

It's Not About Me! – *Leading your church into a good future*

Welcome to "It's Not About Me! – Leading your church into a good future." I'm Jimmy Reader, and I'm delighted you've joined us for this one-hour webinar. During this hour, you will learn –

- Why churches are changing and what we can do
- Why models for change don't work
- What personal and spiritual practices do work
- How you can lead your church into a good future.

We can't talk about everything in one hour, of course, and I won't be able to answer all of your questions, but you will have opportunity to pose your questions and thoughts. At the end of the webinar, I'll give you suggestions for what you can do next to keep learning. So I hope you'll stay with us for the full hour.

Do you struggle with change and conflict in your church? Everyone experiences it. You're not alone, and it's not about you! – Not just about you, at least.

We live in a world of constant, rapid change. We all know that, so why are we surprised that the changes happening all around us affect our congregations? The more we understand about the impact of our changing world on our churches, the more effective we can be as leaders.

In the first part of our webinar, I will give you 5 key reasons why churches are changing today. There are other reasons, of course, but if we don't know how to respond to change produced by these factors, we will not be able to lead our congregations effectively.

Many successful churches and leaders will tell you how they did it, giving you yet another model for navigating the stormy waters of change in our day. Like me, many of you have been to these seminars and read these books and gone back to your churches excited and encouraged, only to find that their models didn't work in your situation. Or perhaps you faced so much resistance from key people in your church that you never really had a chance to try.

Using someone else's model for leading your congregation through the storms of change and conflict seldom works. But there is hope! I will introduce you to 10 personal and spiritual practices which can empower you as a leader to move beyond the struggle of dealing with change and conflict and successfully guide your church into a good future.

Before we look at the 5 key reasons for change, let me tell you what you need to know about what we will do in this hour and how you can get the most out of it. Then I want to tell you just a little about who I am. And in about 2 minutes, we'll move quickly into the reasons for change and what works and what doesn't.

At the top right on your screen, you see the dashboard or control panel -

- Where it says "audio mode," you should have selected either "telephone" or "mic & speakers." (I have everyone muted to avoid distractions, but I will give you time for an open Q&A time later.)
- A Question box allows you to write your questions as they come to you and send them to me. And I will take time now and then through the hour to stop and respond to those written questions.
- I am recording the full webinar, slideshow and audio, and will post it online, along with a pdf file of the content script, and send you a link by email after it's over.

Keep in mind that -

- This webinar is designed to last 60 minutes from when we began. Hopefully, you'll be able to stay for the full hour.
- We won't be able to answer every question you have in such a short time, but my goal is to give you a few new ideas and some valuable help in how to respond to change and conflict in your church.
- At the end of the webinar, I will send everything to you by email, so don't worry about taking lots of notes.

Now – just a little about me. I've been a pastor for 40 years, serving both in fully-supported ministry and as a bivocational minister, earning at least part of my income from other jobs. I have taught at both college and seminary level as an adjunct instructor in ethics, biblical studies, and practical ministry. And I co-direct a nonprofit organization with my wife, Joy Bergfalk, and work as a coach and consultant with church leaders who struggle with change and conflict. I serve as an intentional interim pastor as well.

- My graduate degrees are from Princeton Theological Seminary. In my D.Min. work, my research was in this area of change and conflict and how leaders can be effective in guiding their congregations into a good future. As a church consultant, I have worked with Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist congregations, many of whom were going through intense conflicts at the time I worked with them. And I've been a national seminar leader on communication and relationship skills, presenting to business leaders many of the same practices in this webinar for church leaders.

Out of my experience and learning, I now focus on helping people learn 10 personal and spiritual practices – what we call Life Listening Practices – which will help you be the effective leader you want to be. I'll tell you more about those practices in about 10 minutes.

I promised you **5 key reasons** why churches are changing. Let's talk about those now.

1. People want freedom to decide for themselves.

- a. We may love the ancient metaphor of sheep and shepherd for people and pastor in the church, but people are not sheep. They need to be empowered to decide and act on their own. In *Ephesians 4*, we read that the work of pastors and teachers – indeed of all church leaders – is to prepare the whole congregation to do the work of ministry, of service to God in the world. How can they do that without being personally empowered?
- b. True freedom requires an egalitarian model of church governance, a community model for the congregation. The traditional hierarchical and authoritarian model

no longer "works" for many people. I'm not sure it ever worked as well as some people wanted it to work. We see that change – or at least the desire for that change – politically and economically all over the world. The desire is there in the church as well. – As I read the gospels, Jesus was tired of hierarchy and suspicious of authority as well. Not a bad example to follow!

