

MY LIST

Bob Young

July 2009

This summer presents at least two anniversaries. In June 1969, the summer before my senior year at Oklahoma Christian (College), I accepted a preaching assignment in Okeene, Oklahoma. That assignment put me in the pulpit twice every Sunday, and over the past 40 years, there have not been many Sundays that I have not preached somewhere. Even during the years I spent in higher education, I preached fairly regularly on behalf of the universities or in interim ministry roles. (This summer is also the 40th wedding anniversary for Jan and me—or 80th for those of you who know our story and mathematical ineptitude or creativity!)

About 35 years ago (when I was about 25), I made a list. I titled my list, “*Before you are 40.....*” I typed it out (not on a computer), put it on my wall, under my desk glass, in my pocket. I consulted it, kept it in front of me, prayed about it, and used it to guide my life. I kept working on it. I did not publish it. You won’t find it in any of my “bits from bob...” articles. It has never been the subject of an article. *What if I don’t get the things done that I am urging others to do?*

After I turned 40, I began to look at my list even more closely—progress, but seldom completion. I hesitated to publish my list, because I was still working on it. In my mind, the things on my list were not yet “a done deal.” Now I am 60. I still think that I have not done as well as I should have or could have with my list. I am still working on my list, but I am ready to share it for whatever it may be worth.

Do your homework

While “life-long learning” has become a buzz phrase in the last 20 years or so, my original version simply reflects that fact that one does a lot of one’s basic learning in the early years. Graduations are called commencements for a reason. The homework is not over, it is just beginning. My list reminded me of my need to keep studying, stay fresh, read, learn, and grow. Keep your mind fresh. Figure out the connections. Think outside the box; learn cross-disciplinary interactions and applications.

Today, I would say that my commitment to do my homework has kept me from the temptation to use the shortcuts. No longer does one have to do the homework. Shortcuts are everywhere--sermons abound in print and on the Internet. You don’t have to know what you’re talking about to preach. Much of today’s preaching shouts that the homework hasn’t been done.

Be yourself—develop your own style

Shortly after I began preaching, a well-known preacher came to the church where I was ministering to hold a revival. This preacher had a facial tic that caused his cheek to rise involuntarily and he made a little clicking sound when it happened. Before long, I had a facial tic and clicked. My wife told me to cut it out. It is easy to get into the imitation business. It is hard to accept that God made us to be us. God will use who you are, so develop your own style.

Know your weaknesses

Have you ever made a list of your weaknesses? Scary, isn't it? I made the list, as uncomfortable as it was (and is), with a commitment to work on the weak places. Real strength comes from making the weak places strong. Enough said.

Know your strengths

Making a list of strengths is equally as hard as the list of weaknesses. We hesitate to identify our strengths. We don't want to brag. Knowing strengths can call attention to self. Knowing strengths can cause us to let up in the very places where we ought to develop abilities. But knowing strengths can also help us determine where and how God wants us to serve. Always give God credit when you ask the question about your strengths. What has God uniquely enabled you to do? What are your gifts? What are your unique abilities? I can tell you that diligent work in this area—to recognize strengths, to develop strengths, and to use strengths—yields great rewards in the cause of Christ.

Develop your networks

Someone said, "It's not what you know, it's who you know." True, and not true. Develop your networks; put people in your life. A word of wisdom: networks don't develop because you selfishly seek people who can advance your own self-interests. Networks come from the normal give and take of relationships developed over a long period of time. Make sure you have friends, remembering the words of Solomon, "To have friends, a man must be friendly."

Learn to delegate

I do not desire to burst your bubble, but I have good news and bad news—you probably aren't going to change the world to a large extent. You aren't even going to change your community, or your family. What you can do is change yourself. In so doing, you will find that others respond. If I am not going to get everything done that I hoped to get done when I began, I have to leave someone to carry on when I am no longer here. Delegation gives the opportunity to assist with the training and the mentoring while I am still here. Delegating leaves footprints in which others can follow.

Be loyal

Some people live life with their finger in the air, discerning which way the wind is blowing. Loyalty lives differently. Loyalty lives by principle, not popularity. An important part of all that has gone before in this little essay is loyalty. It will strengthen everything you do—especially your friendships and your delegation.

Decide what really matters

What I have saved to the last is really the first. Jesus said it would be that way. When all is said and done, you better have figured out what really matters. By age 40 (or at some point thereafter, depending on how quick a learner you are), you will figure out that you won't get to do everything, so you better invest your life in the things that really matter.

One final word—it is never too late to begin. If you find helpful items on "my list", feel free to use them. Even better, make your own list. And use it throughout your life!