

# Lifelines

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Topic: *Methods or Principles?*

## **Methods or Principles, or Both?**

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This last week I have spent some time salvaging quotes I had written in the flyleaves of a Bible that I have used for thirty-eight years. The cover is still in great shape, but the pages are all but worn out, with the maps hanging by a thread.

Today's quote is one by Bill Tisdale, which says: "Methods are many; principles are few. Methods may change, but principles never do!" I have experienced innumerable changes in church methodology since I began serving in churches in the 1970's. With every new method, there were people who resisted any kind of change. This is nothing new.

The point is that there may be many methods to get something done. Think of a physical example: In the 1950's people got their news over broadcasts on the radio, on the TV evening news, and various printed newspapers, either bought from a news vendor or received by home delivery. My first real job, as a 12 year old, was as a bike-riding newspaper delivery boy.

Fast forward to 2025. Now we have 24/7 news programming, news apps on our cell phones, podcasts, and other forms of internet news media. Newspapers are still a source of news, but today it is usually local newspapers that we subscribe to, and maybe we even read other newspapers or magazines online rather than holding paper in our hands.

Other examples of changing methods could be our modern-day farming technology, transportation, medical procedures, communication and even how we shop for and prepare our meals.

All that to say, don't obsess over methods. In today's fast-paced world, by the time you learn a "new" method, it has already been replaced by two or three newer methods. Methods change ... it is the nature of an ever-changing world. Don't get in fights over outdated methods.

Methods change, but principles do not. The word "principle" is another word for what I call "timeless truths." Principles are truths that are true and operate similarly in every scenario and year. The Bible is full of timeless truths; principles which are true whether I lived in Nevada, in Europe, in Idaho or Virginia. Principles were true 100 years ago, are true today, and will be true a century from now, regardless of the methods we use for practical living.

For example we read in Galatians 6:7 (NJB): "Don't delude yourself: God is not to be fooled; whatever someone sows, that is what he will reap." There are many people who call God and God's word foolish, but Paul says, "Stop deluding yourself! God is not fooled."

Whatever a person sows, that is what will come up for harvest. You can plant corn and expect watermelons, but it won't happen. If you want watermelons, you must plant watermelon seeds. If you want to be respected in life, you must plant respect. If you plant contempt for others, they will give you a full harvest of contempt right back. If you plant

seeds of animosity, don't be surprised if you don't get love back. If you always break your promises, you will not be trusted.

We harvest what we plant; so be careful what you plant. You can't be careless about what you sow, and expect to get the positive results you wished for. If you invest all your time and energy planting seeds of hate and disdain all around you, you will reap a harvest of hatred and disdain. If you plant kindness and respect, you will reap a harvest kindness and respect.

You not only harvest the same thing you planted, you will receive much more than the seeds you planted. You plant one kernel of corn, but you could harvest five or six ears of corn, each with multiple kernels. The effect is cumulative. If you plant five acts of meanness, you might receive back fifty times that act of meanness done to you. On the other hand, if you plant five acts of kindness, you will receive many more acts of kindnesses in return.

That is a timeless truth. It is true in relationships, it is true in gardening, it is true in car maintenance, it is true in learning and teaching others, it is true in generous giving, it is true in love.

The methods of planting change frequently, but the timeless truths which are built into the growth and reproduction of a greater harvest of seeds than you planted, is timeless. God's truth does not change, only the methods we use to plant it.

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