2. People value people.

- a. What do we value most? Principles or people? The organization or relationships? The choice may not be that simple, of course, but the church too often appears to value doctrine and denomination more than the relationships we have with people, both inside and outside the church. That was not Jesus' way, nor should it be ours any longer.
- b. We live in a time of tension between people who value mutual conversation (dialogue) and those who want to impose their ideas in often bombastic monologue. We live in a time of tension, as well, between people who value competition and want to control ideas and intellectual property and those who value cooperation and mutual participation in creating new ideas and properties. This is the world of open-source software, crowd-sourcing creativity, and networking of what seem to be competing entities. – I hope the church will choose to follow the second path.

3. People want to experiment.

- a. When my children (who are now 32 to 40) were in college, they never left the church. They remained active in Bible study and worship, but they had no desire to serve on committees or boards. To my knowledge, they have continued to take on projects and leadership positions, but not in any capacity which requires boards and committees. – And the two generations of people younger than my kids value that traditional organization even less. We have to find a different way forward.
- b. Most people under 40 grew up with the "just do it" attitude ingrained in their souls. They want to just try something, do it, and see what happens. People who grew up with computers (just about anyone younger than Boomers) think that's how we're supposed to learn and accomplish things. Try it. See what happens. – It's not the way of the church that Boomers inherited, but it's the way forward for the church.

4. People want to be spiritual but not religious.

- a. Was Jesus religious? Were the formalities and structures of the Jewish religion in his day important to him? Even a first reading of the gospels would suggest a "no" answer to those questions. – Why, then, are we surprised when people in our day want to be spiritual but not religious? They want to explore and experience deeper spiritual living without all the trappings and traditions of the organized church.
- b. People often do want to live out what we say we believe – forgiveness and grace, healing and wholeness, a new life full of joy and love. The specific formulations of those beliefs may not appeal to people, but if they can experience the realities of our faith, they will believe.

5. People prefer short-term commitments.

Everyone in church leadership in the past 20 years has seen the change toward a declining number of church members willing to serve 3-year terms

of office, for instance, or teach a S.S. class every Sunday for even one year. I'm old enough to remember quite a few teachers who served for decades and members who rotated in and out of a variety of offices and always seemed to be on some board or committee. (There still are a few.) Beyond that were a number of lay members who also served our denominations at regional and national levels as well. – That reality is rapidly diminishing. We can continue to mourn its eventual demise, or we can create new models for sustainable Christian communities based on short-term projects and commitments of time and energy so that an increasing number of community members can participate and give leadership.

These are not the only ways the church is changing, of course. I will begin an online coaching group in November. If you join that, we will have weekly online meetings, and there we will learn about other reasons the church is changing and how to respond appropriately. I also plan to offer a full webinar in January just on this topic. At the end of this webinar, I'll tell you more about these opportunities for leadership coaching and training and how you can get updates from me when they're available.

Here are two books I highly recommend on this topic:

The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why – Phyllis Tickle (Baker Books, 2008)

The Leadership Jump: Building Partnerships Between Existing and Emerging Christian Leaders – Jimmy Long (IVP Books, 2009)

So what can we do? How can we be effective leaders who know how to successfully guide our congregations into a good future? One common answer is to find a model for change that has worked well somewhere else, learn everything we can about it, and implement it in our churches. Many of the workshops and conferences I've attended, and the books I've read, over the past 30 years and more have taken this approach. So I've learned about many models over the years and tried to implement them in the churches I served. For instance –

- A house church or small fellowship church without membership and with limited structure, putting our energies into contemporary worship on Sundays and weeknight Bible studies
- A congregation structured around small groups and lay pastors, such as the New Hope Community Church near Portland, Oregon or the Korean church model of Paul Yonggi Cho
- Seeker-sensitive services, such as the Willow Creek Model
- Or the purpose-driven church model of Rick Warren

Sometimes we focus not on the model of a specific church or network, but a broader conceptual model of what "church" *should* look like. For a long time, many of us learned all we could about the early Church Growth model of McGavran and Wagner, or any of a number of different variations on that model. These were attractional models that said the key was to draw as many people as possible to the worship services and the multiple ministries of the congregation. And this model said that numerical growth showed the health of the church.

