



bits from bob....

If I Could Begin Again!
December 2017

The end of another year! In the fall of 1967, I began preaching every Sunday at Penalosa, Kansas (during my sophomore year at Wichita State University) ... 50 years, Wow! In 1969-1970, I preached 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 six decades, soon to be seven—the 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s, 00s, 10s...

After 50 years, the question is not unexpected. What would I do differently if I could start over? If my experience has taught me anything, what is it? What would I change? What areas would seem less important? What areas would receive more attention?

In the previous “bits,” I wrote about healthy churches that diligently and consistently develop members through evangelism, bring all believers to spiritual maturity through discipleship, strengthen the membership through worship, encourage mutuality through fellowship, and facilitate ministry to one another and to others. The church that develops a healthy balance of these dynamics is prepared for mission—transferring these dynamics of healthy churches to new places to establish new churches.

If I could begin again in ministry, I would pay more attention to these 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....

Evangelism must be the unspoken, always present purpose of the church. To develop a ministerial and evangelistic influence in the lives of others—know how to evangelize, teach others to evangelize. Effective ministry depends on your influence in the lives of others and using that influence to bring people to Jesus!

This may be a second point, or it may be 1A. Build relationships with everyone. Build relationships with the leaders, with the members, with visitors, in the community. These relationships will enable evangelism and ministry. This is essential to ministry.

Make sure a solid discipleship program is in place. This may be the education program and the Bible classes. This may be small groups. This may be individualized training. Make sure it is quality. The point is that 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, this is equipping, this is mentoring, this is 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 in a corporate sense as they learn their identity as body of Christ. 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! This is fellowship, but it 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 sure it happens 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 missions. Maintain the focus, make sure the church never forgets its primary purpose.

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