work according to God's Word. "The basic work of any Christian ministry is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of God's spirit, and to see people converted, changed, and grow into maturity in that Gospel." (p. 8)

Far too often we get caught up in the trellis work, and it dominates our God-given resources. We must be willing to fight the temptation to look for new trends or get distracted by trellis work. We must advocate for our resources to be spent on the more important vine work in our local churches.

66 KEY QUOTES

- “And that’s the thing about trellis work: it tends to take over from vine work. Perhaps it’s because trellis work is easier and less personally threatening. Vine work is personal and requires much prayer.” (p. 9)
- “The [Great] commission is not fundamentally about mission out there somewhere in another country. It’s a commission that makes disciple-making the normal agenda and priority of every church and every Christian disciple.” (p. 13)

CHAPTER

2

Ministry Mind-Shifts

There is real need for focus change in many of our local churches, especially when it comes to the mindset about ministry structure. The goal is to move from trellis dominated ministries to a vine-focused ministry that supports the idea of the priesthood of believers.

Much of this ministry mindset shift takes place in viewing people as vital parts of what is happening in the ministry of the church. “If we want our strategy to be people-focused, we should concentrate on training.” (p. 19) The lifeblood of vine-structured ministry is the training and equipping of believers.

The local church needs to be the main training ground for all Christians to be equipped to be disciplers and multipliers for the glory of God. This is about gospel growth, not church growth.

66 KEY QUOTES

- “Instead of using our volunteers, we should consider how we can encourage them and help them grow in the knowledge and love of Christ, because service flows from Christian growth and not growth from service.” (p. 20)
- “The opportunities for Christians to minister personally to others are limitless.” (p. 27)

CHAPTER

3

What in the World is God Doing?

If we are going to change our church structures we should always turn to God's Word to be our guide. We may wonder what is God doing with our churches? We sometimes see in the Psalms of David a faithful questioning of God's direction and leading.

"This is what God is now doing in the world: Spirit-backed gospel preaching leading to the salvation of souls." (p. 35) God is going to do His work in the world; we are called to be faithful instruments of the work He is doing.

What are the implications of God's work in the world? We are not the ones doing the ultimate work of changing hearts for the gospel. Our goal is to preach the gospel message and minister to the people He has brought into our lives. This is what gospel growth looks like.

66 KEY QUOTES

- “The apostolic task is to preach; to bear witness; to proclaim the word; and to do so under the power and enabling of God’s Spirit.” (p. 36)
- “But it’s interesting how little the New Testament talks about church growth, and how often it talks about ‘gospel growth’ or the ‘increase of the word.’ The focus is on the progress of the Spirit-backed word of God as it makes its way in the world, according to God’s plan.” (p. 37)

CHAPTER

4

Is Every Christian a Vine-Worker?

Many believers and church leaders would agree with the importance of vine work in the local church, but actually putting this into practice is where the issue lies. Being confessing disciples of Jesus allows one to be part of the vine work of the local church.

Not every person is called to be a missionary or pastor, but all can be a part of the gospel work by using their God-given gifts and abilities for the glory of God. “The picture here (Eph. 4:15-16) is of all the different parts of the body fulfilling their proper function, each part working with the others for the growth of the body.” (p. 45)

It is important that we all speak the truth of God’s Word to one another for edification and encouragement. Pastors and leaders in the church need to allow congregants to be released to do the vine work.

KEY QUOTES

- “This can only mean that God wants all Christians to be speaking to each other regularly, urging, and encouraging each other to stick with Christ.” (p. 46)
- “The pastor (or pastoral staff team) is really the one who does the vine work and the rest of us do what we can to maintain the trellis, not least by giving money. The New Testament’s vision of ministry is quite different. The pastors and elders certainly take the lead in vine work (in prayer and proclamation), and are responsible for guarding and teaching the word and maintaining the gold standard of sound doctrine. But one of the effects of this work is to equip and release the members to do vine work themselves.” (p. 57-58)

CHAPTER

5

Guilt or Grace?

There are not two classes of Christians when it comes to doing the vine work of the church. All Christians are called to be in partnership with the same unified goal of bringing the love of Christ to others.

There is no room for social-club Christianity. “But the immeasurable free grace of God that came to them through faith in Christ was not a licence for an easy, comfortable life with a dash of spirituality on the side; rather, it was a passport to a new citizenship of suffering and contending side by side for the gospel.” (p. 67)

The pastors and leaders in the church need to strive to be disciple-makers that equip their people for the vine work. This leads to many partnerships in the gospel based off of grace, not guilt. These partnerships are not engineered by obligation. Instead, vine work is about working together in graceful and forgiving relationships.