Today many people are looking to the models of missional churches or the emergent church as the way to build up the church and expand the kingdom and serve the world. I see great promise in these conceptual models of what the church might look like as we

move farther into this new century, but they are no more "the answer" for church leaders than any other model has been. There are always some success stories for any model, but there are countless other churches that tried first this model, then that one, and continued to stagnate or decline. Models, in themselves, are not the answer for how church leaders can effectively guide their congregations into a good future because the church is about people, about relationships.

The most important changes we are experiencing today are not about technology – the internet, Google, or Facebook, for instance – or about denominational structures or styles of worship or differences in doctrine. The important changes are about people and relationships. The starting point for responding to these changes is "belonging" more than "behavior" or "beliefs," as Phyllis Tickle defines them. People want to know they belong, even though their behavior or their beliefs may not yet conform to the traditional patterns we have been taught.

"Belonging" is about relationships, and that's the fundamental key to effective leadership. As pastors and lay leaders in our churches, we need to build and maintain healthy, appropriate relationships with people and to help the congregation do that as well. In the midst of rapid change, that's not easy.

Change and conflict go together. The more rapid the change, the higher our anxiety, and with heightened anxiety, conflicts develop and increase. But remember this – conflict is not about "the issue"; conflict is always about relationships. As soon as we resolve one issue, another one develops. If we have healthy relationships and keep talking with mutual respect and compassion, we can find a way through the conflict. Without that kind of relationship, the conflict will deepen and resolution may not be possible.

Here's my mantra in the midst of conflict: It's not about me! If someone has a problem with me, I assume it's their problem and not mine. And much of the time, I'm right. Perhaps they are going through difficult times in their own lives. Or something I've done triggered something from their past that they haven't faced. Or they just don't want to accept necessary changes that have nothing to do with me. – That's not about me!

Sometimes, of course, it is about me. And I know that and try to stay open to that possibility. Maybe I wasn't as thoughtful as I could be. Maybe I was triggered by something within me. Maybe I really wasn't listening to what they were saying. – And that's what the rest of this webinar is about.

What are the personal and spiritual practices I need to engage in as a leader that will help me not struggle as much with change and conflict and be prepared to successfully guide my congregation to a good future? How can I maintain a consistent balance between knowing it's not about me and knowing that sometimes it is – and whether this time, in this situation, it is about me and what I need to do about it?

We have identified 10 practices – what we call Life Listening practices – that will empower every leader to be more successful in working with people during times of change and conflict. We don't have time in this one hour to go into a lot of detail about each practice. You can visit my blog (www.jimmyreader.org) and read more about each practice there and join a conversation by commenting on my posts. You can visit our Changing Churches website (www.changingchurches.org) where we will be adding new content regularly in the form of articles, video clips, and more. Be sure to sign up for our

eZine and email updates to get the latest access to resources as we post them and to find out more about what we're doing.

These are our 10 Life Listening Practices:

1. Centering
2. Awareness
3. Empathy
4. Assertiveness
5. Emotional maturity
6. Connecting
7. Storytelling
8. Reframing
9. Creative imagination
10. Nonviolent engagement

Let's take them one at a time. I'll give you a few thoughts to get you started thinking about them and to suggest some ways to engage in these practices every day. [Remember – you don't need to take a lot of notes because I'll send you an email after the webinar with links to the presentation and a pdf version of the script.]

One more thought before we look at each practice – These are practices, not characteristics of leadership. Most books on leadership describe qualities or characteristics of leaders that we have or are urged to develop in our lives, but what I teach are practices that we can learn and then engage in every day, strengthening our ability to be effective church leaders in the midst of change and conflict.

The first practice is Centering. – Don't get thrown off balance by unexpected words or actions from someone else. Learn to live in such a way that it's as if you are standing with both feet firmly planted, unwavering in a storm swirling around you.

