

[Impact vs Penetration](http://blog.windfarm.org.au) (from <http://blog.windfarm.org.au>)

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It's funny how God works. Sometimes it's even funnier when we consider how God speaks. He is the creator of all languages, both verbal and non-verbal. With me, He frequently communicates through visual images on a screen or a billboard or in a book or magazine. He sometimes brings back to mind the voices of other people, with the replay of their statements running around inside me like records with the needle stuck in the groove. All the while those kinds of communications are being "transmitted", God is trying to communicate an underlying truth... the real purpose of His triggering the latest game of revelatory "hide and seek". This article is a bit like that.

At the outset, let me tell you that what you are about to read is going to feel like together you and I are jumping from one moment in time to the next paying no attention to lineal chronology. However, what you will discover is an attempt to unfold what God has been saying. So, close your eyes, start counting backwards from 10 to 1, then come looking for what God is hiding .....

Recently I was a part of a Storm Harvest Business Gathering in Canberra.

These are times where we gather business people related to Storm Harvest in some way for the purpose of encouragement and the cultivation of relationships for Kingdom purposes. One of the most enjoyable parts of these events is that many of those in attendance are also asked to share during some of the sessions as a way of cross-pollinating the gathering with what each of us has to offer. One of those who shared was Jonathan Brake, the managing director of Momentum TMC, a dynamic and fast growing marketing company based in Australia's Capital. Jonathan is a man who is never lost for words and he shared many exciting things that encouraged all of us greatly. However, in the course of what he shared, he made a very simple statement about the way marketing professionals think. As he made the statement, both Robert Holmes and I heard the Lord impress the same things on our hearts. Jonathan said that the most marked difference between the way the church thinks and the way that marketing professionals think is that ministries go after "impact" while marketing people are in search of "penetration".

SSSSSHPPP! Like a well aimed arrow driven into my heart and Rob's, was the realisation that an elusive answer we have been searching for for what seems like ages, had been found!

In marketing terms, here's what that means:

When you think about hamburgers, what springs to mind? When you think about toothpaste, which company springs to mind? When you think about soft-drink,

soda or pop, again, what springs to mind? If you answered McDonald's, Colgate and Coca-Cola, then you have proven that those companies have achieved their aim with you. Their product has not just impacted you; their brand has penetrated you. Their marketing has effected your decision making process. It has changed the way you think and act .. potentially for the rest of your life.

Both Robert and I have given much of the last decade or more of our lives to serving the church in one form or another around the world speaking at conference events, seminars and schools. We've helped with resources, team development, the encouragement of leadership at all levels, and varying degrees of relationship and friendship. However, the main thing we have wrestled with is why it is that we can relate to a church, ministry or individual for so long only to see little, or sometimes, no lasting life-change and fruit from them when we know what we carry is life-giving.

Privately we have anguished over this issue. We have discussed it often because our desire is that our input and service should always be fruitful, worthwhile, and more importantly, should leave lasting changes for the sake of the Kingdom. However, often it does not. So, we have rightly asked ourselves and each other, "why?"

For many years Robert has used the term "our language betrays us". In other words, because what we speak comes out of the abundance of our hearts, the language we use betrays our true motives and intentions whether we say we were "only joking" or not. (Matt 12:24) With that in mind, it was about a month before the Business Gathering in Canberra that I was again assessing my effectiveness in life and ministry.

You see, I have recently resigned my position as the prophet to a growing network of Australian denominational churches recognizing that my season that was at an end. Television's Dr Phil recommends that at the end of every relationship we should do an "autopsy" on the one that's ended before we move into the next. I began to meditate on why it was that in the final year or so of my time in that network, my prophetic ministry and leadership input had become very evidently ineffective. Into that context, I began to once again "hear" Rob's voice saying "our language betrays us". With Rob's voice repeating in my mind like a needle stuck in the groove of a record, I began to ask the Lord how do you know whether you've been able to bring lasting change to people's lives .. and here is what He said:

"The first way to be sure that you have brought lasting change to a person's life is when they adopt your language" .. to which I said .. "Pardon me? Do you mean that they're able to parrot back to me what I've been saying?"

The Lord replied, "Not at all. Because it is 'out of the abundance of the heart that a mouth speaks', the only way to be sure that a heart-change has been made is

when that person reaches for the language you used to bring that change to their lives. In the early stages of change, your language is the only way they have to articulate the change that's taken place in their hearts."

