

How I Learned to Focus My Life (and my Ministry)

By Bob Young

Note: the thoughts of several authors are brought together in this article, integrated into my own personal experience in life, ministry, and missions. I regret that I no longer have the original sources noted. I will gladly give credit when requested.

-1- I studied the life of Jesus and learned that Jesus focused his ministry

Have you thought about how Jesus stayed focused in his ministry?

Jesus is an example of focused ministry. When he was only 12-years-old, he said, "I must be about My Father's business" (Luke 2:49). Jesus had his purpose clearly in mind, before he was a teenager. Some of his last words were, "I have finished the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4). These verses are bookends on Jesus' life. At age 12, Jesus knew his purpose in life and near the end of his earthly ministry he said that purpose had been completed. When Jesus said he had completed all the work God had given him, had he healed everyone? Of course not. Had everyone become a follower? No. Had everyone even heard the Good News? No.

-2- In local church ministry, I saw the importance of focusing on what was really important

I studied the Bible to learn about God's priorities; I wanted to make God's priorities my priorities; and I committed myself to concentrate on what really mattered, avoiding distractions. In the mission work I am involved with, I have learned to stay focused on what matters most – establishing healthy churches composed of spiritually mature Christians, by focusing on God's plan for the churches -- self-directed, self-reliant, self-edifying, and self-duplicating.

-3- Focusing on what is really important involves four steps

Learn what are God's priorities. *You must line up your priorities by God's standards. Priorities are like light. When you focus sunlight, it has the power to burn. Light defused has little power, but if you focus it under a magnifying glass you can burn grass. If you focus it enough, it becomes a laser that cuts steel.*

Understand ministry priorities. *Your ministry will be shaped by either your priorities or your pressures. If you don't decide what's really important in your ministry, you'll have people lining up to decide for you. The people in our churches have lots of ideas for our ministries. Without a clear focus, you'll be pressured to do all kinds of things in ministry, whether it advances God's purpose in this world or not.*

Concentrate on the priorities. *When you learn to concentrate your ministry, you'll be more effective. You don't just need a to-do list -- you also need a not-to-do list. Effective ministry means knowing what you are and are not called to do. The more you concentrate your life, the more impact your life will have. The people who make a difference in the world are the people who are the most focused. They focus their lives around a few goals. If you don't live by priorities, you'll be managed by pressures. Either you determine what's important in life or other people determine it for you.*

Avoid distractions. *There are many good things you can do. But you can't do everything. Some priorities look good, but they aren't going to be worth it five years from now. What counts is doing and completing the things God wants you to do. What does that mean? It means that God doesn't expect you to do everything. We have just enough time to do the will of God—24 hours is enough time to do what God has called you to do for that day. He does not have more things for you to do in life than the time he gives you to do it. Learning to minister like Jesus means focusing on what's most important: life change.*

-4- Delegation means teaching and training others to be focused on the priority

When the local church with about 200 members had baptisms equivalent to 25% of the membership (52 baptisms in one year), was it the result of my efforts? No, many others were involved. Did I teach all of the evangelistic Bible studies? No, we had a team of members who were trained to bring others to Christ. Did I or the team make all of the contacts with prospects? No, all of the members were focused on identifying people who were searching for spiritual meaning.

This is the process of delegation, but it is even more the process of delegating “within the priority.” Effective delegation empowers others to serve within their gifts and to make a great impact in the kingdom working within their own personal space.

Now I am privileged to work in church planting and church development all across Latin America, with about 35 recently-planted churches. Did I plant those churches? No, teams of brothers and sisters are trained and deployed in various nations. Specifically thinking only of these new churches, attendance is about 1500. Have those souls been attracted by my presence? No, I have never visited most of those churches. (Paul had not visited several of the churches that were established in Asia Minor during his stay in Ephesus.) I work with a network of at least 100 churches. Do they depend on my presence and teaching? No, many nationals have been trained and deployed to encourage the churches. Am I the only evangelist available for campaigns? No, there are many nationals who are much more effective campaign speakers than I am.

My role is training and teaching—training workers, developing healthy churches, focusing on evangelism and providing training for members, teaching for spiritual maturity, training for discipleship. God did not call me to do ministry alone. God is at work through his people. He calls us to work together toward his purpose and his priority. God blesses such partnerships as the body functions, each part according to its own activity and work.

Here is my take on focused ministry (excerpted from my March 2019 webpage feature article).

“These ideas -- loving Jesus, loving the message of Jesus, loving the people of Jesus, loving the body of Jesus -- come together in evangelism, missions, preaching, teaching. I have spent my life in the only job I really ever wanted in my adult life....

When someone loves Jesus and the gospel so much that she or he becomes an authentic disciple of Jesus, that person wants to share the Good News. That person thinks constantly about how to do that. That person loves what God loves, that person loves the world as God loved the world. That person loves the church. That love is contagious! *#SoulPassion* is essential for everyone who seriously seeks to serve in evangelism, missions, and church leadership.

“Here is my prayer! May I live demonstrating my passion for Jesus, evangelism, mission work, and the church. My work with the church has defined the entirety of my life -- leading the church, building up the church, growing the church. I ate, slept, and dreamed evangelism and mission work. That was my life, and then God blessed me with the opportunity to keep doing it and at the same time teach and train others, to share with the next generation my love for Jesus, the Gospel, evangelism, mission work, the church. After that, God blessed me with the opportunity to expand the teaching and training into all the world!

“The church is the most exciting, most powerful, most important thing on earth. What an honor God has given me to encouraging healthy, spiritual, growing, multiplying churches. My heart aches when the church struggles and fails to explode with the power of God for salvation-doubling, tripling, multiplying! Such growth is possible, I have seen it! It has happened in the past, it is happening! Brothers and sisters, let us love as God loves, let us love what God loves -- *#thinksouls!! #SoulPassion.*”

What God is doing in this world is much bigger than I am. God, help me develop a second set of eyes that will allow me to see more than I have seen in the past. So much of what we do repeats what we have always done. Ministry and mission in this world are waiting for us to see new wineskins, new ways, new hope. What will help us see the tremendous Spirit-driven power of refocusing our view. God’s people in multiplied nations are advancing the gospel in ways that we North Americans are not currently experiencing. We cannot control it, we should encourage and facilitate it. Let us outgrow our little boxes that limit us.

God is glorified, not by what I am able to do, but by what his people can do. It was true in my local church ministry. It is true in mission work that empowers those who are advancing the gospel beyond our wildest hopes and dreams.