One way to practice Centering is a simple breathing exercise. Stand with your feet at shoulders' width, facing slightly outward. Let your hands fall loosely by your sides, even shake them out a bit and consciously relax your muscles. Look straight ahead, pulling your shoulders back and straightening your posture. Breathe deeply, from a point a few inches below your navel, so that as you fill up with air your abdomen goes out; then slowly breathe out, and feel your abdomen tighten as you expel the air. You may want to place a hand there to feel it go in and out. Breathe slowly. Relax your muscles. Smile in a relaxed way. And feel the confidence within you. You can face whatever comes in that moment. It is even physically harder for someone to throw you off balance. When we practice this breathing exercise regularly, we learn to live in this "space" emotionally and spiritually as well, even when we're not consciously doing the exercise.

The practice of Centering helps us learn to live from the center of our authentic self. Other ways to engage in this practice include prayer, meditation, and reading Scripture or other devotional literature. Fill your mind and spirit, your whole being, with a sense of God's presence, remembering the stories of Scripture and what God did in the lives of Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets, and bringing to mind the phrases and verses which have in the past given you strength and confidence to face difficult times. These, too, are "exercises" you can engage in every day – spiritual exercises, some call them – which help you be Centered so that you will not be thrown off balance by unexpected events.

The second practice is Awareness. – Know who you are - don't let other people tell you. John Calvin said that knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves are bound together and that a true knowledge of ourselves will lead us to God. How do we know ourselves? Do we wait for other people to tell us who we are? Do we look to other people for affirmation to the extent that we don't have confidence to know we have done well until someone tells us?

As a Life Listening practice, Awareness means learning who we are as unique individuals in relationship with others as we regularly examine our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Awareness does not come in isolation from God or from other people. We need to cultivate a practice of "listening" to life, to all that surrounds us, to our whole environment.

Here are two exercises to help you with this practice:

First, choose a place to sit quietly for at least five minutes. It can be either public or private, busy or not, but it needs to be a spot where you sit still and close your eyes for part of this time. Sit up straight, with both feet on the floor or ground. Breathe deeply, with eyes closed at first. What are you aware of? What are the physical sensations as you focus on each of your five senses, one at a time? What are your inner feelings as you sit quietly for a moment or two? Open your eyes – what do you see and sense? Look around; what comes to your attention? What are your feelings in this moment? Your thoughts? What are you most aware of? – If you have time, take a few more minutes to write down some of your sensations, thoughts, feelings, fears, hopes – what you were aware of during this time.

Second, choose a place where you can sit undistracted for maybe 10 minutes. One by one, think of people in your church. You may want to use a church directory or membership list, if you have one, and go through it alphabetically or randomly. As you come to each name, and see the person's face, what are your feelings – your immediate reaction as you think of each one? What happens within you? Do you smile or laugh or frown or smirk – or grow angry or feel depressed or cry?

Awareness of yourself is an essential practice for leaders so you will not be surprised by what you feel and think and say as you encounter the people of your congregation throughout the week.

Practice no. 3: Empathy – We need to know who other people are, too – to be aware of who they are, as much as that is possible. We want to listen with compassion and generosity, cultivating awareness of what it might be like to be the other person.

We all know Jesus' words to treat other people as we want to be treated, but that "golden rule" has a downside. The way I want to be treated may not be how the other person wants to be treated. No one is quite like me, and many people are quite different. I am an extreme introvert, for instance (according to the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory), and I need time to myself after I've been with other people a lot. So in the midst of a busy conference, for instance, I often want to find a quiet corner to enjoy a meal by myself. But extroverts are always looking for more interaction; they can't imagine why anyone would want to eat alone. – So when an extrovert stops me after a session to invite me to join a group for a meal, what do I do?

If we had time I'm sure we could imagine hundreds of scenarios where what I want and what the other person wants conflict simply because we are different from each other. What I choose to do in that moment may be determined by what I want or need, or by

what the other person wants or needs. In many situations, it cannot be both. It may be appropriate to choose what I want; it's not healthy to always do what the other person wants or needs. We call that codependency. But many times, the best choice will be to do what the other person wants or needs.

The practice of Empathy enables us to be aware of the other person. Do I know the other person well enough to understand why he or she needs my attention in this moment? Am I aware of why the other person is making this request of time and energy? Do I know the person's story enough to understand why what may appear to be unimportant is vitally important to him or her in that moment? Can I be compassionate and generous in this moment toward this person because I am aware of what's happening, both for the other person and for myself? That's empathy, and it's an essential practice for church leaders.