Into the assessment of my recent departure from the denominational network, this was a major revelation for me! As I looked back over the five years of my involvement with this group of people, I was left with the realization that all but one of them, had failed to adopt any of the language I had used over all the years of preaching, teaching and relational encouragement.

Nothing of "the dark night of the soul", "the fellowship of His sufferings", "journey v's destination", "process and price", "the true sword of the Spirit", "fellowship over function", and so much more, had ever been assimilated into their own way of expressing themselves. For me, this was devastating! Because for all that work, I had failed to bring any kind of change to their lives that could be directly linked to my efforts. It made me not only question the effectiveness of my ministry, but also the overall validity of my ministry!

Fast-forward from there back to our starting point .. the Storm Harvest Business Gathering in Canberra where Jonathan Brake is speaking:

"... the most marked difference between the way the church thinks and the way that marketing professionals think is that ministries go after "impact"

while marketing people are in search of "penetration".

At this point I am entering a simultaneous eureka / meltdown moment .....

Aha! / Oh no! ... That's the problem!! I've been so focussed on making an impact that I have never stopped to consider whether I am achieving penetration with those on the receiving-end of my ministry. Could it be that all the while I've thought I've been correctly wielding the Sword of the Spirit, I have not? For example, we all leave the conference venue knowing that an impact has been made, but has penetration been achieved?

The question itself is penetrating. So much so that it's almost too hard to ask ourselves. But it is a question that **MUST** be asked.

When I consider my relationship with Robert Holmes, I realize that after walking closely together in ministry and friendship with him for about six years, and speaking to each other on the phone at least a couple of times a week, Rob has adopted a lot of my language and I've adopted a ton of his.

Does that mean that just because we're buddies that we go around parroting each other because we've formed our own little clique which has its own non-inclusive language? Not at all. What it means is that Rob's wisdom and

experience, his “life in God”, has become of such value to me that, as I have assimilated many of his practices and insights into my life, I’ve been changed... penetrated, if you will... by the presence of God in my friend’s life. If someone is then to ask me what’s changed or how I’ve changed, the only way I can articulate that change is to reach for the language that first brought the life-change to me. In other words, the adoption of another’s language is indicative of penetration at a heart level, because “out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks”.

A very humbling experience has been to read through, edit and critique the second draft of Rob’s forthcoming book on the prophetic only to notice how many times he has referenced me throughout the book. I was aware that some of what I had learned from the Lord over the years had been of benefit to Rob and that it had changed him and his language. I just had no idea of how deep the penetration was until working my way through his manuscript. Very humbling indeed.

One of the most telling examples of this whole unfolding understanding of “impact v’s penetration” came a few weeks ago when I had a conversation with the leader of the denominational network from which I had recently resigned.

As I shared with him my distress and sense of failure over not being able to effectively assist our team in embracing all that God had been calling us to for over two years, he replied by saying that I must not forget the power a group’s “want”. I asked him what he meant. He replied that if a group’s “want” for a particular thing is strong enough, anything that appears to contradict that “want”, even if it’s a word from Heaven, is heard like someone speaking another language. What he meant was, if the “want” is strong enough, it will even override a person or group’s desire to even want to learn the ‘language’ you’re speaking. Hence, at the time of delivery, an impact may be made but no penetration is achieved. As a result, there’s no heart and/or language change that follows.

What to do?

Jesus was highly skilled at knowing which peoples’ lives and which environments were fruitful soil in the making. He had no trouble knowing when to “shake the dust” from His feet in order to move on to where penetration for the Kingdom could be achieved. (Matt 10:14, Mark 6:11) Think about it. Every time he went into the temple, He surely made an impact .. but did He achieve penetration, bringing lasting heart-change among the Pharisees? Did they ever adopt His language? Nicodemus did. Saul did. But two out of hundreds is a pretty low “market penetration” ratio indeed. Jesus made an impact on Judas’ life, but did He manage to penetrate it? We know that Judas got ‘hung up’ on a couple of Kingdom issues, particularly regarding money, so you be the judge. Even in his ‘home town’, Jesus couldn’t achieve penetration, so He moved on implying He wouldn’t waste His time with a return visit. (Mark 6:1-6)

A few years ago on this list, Robert Holmes released a word regarding how the “day of the fishermen had passed and the day of the hunter has come”.

When a traditional fisherman fishes, he does so with a huge net. That’s a decent sized impact! However, a hunter is only looking for one thing .. to apprehend his prey by penetration. We must be the same. One of the successes of the ministry of Storm Harvest has been Robert’s determination to “target” those men and women that he knew, by discernment, would indeed be fruitful soil for the Kingdom of God.

