



bits from bob....

If I Could Begin Again!

August 24, 2020

The beginning of another school church, another church year! In the fall of 1967, during my sophomore year at Wichita State University, I began my preaching career at Penalosa, Kansas. I preached every Sunday, two sermons, except for third Sundays. That was a long time ago -- 53 years, Wow! In 1969-1970, I preached two sermons every Sunday at Okeene, Oklahoma. When I graduated from college in April 1970, I began preaching full-time in Dierks, Arkansas. I like to say I have preached in seven decades, soon to be seven—the 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s, 00s, 10s, 20s.

After 50+ years, one question surfaces repeatedly. What would I do differently if I could start over? Various versions of the same question can be asked. What have I learned? What would I change? What things do I now see as less important? What areas would receive more attention?

I have written frequently about healthy churches—churches that diligently and consistently develop members through evangelism, bringing all believers to spiritual maturity through discipleship, strengthening the membership through worship, encouraging the shared spiritual life through fellowship, and facilitating ministry to one another and to others. The church that develops a healthy balance of these dynamics is prepared for mission—transferring the dynamics of healthy churches to new places to establish new churches.

If I could begin again, I would pay more attention to the biblical descriptions of the church. I would establish priorities and seek them intentionally. I would be more diligent in avoiding the distractions and the siren songs of a host of “good things” that constantly beckon for attention. In too many places, the church has been hijacked and derailed, diverted from its biblical purpose.

If I could begin again.... Seven things come to mind—made possible by an eighth.

Evangelism must be the unspoken, always present purpose of the church. Ministry must maintain an evangelistic spirit, influencing the lives of the members and of others—know how to evangelize, teach others to evangelize. Effective ministry depends on my influence in the lives of others and using that influence to bring people to Jesus!

Build relationships with everyone. Build relationships with the leaders, the members, with visitors, in the community. Relationships enable evangelism and ministry. Relationships are essential in ministry.

Make sure a solid discipleship plan is in place. This may be done through the education program and the Bible classes, in small groups, or in individualized training. Make sure that discipleship training is of the highest quality. Every Christian must continue to learn and to grow in knowledge and in grace. Every Christian must learn how to do God’s will in life. Discipleship is equipping, mentoring, walking along side.

Make sure something happens in worship, facilitate spiritual growth, facilitate the vertical relationship that sustains faith. Develop the members, develop the membership as they learn and appreciate their identity as the body of Christ of earth. Quality worship is paramount, invest the necessary time to preach well consistently, bringing the truth of Scripture to touch the world where we live.

Encourage mutuality! Some call this fellowship, but the shared spiritual life is deeper than sharing lots of meals. How is life shared? Encourage spontaneous fellowship and sharing. The tension between quantity time and quality time says that genuine fellowship depends on multiplying opportunities to share life. Listen to “group theory” and try to get every member involved in at least seven groups. Make fellowship a reality for everyone—not just those at the core.

Every member a minister and servant. Reaching this goal demands thoughtful, intentional, and creative development of ministry and service opportunities, mentoring, training. Everyone has a part, everyone has a role.

Keeping evangelism at the forefront will drive biblical mission work. Maintain the focus, make sure the church never forgets its primary purpose.

Perhaps I should have said it first. It is the most important point. I have put it last because it energizes and empowers all of the above points. If I could begin again, I would be more diligent to bathe everything in prayer. I would seek fresh models, opportunities, and excuses for prayer. I would make it easy, frequent, and constant in the life of the church.