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Radio Days: Lessons Learned Behind the Microphone

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Last Friday marked the final live broadcast of *The Albert Mohler Program*. Delivering that program was one of the great privileges of my life, and one for which I will always be thankful. Day by day, coast to coast, individuals and families welcomed me into their lives and joined in what we sincerely hoped was “Intelligent Christian Conversation About the Issues That Matter.” For years, I eagerly awaited the experience of sitting behind that microphone and talking to America and friends around the world.

And yet, the time came to bring the live broadcast to an end — not because we had run out of issues that demand attention, but because life is finite and ever changing. As I brought the program to an end, I wanted to share some lessons I learned in the process. I did my best on Friday’s program to distill these into “Ten Lessons Learned Behind the Microphone.”

1. Christians Are Starved for Intelligent Christian Conversation

There is no shortage of talk in this world, and that includes the Christian world. Nevertheless, much of this talk, on and off the air, is unintelligent even in its aspiration. The cable news networks have become platforms for ideological show fights, with little room for an honest and intelligent debate of the crucial issues at stake. The public space for reasoned conversation is growing more and more constricted, and this extends to virtually every sector of the culture.

Among Christians, much of the talk is superficial, sensationalistic, and unbiblical. Rod Dreher, formerly of *The Dallas Morning News*, recently remarked that Americans “prefer their religion news to be soft and self-helpy.” Frankly, many Christians want their *religion* to be soft and self-helpy — a religion that has little to do with biblical Christianity.

But I am glad to report that many Christians are actually starved for intelligent Christian conversation. They want more, not less, substance. They want a reasoned and thoughtful conversation about the issues they know are facing their families, their children, their churches, and their culture. They want to stand upon the full authority and truthfulness of the Bible and think as faithful Christians.

My fervent hope is that Christian churches, families, and organizations will foster intelligent Christian conversation as a matter of Christian responsibility. I can assure you that there is a hungry audience eager to join such a conversation.

2. Time Passes Quickly — On and Off the Air

One of the most important lessons of live radio is the mandate of the clock. The microphone goes live whether you are ready or not, and the breaks will come without regard to whether the host is about to make a crucial point. I learned quickly that time on the air passes more quickly than any other experience of chronology. I would start the conversation and then see, to my utter amazement, that time was running out.

In that sense, radio is a metaphor for life itself. The years on the air passed so quickly as week rolled into week, month passed into month, and year followed year. I am so thankful for those years, but I am also aware that the passage of time



can catch us all unawares.

For the radio host, pacing becomes second nature. The music was all I needed to know exactly where I was in terms of the clock. I trusted the music in my ears more than the clock I saw running down with my eyes. Oddly enough, I think that skill made me a better preacher. I learned how to end on time . . . most of the time.

Actually, the communication skills that make for good radio are invaluable to every aspect of my life, and for these I will always be thankful.

3. Words Matter — All of Them

In the movie *Amadeus*, the Austrian Emperor responds with incredulity to Mozart's musical abundance with the infamous quip: "Too many notes!" Perhaps this world is filled with too many words, but God made us to be creatures who live and die by words. I was constantly reminded of how words matter as I did radio. The right word works, the wrong word fails. Too many words inundate, but too few frustrate the listener. A well-constructed sentence flies over the airwaves. A convoluted sentence leaves listeners scratching their heads or turning the dial.

I am thankful for the lessons learned with regard to the power and stewardship of words. I was often humbled by words, sometimes tripped up by words, amazed by the words I heard from callers, and made to laugh by the words I was surprised and chagrined to hear come unexpectedly out of my own mouth. Trust me, words matter. When I misspoke, I heard quickly from listeners (starting with those at home). In ways both profound and fundamental, words really do matter.

4. Issues Come and Go, but the Gospel of Christ Remains

There is no shortage of issues Christians face in this confusing and fast-changing world. Controversies about politics, economics, the arts, education, and the direction of the culture come with incredible velocity. Moral issues emerge with explosive power, ranging from human sexuality and the nature of marriage to questions of justice, the stewardship of the earth, medical ethics, and the sanctity of human life.

Added to these are the issues confronting the Christian church — right down to questions of orthodoxy versus heresy, truth versus error, and the very nature of the Church and its message.