Practice no. 4: Assertiveness – Many people are either passive or aggressive in their relationships, sometimes passive-aggressive (which is not good!). Passive people don't speak up and let others know what they're thinking or feeling or what they want. So they often feel left out or ignored. Aggressive people have no trouble expressing their feelings or thoughts, but they often do it in a way that hurts or offends. Assertive people have learned a good balance – they know how to say what they need to say and be who they need to be and to engage others with confidence and respect.

In couples counseling, we ask the couple to do a simple exercise to help them practice assertiveness. On a sheet of paper, write this unfinished sentence three times: "One thing I wish you would do more of is..." Each person completes the sentence in three different ways. Then taking turns, they both say directly to the other person what they want the other person to do. That leads to another exercise on listening, but just that much can be a helpful exercise because it helps passive people say out loud what they never would have said and gives aggressive people an opportunity to learn how to say it in an appropriate way. It is helpful to have a third person in the room to help them rephrase what they've said when that would help them learn.

Try this exercise with a friend or co-leader who will give you appropriate and honest feedback. You might try a variation – imagine you want to say these things to someone in your congregation, and ask the friend who is practicing with you to "be" that other person for the purposes of this exercise and give you feedback accordingly, if that can be done within appropriate boundaries of confidentiality. (That would mean your friend would have to practice empathy for that other person!)

A 5th practice is Emotional maturity. – This sounds like a quality or characteristic of leadership, but it is indeed a practice. Leaders learn how to respond and not react to what people say or do. We want to be able to speak and act appropriately in all situations, being aware of our feelings and choosing helpful responses.

This term comes from systems theory. It refers to being a "non-anxious presence." That is, we want to be able to not be caught up in the anxiety of the situation or relationship or group. We need to keep enough emotional distance that we don't react at a gut level (a non-thinking level); rather we need to be able to think clearly about what we say or do so we can choose an appropriate response.

We've all experienced moments when we can feel our bodies tense up and our hearts speed up, and we know that if we react to what the other person is saying or doing at that moment, it won't be good. Indeed, I expect we all have had times when we've given into the urge to just react. It may have felt good at the moment, but we knew as soon as we said it, we shouldn't have done it. It is a sign of emotional maturity if we at least recognized that our reaction was inappropriate and not helpful. It is better, of course, if we can learn to respond appropriately, rather than react, in the first place.

The exercise I want to recommend is one you can only do in those moments of tension, but as you practice it consistently you will increase your emotional maturity and ability to respond appropriately at other times of high anxiety and conflict. The practice of Awareness relates directly to this exercise. We need to be aware when we are experiencing heightened anxiety in a situation. Most of us know people who raise our blood pressure the moment they walk in the room. That's a good place to do this exercise. Be aware of the sensations within your own body – tense shoulder and back muscles, clenched hands, rapid heart beat, shallow breathing. Those are signs of increased anxiety and the need for emotional maturity in this moment.

- Slow your breathing by taking deep breaths from that point below your navel.
- Loosen your clinched fingers and furrowed brow, and consciously relax the muscles in your shoulders and back.
- Smile (if appropriate to the moment), or at least find some pleasant spot in your memory or imagination to go to.
- Take the "centering" stance, with your feet apart and hands loose at your sides and shoulders back, breathing slowly and deeply.
- Focus your attention on what the person is saying or doing, listening carefully and seeking to understand what the person is saying or doing and why.
- Centering, Awareness, and Empathy are practices to consciously draw upon in this moment.
- Resist the inner gut-level urge to react in the moment, and choose an Assertive response that is appropriate to what the person has said or done.
- And after the moment has passed, as soon as you can find a quiet moment, reflect on your feelings, thoughts, and actions in that moment and the response you choose. Perhaps write down a summary to help guide you in the future.

A 6th practice is Connecting. – Remember that it's not just about you; you can't do it alone. We need other people. To paraphrase, John Donne: "No leader is an island." The good future you want for your congregation cannot be gained by your efforts alone.

As church leaders, we want to develop an ability to see the interdependence of all things. People speak of "six degrees of separation" – that we are only six steps away from being connected to any other person on earth. I often wondered how that could be true. But with Facebook, I keep finding people I never heard of before with whom I share 10, 20, or 30 friends – people who live all over the world. We've probably all had experiences of encountering people we've just met who know people we know or are from a small town we lived in. "It's a small world," we say.

