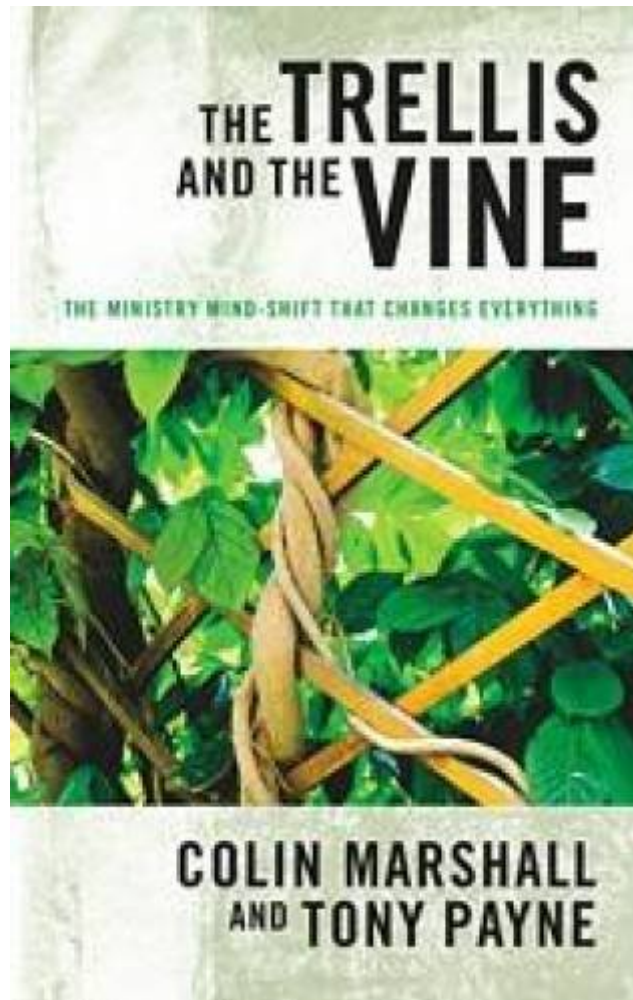


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The Trellis And The Vine



Synopsis

All Christian ministry is a mixture of trellis and vine. There is vine work: the prayerful preaching and teaching of the word of God to see people converted and grow to maturity as disciples of Christ. Vine work is the Great Commission. And there is trellis work: creating and maintaining the physical and organizational structures and programs that support vine work and its growth. What's the state of the trellis and the vine in your part of the world? Has trellis work taken over, as it has a habit of doing? Is the vine work being done by very few (perhaps only the pastor and only on Sundays)? And is the vine starting to wilt as a result? The image of the trellis and the vine raises all the fundamental questions of Christian ministry: * What is the vine for? * How does the vine grow? * How does the vine relate to my church? * What is vine work and what is trellis work, and how can we tell the difference? * What part do different people play in growing the vine? * How can we get more people involved in vine work? In *The Trellis and the Vine*, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne answer these urgent questions afresh. They dig back into the Bible's view of Christian ministry, and argue that a major mind-shift is required if we are to fulfill the Great Commission of Christ, and see the vine flourish again.

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Customer Reviews

Mark Dever has put this book in the top ten reads of 2009. He says "This is the best book I've read on the nature of church ministry." Possibly. My first impression was "Welcome to the conversation - a little late, but welcome nonetheless." What Marshall and Payne have written about here has been written about many, many times in the past 10 years or so, mainly by Emergent type folk. A lot of their suggestions and conclusions have already been suggested and concluded in various books about church ministry. What Marshall and Payne do here is articulate it through a very biblical framework - more so than other books - as well as offer a concrete way of doing church differently, and that is what makes the book good. Their fundamental point is simple - yet transformational if churches understood it - Disciple making should be the normal agenda and priority of every church AND every Christian disciple. EVERY Christian's focus should be to BE a disciple and to MAKE disciples and Churches and pastors are meant to be facilitating that process. This requires a shift of focus for churches and ministries. Early on in the book they give 11 such shifts that must take place: 1. From running programs to building people 2. From running events to training people 3. From using people to growing people (huge shift away from church 'volunteers') 4. From filling gaps to training new workers 5. From solving problems to helping people make progress 6. From clinging to ordained ministry to developing team leadership 7. From Focusing on Church polity to forging ministry partnerships 8. From relying on training institutions to establishing local training 9.

The Trellis and the Vine has two core ideas. The first is that programs and organisational activity in a church (the "trellis") often get in the way of the real gospel work ("the vine"). The second is that real gospel work involves discipling others. Now, I need to say at the outset that I am in fundamental agreement with these two emphases. Yet, it must be said that they are emphases only. It is very easy for a discipleship system to become a new trellis. The book's discussion on discipleship, however, is sufficiently nuanced to make it broader than just 1:1 discipling. There were two things I particularly appreciated about the book. Firstly, Marshall and Payne make the point that the aim of Christian ministry is to "make disciples who make other disciples, to the glory of God," and not, for example, to get more people into small groups. This is very important for me to remember, since I would dearly love to see more people in my congregation join a small group. But that is only a means to an end, and not an end in itself. The second thing I appreciated in this book was the argument in chapter 9 for investing time in more mature Christians so that they would join in the "vine work". Although a pastor may be naturally inclined to spend time with those who are struggling or those who need to hear the gospel, this book recommends an approach to ministry that trains

others to do this - and suggests that the pastor focuses on those who need either the equipping or the encouragement to join you in the work. This is radical and controversial - yet it is the way Jesus carried out ministry, focusing on twelve disciples who would (at a later time) teach and disciple others. This is very different to the way many people view pastors and ministers - yet it is biblical.

The Trellis and the Vine focuses on doing the hard work of gospel living. That is, Christians giving of themselves through personal discipleship creating gospel growth. The trellis represents the structure of a church including "management, finances, infrastructure, organization, governance." The vine represents gospel growth that grows around the trellis such as "planting, watering, fertilizing, and tending." (8) Very often trellis work can take over vine work since it tends to be easier to see and to figure out what needs to be done. Vine work can be tougher to discern just what needs to be done and exactly how to do it. This book tackles the aspect of vine work. The reader is moved from thinking of the church as an institution into a personal, intentional and relational understanding. The barriers of trellis thinking are broached and broken down without being dismissed. The authors attempt to get the readers thinking about vine work. The authors explain the reasons for vine work and gives examples of how it can be done. They explain what vine work training might look like and encourage every church member to be involved. A chart of "gospel growth stages" is given using seven example people that one might find in their church. Those stages consist of outreach, follow-up, growth and training. (86-87) This is an example of one of the tools offered. A particularly interesting chapter is Why Sunday sermons are necessary but not sufficient. The authors lay out two stereotypes of church ministry - Pastor as clergyman and Pastor as CEO. (98) Every person will probably be able to see some aspect of these stereotypes in their churches. The authors offer another way which is the pastor as trainer.

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