

If I Could Begin Again

Dear Chris,

If I could turn back the calendar and begin my ministry again, I would give even more attention to seven important ministry emphases. I have benefited from these practices throughout my pastoral tenure, but I have also struggled to maintain them as priorities amidst the daily press of service.

What would I tell a young minister? The same thing that I remind myself, and the same thing I would pass on to a tenured pastor.

First and foremost, never forget that there is no substitute for a personal, intimate, private relationship with Christ on a daily basis. Never allow yourself to neglect the opportunity of personal communion with the Spirit of Christ. Without that connection, life and ministry will misfire. The greatest temptation you will face is being busy in ministry while neglecting the need to feed your own spirit. Very few people, even your most devoted parishioners, will fully understand, appreciate and protect your need for study and prayer. Establish it as your highest priority and let *nothing* interfere.

Second, remember that your first ministry is to your family. You may not be the only pastor they have, but you are their only husband/father or wife/mother. Your children will neither love the Lord nor the church if they have to compete with either for your affections. God gave you a family as a sacred trust. Treat them accordingly. No meeting of any committee or theological organization

should take precedence over the priority needs of your family. Have you ever known a minister in your entire life who, on his dying bed, wished he had spent more time in committee meetings? Since there are no committee meetings in Heaven (I hope), I suggest the priority caucus sessions of your life be at your own address with your own family—and with great frequency.

Next, I would *Sabbath more and Sunday less*. It is a tragic mistake to assume that Sunday is a day of rest for any minister. Yet most folks will make that assumption. You must not. Don't break the Sabbath. Establish such a day in your own experience. Preserve it doggedly. Demand it with the tenacity of a pit bull. A Sabbath will replenish your resources and restore your soul. When you are constantly drained on every possible level, your own spiritual refreshment is vital to the effectiveness of any ministry. To be a Sabbath breaker is not just breaking a commandment, it is also breaking your commitment.

If you haven't already done so, Chris, discover, select and maintain an accountability group. Lone Ranger ministries will inevitably be ambushed. A minister cannot exist and maintain the best of spirituality and moral integrity without a special trust group. Find an accountability team to whom you can trust your life. Ask them to hold you accountable on a consistent basis. You could do the same for them, and it will be a blessing of untold proportions. This will be a difficult task to establish. Accountability is instinctively resisted and feared. The benefits, however, are beyond value.

Fifth, respect your body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. Condition it and bring it under submission. Find something on which you can expend enormous

physical energy outside of your basic responsibilities. Find something to hit that is inanimate and will not injure or hit back. Golf, tennis, racquetball, cycling and running are all marvelous expenditures of healthy energy that replenish the body. This, too, is more important than the next board meeting or the last one. Fatigue makes cowards of us all. An exercise regimen has enormous benefits.

And, dear friend, never speak a word of condemnation or criticize, even through innuendo, one of your ministry brothers or sisters. Remember God has to compromise to use any of us, the degree to which will only be known when we get to Heaven. Celebrate, pray for and pull with your colleagues in the cloth. We have too many enemies on the outside, so let's not take pot shots on the inside. Theological intramuralism bores God and is a terrible misuse of God's truth. You can learn from anyone, even a bad example. Since lighthouses are not set up to compete with one another, there is no sensible reason, at all, for competitive lighthouse keepers. Our ultimate test of leadership is not how many building campaigns we've led or how big our budgets, but whether or not we have helped men and women become like Jesus. So become a minister to your fellow ministers in this great enterprise.

And last, always remember that you are an authentic, unique creation of God. He has gifted you according to his desires and you are never required to follow anyone's footsteps or compete with anyone ministerially. Even when some dear soul in your fellowship is convinced that you are the successor to Billy Graham . . . don't believe it. God will create that person in his own good time. Don't take yourself so seriously. Learn to laugh at yourself, life and all

circumstances. It is part of the command of Scripture that we rejoice in all things. Many ministers are far too serious for the good of anyone, much less themselves. Send your ego on a trip, but don't accompany it. Down-to-earth, authentic, humble spirits are blessed and used by God to the maximum.

Your brother,

Dan Yeary

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So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God,

You will receive what he has promised.

Hebrews 10:35-36