

## **Lessons in Ministry and in Life**

*Baptist Times* (12 October 1995) 14

On a Saturday evening 25 years ago - on 10th October 1970 to be precise - I was ordained to the Christian ministry. The service was led by my then minister, Donald Monkcom, a former BMS missionary to Jamaica, and the induction ceremony itself was taken by Fred Drake, the then Associate Overseas Secretary of the BMS, with special responsibility for Africa, the West Indies and Brazil. Within a matter of days Caroline and I, together with our fourteen-month old child, Jonathan, were on the high seas, en route to serve with the BMS in what was then the Free University of Congo.

After two years of teaching Greek and New Testament in the Protestant Theological Faculty, I began to feel uncomfortable training pastors without having been a pastor myself. So we returned to England, where within a matter of months I had accepted the call to Altrincham Baptist Church. After 13 very happy and fulfilling years of pastoral ministry, during which period the church almost quadrupled in size, the opportunity came to enter again the world of theological education again. So for the next six years, as principal of Spurgeon's College, I devoted myself to the challenging task of overseeing the formation of men and women who would be leaders of today's and tomorrow's church.

And now here I am in Chelmsford, glad to be back in pastoral ministry, older most certainly, hopefully a little wiser, but still fired up for mission. As I reflected on the past 25 years, I began to ask myself: what are some of the lessons I have learnt discovering pastoral ministry itself, but also about life in general? At the risk of perhaps being a little twee, I thought I would jot down 25 lessons about ministry, and 25 lessons about life.

### **25 lessons in ministry**

1. The key to pastoring is loving
2. Pastoral visiting has not had its day
3. Everybody is wounded
4. Meaningful fellowship is best expressed in small groups
5. Every church is different
6. Ministers are made (or unmade) by their deacons
7. The local church is the cutting edge of the kingdom
8. The kingdom is not the church
9. Leadership is the task of the ordained
10. Leadership is plural
11. Good preaching entails structured simplicity
12. Great worship climaxes around the Lord's Table
13. Baptismal services provide the best opportunities for gospel preaching
14. Transfer growth is a bonus, not a goal
15. An office at church allows home to be home
16. A book a week keeps a pastor awake
17. Monday morning blues are par for the course

18. Thank God for friends!
19. The Spirit is no substitute for hard work
20. Hard work is no substitute for the Spirit
21. A spiritual director encourages ministerial integrity
22. Constant change is here to stay
23. No church is immune from power games
24. Ministry is tough
25. Ministry is a high calling

## **25 lessons in life**

1. Life is a constant adventure
2. Life is to be lived passionately
3. The best is yet to be
4. Mountains are to be climbed
5. Life is about growth
6. Life is a journey in self-discovery
7. Only the self-aware are secure
8. God wants us to be real, not cardboard cut-outs
9. God wants us to be rainbow people
10. Integrity counts for more than success
11. Life can be tough
12. Wounds can make for healing
13. All sunshine makes for a desert
14. God is there even in the dark
15. God knows
16. Time brings perspective
17. Friends are often God's agents
19. Iron sharpens iron
20. God's love is experienced in unexpected places
21. Orthopraxy is more important than orthodoxy
22. It's OK to be angry
23. One way to inner freedom is to forgive
24. Children are a great education
25. A capable wife is more precious than jewels

Maybe the above could be somewhat misleading. If, for instance, it were assumed that in 25 years of ministry I had learnt no more than 25 things about ministry and 25 things about life, then heaven help me - and heaven help the present church I pastor! There is, indeed, a certain artificiality about my two lists of lessons learned. But if these lists encourage others to keep growing and developing, then it will have been worthwhile.

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