We are learning more every day about how seemingly unrelated events can be connected – like the now classic example of a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil being connected to a tsunami in Japan. Remember when you pulled on what you thought was a disconnected thread, only to unravel some garment? Or when you told a friend some story that came back to you from someone you had no idea was in some way connected

to that first friend? The internet, of course, now makes it possible for people around the world to learn about almost any isolated incident before the day is out. We live in a complex, interconnected world.

This Life Listening Practice of Connecting recognizes that reality and cultivates the ability to live with an attitude of cooperation, seeking mutual benefit in what we do. Competition has driven the practices of leadership in a world where we thought we could be isolated and disconnected from others, where we thought we could control our own environment and make our own decisions without affecting anyone else. Whether that was ever true can be debated, but it certainly is true no longer. Cooperation, rather than competition, needs to drive leadership practices today. We need to look for what will be mutually beneficial for all concerned – what will be for the common good – rather than what people with position and power want.

Leaders who engage in this practice of Connecting run the risk of offending people who created the situation we live in now or who see themselves as the conservators or guardians of the tradition or organization we are part of. Competition between traditions and organizations must now give way to cooperation between formerly competing entities. Learning how to bring people together rather than enforcing boundaries that exclude people is part of this new leadership. Learning how to lead isolated communities into a future where we recognize the connections between our communities and seek the common good is at the heart of leadership in the 21st century.

How can we cultivate this practice in our lives? Develop a daily habit of noticing someone you never saw before, and learn something about that person, no matter how insignificant it may seem at the moment. Drive different routes to work. Listen to different radio or TV stations. Notice people when you’re standing in a line at a store. Go to an airport or a mall or a busy urban area, and sit and watch people. What do you notice? What can you learn just by watching? Or maybe you can engage someone in conversation and discover connections you never knew existed. – This can be an intimidating exercise for many of us, but it might open up new possibilities for you as a leader.

Practice no. 7: Storytelling. – A friend once said that people think 90% of reality is perception, but that’s wrong – it’s 100%. That is, the way I “see” what’s happening is the way it is for me. It’s my reality, the way I experience it; it’s my story. Everyone else will have a somewhat different perspective, a different story to tell about the same situation. The practice of storytelling disciplines us to listen to the stories people tell, even though they may be very different from our own, especially if we were involved in the situation.

As we learn to listen to other people’s stories and to tell our own stories honestly and courageously, we can develop a shared narrative that enables us to transform our world. That’s the practice of storytelling. When our narratives, our stories, of shared experiences conflict with the memories and perceptions of other participants, we can not move forward together in any harmonious, peaceful way. We must learn to listen to each other and to develop a shared narrative that may be different from any one of our own stories of what happened. That shared narrative, that common story, that we can agree on will open the door to a good future for us all.

Practice 8 is Reframing. – Is it possible for everyone to learn how to see that shared experience differently? It is. It's not easy, but it's possible. The practice of reframing enables us to speak out of our own values and perspectives, offering alternative ways of seeing the world. We don't have to choose between accepting any one version of what happened over any other. We can listen with respect and compassion and grace to all the stories and look for the commonalities. And where different perspectives are still in conflict, as leaders we can help everyone reframe what we see.

When we take photos or videos, we don't change the reality of what we're trying to record. But we can change our position, moving around to find a good way to capture what we see and want to remember in the photo. So we look through the lens and "reframe" what we're looking at until we're ready to take the photo we want.

Reframing enables two people – or a group – to remember the situation together, shifting positions, finding new angles to view it, and coming to an agreement that a particular perspective – like framing the shot through the camera lens – is, at this moment, what we see as the best way to remember it together.

When you're leading a congregation to envision their future together, the same practice can be used. In creating a vision of the future, you're imagining together the story you want to happen, the situation as you want it to be. Walk a group of people around an imagined scene, reframing it and telling the hoped-for story in different ways until as a group you are telling a common story you all want to live into. That can become the good future your church will experience.

The 9th practice – Creative imagination. – People use the word "imagination" in different ways. What I mean by it is our ability to see recurring patterns in our experience and make sense of them. When we look at a painting, for instance, we literally see colors, shapes, and textures, but our imagination allows us to make sense of it based on common patterns in our experience. So a particular painting seems to clearly capture a house in the woods by a river, for instance.

