

## If I Could Begin Again!

By Bob Young

In the summer of 1965, I preached my first full-length sermon. I had previously given devotional thoughts and shorter classes or lessons in my home church, but that summer I was invited to speak at a couple of area youth rallies. That memory takes me back about 58 years.

In the fall of 1967, during my sophomore year at Wichita State University, I began preaching at Penolos, Kansas. I preached two sermons every Sunday, except for third Sundays. Wow! That was 56 years ago.

In 1969-1970 during my last year of college, I preached two sermons every Sunday at Okeene, Oklahoma.

When I graduated from college in 1970, I began preaching full-time in Dierks, Arkansas. I like to say I have preached in seven decades—the 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s, 00s, 10s, and 20s.

Looking back across the years, one question comes to my mind again and again. **What would I do differently if I could start over in ministry?**

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 of the many “good things” that constantly demand attention. In many places, the church has been derailed and diverted from its biblical purpose.

I write frequently about healthy churches—churches that grow through **evangelism**, bring members to spiritual maturity through **discipleship**, strengthen members through **worship**, encourage the shared spiritual life through **fellowship**, and facilitate **every-member ministry** to one another and to others. The church that develops a healthy balance of these dynamics is prepared for **mission** — transferring a healthy church dynamic to establish new churches. If I could begin again, I would pay more careful attention to these things.

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 mentoring and 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 daily 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 consistently well, 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 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. Be aware of group dynamics; 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 everything else. 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.