

**Grace to You :: Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time**

## **Radical Individualism: A Good Trait for Young Pastors?**

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Editor's Note: In case you hadn't heard, there's been a bit of a buzz regarding a comment John MacArthur made about a book by Darrin Patrick in last Sunday night's interview, "Theology and Ministry: An Interview with John MacArthur." Here's what John had to say about it.

On Sunday, January 16, I was interviewed at Grace Community Church. During the course of the evening, I paraphrased a point Darrin Patrick makes in his book *Church Planter: The Man, The Message, The Mission* (page 37). Here is that section from the book:

"One of the common errors of young men who surrender to ministry is to simply adopt the model of a church that they have experienced or idolized. A similar mistake is to blindly accept the ministry philosophy and practice of a ministry hero. The man who is experiencing head confirmation is thoughtful about his *own* philosophy of ministry, his own ministry style, his own theological beliefs, his own unique gifts, abilities, and desires. In short, there is uniqueness to the way he wants to do ministry."

Notice that Darrin Patrick himself summarizes and restates the point he is making, and it is about "uniqueness" in "the way he wants to do ministry." He seems to suggest that everything about one's ministry (Patrick expressly includes "his own theological beliefs") needs to be self-styled and individualistic.

Indeed, the entire book treats church planting as an entrepreneurial business, with almost no word of caution against the many dangers of bringing an entrepreneur's mindset into ministry. Scripture, by contrast, consistently uses pastoral language rather than terms borrowed from financial enterprise. Church leaders are to be shepherds, not tycoons. Our people are sheep, not consumers.

On the surface, it may sound noble to hold to a unique theology that has been independently forged, but such thinking (too common among today's young-and-restless reformers) is dangerous to the health of the church. Allow me to publicly state that if this is not what Darrin Patrick meant to communicate, I would certainly love to embrace any clarification.

Meanwhile, let me clarify *my* remark: I was not questioning Darrin's personal orthodoxy – his theology is clear in the book. The issue is rather the danger of developing a unique theology and a radically individualistic philosophy of church leadership. When one's "own theological beliefs" are self-styled

and unique, those beliefs *need* to be questioned. Protecting the soundness of our theological convictions is a commitment that we all must make. It is increasingly clear that the vanguard of evangelical Christianity is intent upon actively promoting change at every level within the church, and young men in particular should not be encouraged to think radical individualism is a positive mindset for church leadership and ministry style.

Good ecclesiology demands that there exist an awareness of, appreciation for, and deliberate connection to the flow of redemptive history. Patrick's statement, it seems to me, is quite out of harmony with Paul's charge to Timothy: "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). The goal certainly should not be to encourage young pastors to *distrust* or *remodel* what they have learned from faithful men.

I don't know Darrin, and I'm not attacking him or challenging his statement of faith; I'm cautioning that this championing of "uniqueness to the way [young pastors want] to do ministry" is a dangerous trend, not a healthy one.

For the Master,

John MacArthur

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