

Have you worked—or are you currently working—in a workplace...yeah, a business or a nonprofit...a place where there are significant gaps between what the enterprise says it stands for and what it actually does day-in and day-out? Now I'm not talking about occasional micro-failures in, for example, a customer service lapse in a business that considers itself strongly customer centric. Instead, I'm talking about significant, lingering gaps between what an enterprise says it stands for and what it actually does.

We're well in to more than a couple dozen episodes in a series called "Research-Wisdom-Action"—that's a foundational process of highly effective people and organizations: yes, they do great research...they gain wisdom, and they take commensurate action. Today, our focus is the outworking of those three: yeah, we're taking research-wisdom-action and casting the application of that as *beliefs-emphases-practices*.

That's right, research works to yield your organization's set of *beliefs*...wisdom works to yield your proper priorities or *emphases*...and action yields your ongoing *practices*. Every great organization defines and then manifests this chain of beliefs-emphases-practices very, very well. Lesser organizations lack either the discipline or even the motive to strongly link these three well—and their long-term results reveal that lack with the cracks that develop. Every business and nonprofit must deal with this issue—and whether each one does so well or badly will determine its destiny, sooner or later. That's true of every church, too.

The problem is that there's always a universal, driving propensity to create gaps between beliefs and the right emphases and also to create gaps between the right emphases and ongoing practices. Those gaps can become deadly. And that's why this episode's title is *Mind the Gaps: Beliefs to Emphases to Practices*.

But why the title "Mind the Gaps"...? Well, there's a story behind that phrase. In the late 1960s, London's upgraded train system was freshly automated. And since there was a rather dangerous gap at each stop of about twelve inches between the train and the stationary platform—well, then, in response, the authorities created a simple, automated message to passengers crossing over: a recorded voice said simply "mind the gap." And that same "mind the gap" phrase was written in big block letters at the passengers' feet before they boarded the train.

But the problem in your business or nonprofit is that there's no voice or big block letters constantly reminding you to mind your enterprise's dangerous gaps. And frankly, many enterprises lack the necessary mindfulness that identifies and corrects gaps and sustains success. That lack of mindfulness is their peril!

But...there's a model out there of that mindfulness being done really, really well—and simultaneously being done quite badly! Both dimensions are quite revealing and instructive. So, let's visit the realities of the church world, starting with the early church revealed in much of the New Testament.

Now the four Gospels along with the epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, the Galatians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, and the Colossians were focused on documenting, teaching, and reinforcing beliefs and practices of the New Covenant...*as well as correcting practices rooted in shaky or incorrect beliefs or emphases*. The reason it's so significant that we focus on that is because the Scripture is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16-17)—it's there we see accurate, no-holds-barred accounts of gaps...and their consequences!

Now the Pharisees are the Gospels' poster children for off-base religious practices often based upon faulty emphases on the law. And the Pharisees worked hard to confront and undermine Jesus to retain their power and status—often arrogantly based on their emphases that had many gaps from God's intent.

Therefore, over and over again, Jesus defeated the Pharisees by anchoring to the right beliefs...the right emphases anchored to the right beliefs...and the right practices. That's right—*throughout Jesus's ministry and teachings, there were no gaps in His handling of it all*, either from the Scriptures or His Father's plan and intentions.

So, the Pharisees were often at odds with Jesus. For example, the Pharisees' belief was that the law should be fulfilled perfectly, and their emphasis was on tithing mint and cumin. But when Jesus was fulfilling the law, he did so by fully emphasizing love. And He astoundingly put that into practice at the Cross.