But above all these one truth remains constant — the Gospel of Jesus Christ. No other message means the difference between heaven and hell. There is only one Savior, and only one Gospel. Getting the Gospel right is more important than getting any other question or issue right. The Christian church is called to give an answer on countless questions and issues raised by a fallen world, but its main responsibility and irreducible message is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

5. The Church in this Generation is Confronted with Tremendous Challenges

This is not just a matter of generational perception. Previous generations have dealt with their own daunting questions and challenges, but this generation faces unprecedented challenges that will demand the full wealth of Christian conviction. It would be hubris to suggest that the challenges faced by this generation are greater than those faced by generations in the past, but it is plainly true that the generation of Christians now living faces its own set of pressing challenges.

These include issues of theology, questions about the nature of the church and the shape of Christian ministry and mission in this age, questions about Christian morality and Gospel witness, and challenges to the very nature of truth. The challenges are huge . . . and insistent.

6. The Church Has Ample Reason for Hope

The most important ground of the Church's hope is Christ — who assures that the gates of hell shall not prevail against his church. Over and over again, I was reminded that Christ has his people in the most unexpected places. I was so encouraged as I heard from Christian moms, young people, pastors, and laypeople. Christ gives his church all it needs to make its way in this fallen world until He comes, and we have the Bible, the Word of God, as our guide. The church

faces daunting challenges, but it lives in confident hope, I was always reassured to hear that hope in our conversations over the airwaves.

7. The Young Are Bearing the Greatest Burden

Just imagine being a young Christian in postmodern America. Everything appears up for negotiation, from sexuality to spiritual realities. In these times, the young are bearing the greatest burden, paying the greatest social costs, and carrying much of the intellectual freight as well.

They need help — and understanding. They desperately need the church to respond with the full witness of Scripture and the full measure of conviction. They are pressed on by all sides, pulled by the vortex of a secular culture, and faced with frontal attacks on the Christian faith. They are on college and university campuses where Christianity is derided as imperialistic and where belief in the supernatural is written off as insanity.

They face moral and cultural temptations that no previous generation of Christians has faced. They need help, and I heard their voices with particular concern and priority.

8. You Should Never Take Yourself Too Seriously

This just has to be said — there is no better way to make your foibles audible than to say them over a live national radio program. The “bloopers” have been many. But those are just another reminder that, though the host serves to center and drive the program, taking yourself too seriously is a formula for disaster. To a kind and attentive radio audience, I can only say “thank you” for understanding, and for laughing with me.

9. Family, Friends, and Colleagues are Precious and Indispensable Gifts

We all know this already, but it must be said. *The Albert Mohler Program* could never have been done by Albert Mohler alone — there was a team of friends and colleagues who made all this possible. I could never have done this without the constant support, understanding, and love of my precious wife, Mary, and of our children Katie and Christopher. My arrival home after radio each evening was a sweet time.

I was constantly served by a cast of incredibly intelligent, committed, and gifted producers, engineers, interns, and colleagues. Each made a great contribution to my life and ministry. To them I will ever be thankful and indebted. Working with them has been a great privilege.

10. There is a Time and a Season for Everything

There was a time to bring this show into existence, a time to invest daily in its work, and a time to bring the live broadcasts to a close. My stated reasons for making this transition are the real reasons — I need to move to a different communication platform that will not require me to be behind a live microphone at a set time five days each week. The articles on *AlbertMohler.com* will continue as always, with additional features now added. I will continue to do national commentary for the Salem Radio Network and I will continue to serve on the network’s Editorial Board. I will also be doing several special broadcasts for network broadcast each year.

On September 1, we will launch a new daily podcast, “The Briefing,” which will be released every morning, Monday through Friday, with additional releases as national and world events develop. In addition to this, we will debut a weekly long-format program that will feature in-depth considerations of pressing theological and cultural issues. I am looking forward to these new projects with enthusiasm. I hope to devote more time to book projects and writing priorities. I hope to be more available where I can make a Great Commission impact.

The main lesson I learned was gratitude, which I hope to express eagerly, if inadequately. I am so grateful for this opportunity, so thankful to this program’s audience, and so appreciative of these years of conversation together.

I look forward with eagerness and anticipation to continuing this conversation in a new way. Stay tuned.

TABLE OF THANKS

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To God alone be all glory.

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