I don’t know about you, but I am tired of the wasted weekends “doing ministry” somewhere in the world in locations where only an impact is ever made. Robert and I have seen this the world over. Locations we have been to again and again, but nothing ever seems to change as a result. But still others where the people in that location willingly allow their lives to be penetrated with the things we carry to them from God resulting in long-term life change at both an individual and corporate level. However, one of the richest and most joyous experiences you will ever have is when one of your sons or daughters in the Lord starts sharing with you about what they’re up to this month, only to hear your language talking back to you. Have they learned to parrot you? Not at all. What they’re manifesting is the penetration God has made in their lives with the truth you carried to them at one time or another.

I believe that, like Jesus, we must each become much more intentional about where we minister, how we minister, to whom we minister and even how long we attempt to minister the Kingdom into a given person or setting. If fruitfulness and change is not being achieved, manifest initially by an adoption of the language that brought the change, then it’s time to move on.

I believe we must move away from our “shotgun” event-based, impact-focussed ministry and begin to think like the hunter; targeting those that we discern will firstly allow penetration and secondly that we can work with to bring lifelong change to through demonstrating our discipleship to Christ.

That’s what Jesus meant when He said we were to go into all the world and “make” disciples. Disciples are not converts. Disciples are people who have allowed their lives to be penetrated by Kingdom truth and whose lives and language have permanently changed over time as a result. Am I talking about evangelism? Perhaps. But really, my primary focus is on us being intentional .. missional .. incarnational.

Impact or Penetration. Which will you choose? Remember, even the gates of hell are meant to be penetrated by the church, not just dazzled by the feel-good impact of our events and programs.

## [IMPACT v's PENETRATION .. PART II](#)

**Posted on Saturday 6 May 2006**

Thank you to all those who wrote to voice their appreciation for the previous article on this topic, but thank you most of all to Terry Mengle of Kent, Washington in the USA whose transparent and heartfelt e-mail stirred me deeply and led me on a further quest for language to describe how to make the shift from having a focus on making an impact to achieving genuine penetration in peoples' lives. Terry wrote:

"I enjoyed your article and sent it out to several friends. It caused quite a stir, but some of us were wondering if you would elaborate about the difference between impact and penetration. Many of my friends hope you will say more about this topic and what you feel the Lord is saying about this. How do you aim for penetration?- without impact? What makes for effective penetration? As a pastor for 30 some years I recognize now that I often went for impact with little lasting fruit. In fact, after serious consideration I feel I gained little of lasting value for all the effort. We must not let the younger generation make the same mistake. How can we help them avoid this costly error?"

There is much I could say in response to Terry's e-mail, but allow me to simply tell you a story and then make a few basic observations.

About six years ago I was asked by a friend to come over to his church in Hermanus, South Africa to dedicate their new facility because I had been prophetically involved with catalyzing its construction. As you can imagine, it was an incredibly busy time for my friend Mario Marchio. As the church's founder, he was overseeing the completion of a building that was not only intended for use by his church and their attached Christian school, but he was about to announce to every church in their town of about 30,000 that this new 850 seat auditorium was available to every church, free of charge, whenever they needed it because, while it might have been built by Bosko Ministries, it belonged to the Kingdom.

A day or so after the packed dedication service, Mario took me for a drive to Cape Agulhas, the southernmost tip of the African continent. It's a windswept part of the world with nothing much to see except to be able to say you've been there and that you've seen the place where two oceans geographically meet. Big deal, eh? Well, it will always be a big deal for me, because it was on the drive home that Mario penetrated my heart and changed me forever.

As we were driving home that afternoon, I thanked Mario for taking so much time out of an otherwise very busy schedule for me while I was in town. While he was driving the car, I remember him looking across at me in the passenger seat with tears in his eyes. He said, "Buddy, I love you. And if I love you I'm going to give

you my life.” He went on to say, “Kerry, I’ve only been given one thing in life and that’s ‘time’, so if I really love you, I’m going to give you my life, but the only way I can do that is to give you my time.”

Selah

As you can imagine, I came apart. We cried together as we drove .. and I discovered something of the nature of God’s heart that has hounded me ever since. Real penetration only ever takes place over time.

By way of example, Robert Holmes and I love to spend time with each other as often as we’re able but there’s something more at work when we connect. There’s a strong belief in each others’ potential that makes us very intentional about the ongoing development of our friendship. What I’m talking about is not just hanging out. This is intentional life investment.