KEY QUOTES

- “For them ‘holding fast’ to the gospel as partners with Paul inevitably meant joining with him in striving for the gospel, and accepting the suffering that always followed.” (p. 65)
- “However, at a profound level, all pastors and elders are also just partners. They do not have a different essence or status, or a fundamentally different task- as if they are the real ‘players’ and the rest of the congregation are spectators or support crew. A pastor or elder is a vine-worker who has been given a particular responsibility to care for and equip the people for their partnership in the gospel.” (p. 67)

CHAPTER

6

The Heart of Training

Training in ministry has different meanings to different people. It is often associated with what happens in local Bible colleges and seminaries. Instead, we need to associate it more with what should be happening in the local church.

“In the New Testament, training is much more about Christian thinking and living than about particular skills and competencies.” (p. 70) The training of the local church should lead towards certain character qualities rather than a set of skills. Relationship building and imitation go a long way to seeing this type of training thrive in the local church.

This model of training in many ways looks like parenting. Through personal relationships, we are attempting to build up convictions, character, and competencies as ministry trainers.

KEY QUOTES

- “We are to set an example in striving for holiness, not in displaying perfectly achieved holiness (Heb. 12:14). In fact, at the most profound level, the example we set is in modelling the way of the cross. We are not attempting to create clones or a cult of personality, but following our Master’s example in persevering in the face of trials and persecution.” (p. 75)
- “The life and ministry of the trainer is a model for the trainee- not of perfection but of godly desires in an earthen vessel.” (p. 76)

CHAPTER

7

Training and Gospel Growth

Training in the local church often causes us to think about numerical growth. However, the Bible teaches us that true training is interested in gospel growth. “The gospel by its very nature produces growth.” (p. 82)

The ‘gospel growth process’ where we hope to see the greatest movement, is through outreach, follow-up, growth, and most importantly, finishing with the training to disciple others. Our main goal is to grow in Christ. “To grow like Christ is to grow in love and a desire to serve and minister to others.” (p. 85)

Ministry ultimately is about people over programs. It is important that as we train and minister in the local church always to keep people as our main focus.

KEY QUOTES

- “We see people not as cogs in the wheel, or as resources for our projects, but as individuals each at their own stage of gospel growth. And our goal for each person is that they advance, that they make progress, that they move one step forward from where they are now. ” (p. 83)
- “Training is the engine of Gospel growth.” (p. 90)

CHAPTER

8

Why Sunday Sermons are Necessary but not Sufficient

How should we view the leaders in our local churches? There have been different models used in recent years, but many fall short of the biblical model provided for us. It is important to free up our pastors and leaders to regularly do vine work.

Some see the pastor's role as just preaching, conducting guest services, and counseling. Others see the pastor as the church's CEO, focused on keeping the business running. The biblical model, however, shows the pastor as a trainer and equipper.

A training-pastor surely focuses on God's Word through his equipping. He desires to make disciples who multiply and work with him to do the work of the Gospel. "Our congregations become centres of training where people

are trained and taught to be disciples of Christ, who in turn, seek to make other disciples.” (p. 99) Richard Baxter is a strong example in church history of the equipping pastor.

KEY QUOTES

- “[The pastor’s] task is to teach and train his congregation, by his word, and his life, to become disciple-making disciples of Jesus.” (p. 99)
- “As we have already seen, God expects all Christians to be disciple-makers by prayerfully speaking the word of God to others- in whatever way and to whatever extent that their gifting and circumstances allow. When God has gifted all the members of the congregation to help grow disciples, why should we silence the contribution of all but one of them (the pastor), and think that this is sufficient or acceptable?” (p. 103)

CHAPTER

9

Multiplying Gospel Growth Through Training Co-workers

By ourselves we have no chance to minister to everyone. That is why the goal is to disciple and multiply. This leads to vine growth and the gospel spreading farther and faster.

The Apostle Paul provides a strong example of building partnerships for the purpose of glorifying God. His partnerships were based on a group of men that could minister with him. “The ministry they undertake is not just any service or help, but a service that is related to the spread of the word and the building of the church.” (p. 114)

All churches and church leaders need co-laborers that can be equipped and trained to partner with them in ministry. Dealing with people is messy, but we need to make this our focus: building up co-workers for the gospel.