But battling the Pharisees' misapprehending God was not the end-all—Jesus deployed a wider scope of beliefs-emphases-practices. Jesus was clarifying beliefs through parables...He was proclaiming, teaching, discipling, and sacrificing for every person for all time...yes, He was actually enabling and fulfilling the New Covenant—a ransom for all! In short, Jesus's beliefs were perfect...His emphases on those beliefs perfect...His practices perfect. No gaps arose with Him—*Jesus was flawlessly about His Father's business!*

And when Paul wrote his epistles, he, too, was teaching right beliefs, right emphases, and right practices. But he was also correcting, for example, the followers of the Judaizers in the Galatian church who wanted to wrongly force their practice of circumcision for all believers into the belief system of the New Covenant. For that matter, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul corrected the believers who believed they were still under the Mosaic Law (Galatians 5:18). Overall, in matters huge and sometimes smaller, under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul astutely “minded the gaps” for each local congregation in the early church, and in so doing wrote some Scripture himself *for us all to mind those very same gaps in our churches!*

And that's the point for us here in our local churches and denominations. Take the word “evangelical,” which comes from the Greek word for “good news.” Yes, Christians are to have good news for every unbeliever—but is that the current practice of many “Evangelicals” in American politics, in culture wars, in church activity? Are Christian leaders truly “minding the gap” between Bible truth and their practices?

Let's be clear here. We would be hard pressed to find a major Christian denomination that, *over time*, has competently minded the important gaps between beliefs, emphases, and practices as delineated in the Bible. First and foremost is the fact that some unapologetically don't really anchor their beliefs in the Bible! Well, no wonder such beliefs, emphases, and practices easily morph—everything is negotiable!

Still, many churches really do try to pursue anchored belief systems. But, over time, only the barest few *have sustained* sound emphases or sound practices, like effective worldwide gospel-outreach programs or recording local decisions for Christ. Funny, I have asked many Christians this: when two evangelicals show up on your doorstep, are they there to proclaim Christ...or candidate Smith for U.S. Senate? Sadly, the response is often a knowing chuckle—it's a common perception of current realities! In just this way, the spreading of the true Gospel recedes. More than ever, local church leaders must mind their local gaps!

Look, not minding the gaps between beliefs, emphases, and practices in churches is hazardous...yeah, not minding the gaps inexorably works to diminish the beliefs and increases the ultimate impotence of the organization's impact over time. *That's why Jesus minded others' gaps and that's why Paul minded the gaps*—and the Bible content spends quite a bit of its space documenting just that! Every church can risk that one over-emphasis can dramatically distort any well-integrated collage of beliefs. Overemphasized practices like circumcision in Galatia or not drinking a drop of wine in America can steer an entire church to secondary issues that neuter the intended power of foundational understandings like the gospel itself!

And all this is likewise true of every enterprise—from nations to retail stores. Every nation's practices always have critical gaps from its ideals, its founding principles. But the point is *not* whether the gaps arise—they always do because people are fallible—but whether they mind the gaps, whether they actually fix the gaps fruitfully! And, yeah, for example, retail stores, like churches, are easy pickings regarding gaps: in the Amazon era, how many retailers believed they were delivering great customer value even while their long-time customers were drifting to Amazon in droves?

Yes, gaps for businesses and nonprofits can happen from competitive pressures causing your best practices to fall short. Or it can be supply chain issues. Or government policies causing inflation. But the fact remains, all those types of challenges *are a given in the modern era!* In order to mind the gaps in your enterprise—whatever unwelcome events or organization-drift cause destructive gaps between beliefs and practices—leaders must have an evergreening mindset that gaps are addressed. You know, like Jesus did. Like Paul did. Along those lines, Paul wrote to the Romans that they should work to renew their minds.

Exactly. Renewing our minds by the Holy Spirit is exactly what the Bible tells us to do! So...*mind the gaps!*

A&A: Application & Action

1. Quick, name the top three gaps that your workplace enterprise is minding or should be minding. If your workplace hasn't identified any gaps, why not? Discuss.
2. Quick, name the top three gaps that your local church is minding or should be minding. If your church hasn't identified any gaps, why not? Discuss.
3. Do you have specific processes to successfully mind your own gaps between God's best and your practices? Share.