Likewise, I am the ‘white sheep’ of my family; I’m the only practicing Christian out of my parents and my four brothers; but more and more I am discovering that my family are opening up to and embracing the things of God the more I show them that they as people are important to me. I’m doing all I can to be with them at times that matter and even at times that don’t. It’s taken almost 30 years of me making mistakes to learn that all they want is to see me LIVE the reality of what I believe. As they see it, they’re becoming more open to being penetrated by it. They don’t need Word of Faith hyper-positive mumbo-jumbo. They don’t need me to yield to the lie that it’s more important for me to be at yet another church service than to be with them. They certainly don’t need me preaching at them or Bible-bashing. What they need is to see the reality of an ordinary man learning how to serve an extraordinary God in the most challenging time in human history. As a result, my life is starting to penetrate them more and more because I’m intentionally spending time with them.

Because of nearly 25 years in broadcasting, many see me as an extrovert. The reality is, I am an introvert, and I find reaching out to people and spending time investing myself into them to be really hard work. But there’s no escaping it. I have discovered that the ONLY way to penetrate a person’s heart is to intentionally spend time with them, investing myself into them while remaining open to my being penetrated by their life in turn. This means I have to go beyond myself and live according to my convictions rather than my preferences, because communicating .. really communicating .. involves genuinely engaging people for extended periods of time. It involves a two way interaction that requires me to open up my life and heart .. and that’s just not comfortable nor safe .. nor does it fit well in our current institutional church models.

Did Jesus impact or penetrate? Interestingly, He did both.

Cast your memory over the gospels. There were countless instances where

Jesus entered a town and healed many but we hear nothing more from them. The story of the Ten Lepers is one such instance. Did He make an impact? You bet He did! The same could be said in the temple courts at the time He overturned the money-changers tables. Impact? Certainly. Penetration? None.

But now think about Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well in John chapter 4. They spent an extended period of time together one-on-one. He engaged her. He 'opened' His life up to her and she to Him. The result was that she returned to her town and told everyone there all about this encounter. This in turn saw every person in the town become Jesus' disciples. Now THAT'S penetration! And it all came about because Jesus invested real time and real life into this supposedly worthless woman.

Think about the twelve disciples who eventually became 'sent ones'. The penetration of these men's hearts was so deep and so broad that we are still living in its wake over two thousand years later with all but one changed forever by a man named Jesus who was willing to invest three or more years of His life and time into each of them!

Why would you ever again be satisfied with just making an impact when penetration produces such lasting benefits?

Recently Rob Holmes and I spoke on the phone while he was away working with Brian Medway on a series of "cluster meetings" for the Crosslink Christian Network. These meetings were designed to have only about ten or twenty leaders in attendance over two days. They only needed to get to a location near where they live and minister because the leaders of the network valued them enough to go to them to spend time with them. When I asked Rob how the meetings were going, he said, "Oh mate, you can't produce fruit like this any other way". His language betrayed him! He literally meant that the only way to make the kind of lasting penetration they were seeing was to spend intentional, quantity time with people right where they are.

I remember attending a denominational conference about ten years ago during which there was a split session... the men in one building and the women in another .. for the purpose of getting down to some straight talk about some issues relating to each group. During that session, one thing was said that penetrated my heart and has stuck with me all these years. The speaker said that the concept of "quality time" was a lie. He said, "Quality time only ever comes out of quantity time, because you can't schedule 'Kodak moments'. You just have to make sure you're around for when they happen."

The same is true when looking at impact v's penetration.

I can schedule a corporate meeting in the hope that what I have to say will hit its mark at the time I've designated it to. The reality is, the most lasting change only

ever seems to come during those “uh-huh” moments when two or more people are mutually sharing and blending the issues of life, faith and friendship together. Remember, Jesus didn’t come to bring us “meetings and meetings more abundantly”. He came to bring us life! That’s what we’re meant to bring to each other, but that can only happen if we’re willing to invest ourselves into each other and stop hiding behind the busyness of our programs.

In short, do the sums and make a choice ...

event-focused + “quality time” + “manageable excellence” = IMPACT

relationship-focused + “quantity time” + the untidiness of life = PENETRATION

Remember the essence of my friend Mario’s words when he said “Buddy, I love you. And if I love you I’m going to give you my life.” What he was really saying was “greater love has no man than this, that he lays down his life for his friends.” I want my life in God to penetrate that of others and that really only happens when we’re willing to push the pause button on our busy schedules and give each other time.