Creative imagination allows us to create a new story for ourselves based on different experiences that enable us to make sense of what's happening or what might happen in ways that are sometimes very different than how we have seen it before. I know it may sound strange to you – but I was 55 years old before my wife, Joy, helped me "see" the man in the moon. I had, of course, always heard people talk about it, but no one ever helped me see the pattern on the moon which created that metaphor. Now I can't look at the moon without seeing it.

Expanding our ability to see the world from different perspectives, applying new perspectives to old problems, is the practice of creative imagination. Many of you have seen the picture of a woman used in psychology classes where some people see what was commonly called an old hag and some people see a young, beautiful woman. What we imagine – the meaning we give to just one pattern of shapes and color – changes our sense of reality. When we can imagine a new way to be the church, when we can imagine creative ways to be a different kind of congregation, when we can imagine a way into a good future that none of us alone could have imagined – that's creative imagination.

And practice no. 10 is Nonviolent engagement. This final practice, for me, forms the foundation for everything else. 1 John 4:18 says that *perfect love drives out fear*. When we choose the way of love rather than fear, we can respond to threats with creative confidence in the future. In every church, many people will say they don't like change. What they really mean is that they are afraid of what they don't know, what they have never experienced. When people react to any change – real or imagined or proposed – with extreme, even violent, emotions and words and actions, those reactions come from fear. The best response is love – to love the people, to treat them with respect, grace, and honor, and expect the same from them.

Nonviolent engagement does not mean passivity; rather we actively engage the other person or the group that challenges us and perhaps threatens us verbally, emotionally, or physically. Regardless of the level of their "violence" toward us, their disrespect or lack of compassion, we engage them with a nonviolent response. We match their disrespect with respect, their lack of compassion with grace and love. This practice may not resolve everything, but it often will defuse an explosive situation.

What kind of future do you want for your church? – It starts today – and it starts with you. It's not all about you. It's not all up to you. But as a leader in your church, whether a pastor or lay leader, the future you want can begin with you. It begins with learning and engaging in these 10 Life Listening practices – developing the abilities to lead people through change and conflict into that good future.

What will you do next? What steps can you take today, as soon as this webinar is over, to move in the directions you imagine? If you have found this brief overview helpful, here are 5 steps you can take today:

1. Go to my blog at www.jimmyreader.org and read more about each of these practices.
2. Join our Facebook group at Changing Churches.
3. Visit our website at www.changingchurches.org and sign up for our e-zines and e-mail updates. That's where you will get invitations to the January webinar on how churches are changing and ways to respond to it.
4. Join my new virtual coaching group, with weekly online meetings and e-mail and phone access for individual coaching, designed for church leaders who struggle with change and conflict.
5. Invite me to speak, lead a workshop, or consult with your church or group.

[E-mail me at jimmyreader@changingchurches.org for the details on the virtual coaching group or face-to-face coaching, speaking, or consulting.]

At Changing Churches you will have access to increasingly diverse resources.

Rev. Joy Bergfalk, co-director of our organization and my wife, can help you in a variety of ways, out of more than 20 years of experience as a pastor, spiritual director, counselor, and trainer:

- Couples counseling and training of pastors and therapists for couples counseling
- Spiritual direction (Shalem Institute) and Whole-life coaching
- Discernment & Decision-making for groups and individuals
- Spiritual formation for groups and individuals
- Labyrinth workshops and building of labyrinths through a discernment process

- Enneagram workshops and coaching
(Email Joy at joybergfalk@listening.com for more information.)

In 2011, our plans for expansion include:

- Interviews with church leaders and educators who understand change in the church and who will offer their perspectives on preaching, ministry, and leadership
- Training videos and webinars on a growing number of topics of interest to church leaders who struggle with change and conflict.

Also, I would like to ask a favor of you. If you've been thinking of other people you wish had been at this webinar today, would you e-mail them and send them the link to my website at ChangingChurches.org and encourage them to register for the next webinar. I have another one scheduled tomorrow (Fri, Oct. 22) at 2:00 p.m. and another one next week on Thursday, Oct. 28, at noon (Eastern time).

I'm delighted you joined us today. I'll send you an email today with the links you'll need to find the recording and the transcript for this webinar online.

Thank you for joining us today.