“Growth is like this. It creates a kind of chaos, like a vine constantly outgrows the trellis by sending tendrils out in all directions.” (p. 126)

KEY QUOTES

- “There are more people than we can ever get to. It doesn’t all depend on us, praise be to God.” (p. 110)
- “On the face of it, we would need good reasons not to adopt Paul’s methodology of team ministry. Theologically, it is an expression of the character of the church as a body with many parts. Practically and strategically, it provides support, refreshment, a sharing of the burden, and a multiplication of effective gospel work.” (p. 115)

CHAPTER

10

People Worth Watching

A big question is: From where do the leaders of the church come? God leads the way, but He works through human agents to bring it about. “He’s the creator and his characteristic mode of operation is to work in and through his creatures to achieve his purposes.” (p. 127)

It is important to understand that yes, all are called to serve, but the Bible is clear that some are called in a special way to serve the body of Christ. It is important to be proactive in seeking out those called especially to do the work of the kingdom. Biblical qualifications are of the utmost importance in calling them to ministry.

It is also important for churches and ministries to strive to compensate their workers, allowing them freedom to be more effective in the work they are doing.

KEY QUOTES

- “[Pastors need to be] actively recruiting suitable people within their churches, and challenging them to expend their lives for the work of the gospel.” (p. 128)
- “In that sense, all Christians are ‘ministers’, called and commissioned by God to give up their lives to his service, to walk before him in holiness and righteousness, and to speak the truth in love whenever and however they can. However, even though we have been emphasizing in this book the ‘ministry of the many,’ it is not in order to sideline the ‘ministry of the few,’ but to create the conditions under which, it, too, will flourish.” (p. 130)

CHAPTER

11

Ministry Apprenticeship

One way to see true growth in future leaders in ministry is through apprenticeship. There is great benefit to formally equipping and training the future generation for ministry work.

“The apprentice learns to think biblically and theologically about everything, and works this out practically with his trainer.” (p. 146) You learn a lot about both the person’s character and skills through this formal training. This also can be a great system used in the local church to build up leaders.

There are several traps we must avoid when recruiting leaders to apprenticeships. Most of these revolve around the pride of those who are training and equipping the future leaders. One of those traps is revolving your training around your personality or personal whims, thereby not allowing those you train to maximize their unique gifts and abilities.

KEY QUOTES

- “Whoever you recruit, one hard truth must be faced: recruiting people for ministry, training them as apprentices, and sending them off to Bible college will result in a steady departure of your best and most gifted church members. This is a challenge to your gospel heart. What are you most interested in: the growth of your particular congregation, or the growth of the kingdom of God? Are you committed to church growth or gospel growth? Do you want more numbers in the pew now, or more labourers for the harvest over the next 50 years?” (p. 149)
- “The training mentality is an engine of growth and dynamism.” (p. 150)

CHAPTER

11

Making a Start

The true vine work of ministry begins and ends with making disciples. We strive to faithfully teach the Bible as well as ministering to and building up people. “The fundamental goal is to make disciples who make other disciples, to the glory of God.” (p. 152)

How do you get started in making this ministry mind-shift in our ministries? It begins with correctly preaching and teaching God’s Word, giving a compelling message of the need for change. It is important to work closely with the church leadership in building up and equipping co-workers to work towards the goal of change.

It may seem like a hard task ahead to see this change! It is however, a process that is worth it and will bring the most honor to our Lord long-term. Avoid allowing the trellis work to swallow up all your time and resources. Instead, do the hard things to make the vine work of ministry the priority.

66 KEY QUOTES

- “This is the Great Commission- the making of disciples. The touchstone of a thriving church is that it is making genuine disciple-making disciples of Jesus Christ.” (p. 152)
- “Keep holding high the death and resurrection of Christ, and keep praying for your people. The motivation to serve and to be trained will come from the gospel and from a deep work of the Spirit in people’s hearts. It won’t come from you going on and on about training, and harassing people until they finally sign up! It’s grace, not guilt. Don’t make ‘training’ the new test of true discipleship.” (p. 165)



CONCLUSION

We often fall into the trap of allowing the trellis work of programs and systems to dominate our ministry. Rather, we need to spend more time focusing on the vine work God has called us to - making disciples who make disciples. Making vine work the focus of our ministry is a biblical way to build the kingdom of God for His glory and our edification.

The main 3 Key Insights in this book are:

- 1 Motivation for Change**
There must be a willingness for church leaders to reconsider our ministry models, looking at what God's Word says to guide us to healthy change.

2

Priority of Vine Work

Our local churches need to change their ministry mindset from the trellis work of events, meetings, and programs to the vine work of ministering to and equipping people for ministry work.

3

Training/Equipping for the Glory of God

The greatest resources of money, time, and vision in the local church should be used for training and equipping all believers to do the work of making God known.



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