



# Gospel Ministry Wisdom

## Lesson 7

### Vision, Planning and Longevity

In our last session I spoke of the practical application of vision, planning and pastoral leadership: by planning and preparing sermons well in advance, by developing a preaching calendar and by developing a church calendar.

I will now pursue the practical application of vision, planning and pastoral leadership by discussing two additional areas. I'm raising the stakes. Failure to plan and prepare sermons well in advance will show up in your preaching. It will also put enormous pressure on you as you struggle at the last minute to *throw something together*. Failure to develop a preaching calendar will rob you and your church of the opportunity to systematically present the Word of God in a thorough, organized and systematic way. Failure to develop a church calendar will cost you and your church. It will create conflicts, cause confusion, and rob you of harmony and a clear, unified direction.

Failure in the two areas I am about to discuss will come back to haunt you in gruesome and grisly ways. What do you suppose will happen to your church when you have a stroke, get Alzheimer's disease or die? Where do you suppose they will get the next pastor? What makes you think there will be a next pastor? Pastoral leadership demands that you do what you can to prepare your church for the days beyond you. Furthermore, how do you expect to survive and pay the bills when you are old and gray and no longer physically able to pastor a church? Your wife will most likely pay an even higher price. You really need to listen carefully and think about what I'm prepared to say.

#### **I. LIFE BEYOND THE CURRENT PASTOR AND THE PRESENT GENERATION.**

##### **A. Every one of us knows that our time is limited.**

1. None of us own the pastorate, and it's just a matter of time until we will not be the pastor anymore. We may think a moral or financial scandal will never touch us, or that our church will stay strong as long as we do; but not one of us is immune to time. If all else fails, sooner or later a disease, old age or death will take you down.
2. I never cease to be amazed at how easy it is to ignore the obvious, the elephant in the room. All of the time we see pastors and missionaries coming and going, yet we behave as though it will never happen to us and our church.

##### **B. If your church lives, somewhere up the road ahead you won't be a part of it.**

1. They may run you off, fire you. It happens pretty often. If that doesn't happen, at some point you will get sick or old or die and leave your church without a pastor.

**2. What do you think they will do when they lose you?**

- a)** We can be cavalier and say, *“God will take care of them. That’s none of my business.”* He may, but He may not. No church is ever more vulnerable than when it is without a pastor. The fact is, without a pastor, many of them fragment and go down; some of them go under.
- b)** Furthermore, most churches are ill-equipped to find a new pastor. They do not know where to look, questions to ask or how to conduct a thorough background check. Very often the next pastor exploits or greatly changes the direction of the church; some destroy it. Zechariah said, *“Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered,”* **Zechariah 13:7**. The church you pastor is not immune to that. No church is guaranteed long-term survival. Every church in the New Testament died.

**C. A responsible man of God will look out for the church or ministry past his personal administration.**

- 1.** Pastoral leadership is being out front. A man of God who behaves responsibly sees what is likely to happen to his ministry after he is gone. He sees the dangers, he sees what needs to be done to prevent trouble and he puts a plan in place.
  - a)** He will see that the church in its constitution and bylaws or other operational documents has a clear-cut plan to negotiate a transition. The plan will specify who is in charge of the transition: deacons, a certain group of men or otherwise.
  - b)** He will train his church on how to deal with a pastor change. He will teach them what to look for doctrinally and the right questions to ask. He will teach them how to recognize a man who is a sex offender, immoral, a womanizer or a financial deadbeat. He will teach them how to recognize the right man when they find him. He will help them know how to come up with a financial package.
  - c)** Another way leadership sees the future and plans for its success is by mentoring a replacement. Godly men of God invest themselves in the next generation. Like Paul to Timothy, they pass on all they can. One of the young men who is trained may carry on the missionary’s ministry or become the next pastor of the church. If he doesn’t become the pastor of this church, he will be available to another church. Leadership and vision invests in the future. It seeks the longevity of the work of the Lord, and does more than talk about it. Leadership sees the need and puts a plan in place to address future needs.
- 2.** Godly responsible leadership says you do not just walk off and leave a ministry or church high and dry.
  - a)** A responsible man of God thinks in terms of the longevity of their work beyond them. They realize it is the Lord’s work, not theirs. They want it to succeed whether they are there are not. They therefore give themselves to its welfare.

- b)** It is self-indicting and indicative of great selfishness for a man to be interested in a church or ministry only while he is there. If he is truly interested in the work of God, he will want it to succeed whether he is there or not there.
- c)** A truly responsible man of God recognizes that he is a part of something far bigger than himself; he is a part of the work of God which was before him and which will continue after him. He will be just as interested in contributing to the welfare of the work of God past his hands-on years as he was when his own hands were at the wheel.
- d)** A man of God who makes no or little effort to ensure the welfare and the longevity of his ministry or church beyond his years is shortsighted and selfish. Leaders with vision plan for longevity; not only during their own administrations, but beyond themselves.

## **II. POST PASTORATE YEARS.**

### **A. Sooner or later a man of God will reach the end of his mortal ministry.**

- 1.** As already indicated, we are all mortals; and all mortals get sick, hurt, old and feeble. That is just as true of good preachers as it is of ditch-diggers and doctors.
- 2.** A few preachers do not get sick, hurt or old; they die first. They are the exceptions rather than the rule. Changes are very high that you will get sick, hurt, old and feeble before you die.
- 3.** I have personally watched several preachers and missionaries reach the winters of their lives. For many of them, it was a rather rude awakening. They woke up, but too late. They were woefully unprepared.

### **B. One of life's realities is that it goes on with or without you whether you are prepared or unprepared; and life can be quite merciless.**

- 1.** Even men of God and their mates who are no longer able to stay on the missionary field or pastor a church need a place to live, food to eat and transportation. Like everybody else, they have utility bills, need clothes and shoes and need healthcare. They still like to go places and do things, but they don't have any money.
- 2.** I have seen them living in poverty, with their children, on welfare and just getting by.
- 3.** Many an old preacher has hung on and on and on to a pastorate because he had to have a paycheck. He stayed on long after he was a liability; he had no place to go. The church felt sorry for him, so he stayed when everybody knew he should go.
- 4.** A life of post pastorate poverty is humiliating and grueling. It has a way of taking the very heart out of old pastors and missionaries.
- 5.** It's worse for the widows. It's hard enough when the old preacher is still alive, and the two of them are struggling together. It's harder for old widow when the old preacher dies and

leaves her penniless, at the mercy of her kids or the welfare system. And, kids and widows don't like to bury old preachers.

6. I know of no place where the truth of **Proverbs 29:18** better applies than right here. *"Where there is no vision, the people perish."*

**C. Responsible leadership sees the obvious and puts in place a plan to address what is certain to come.**

1. All who are familiar with the Scriptures know that investing is seen throughout the Old and New Testaments.
2. I cannot overstate the importance of starting early. Usually investments take time. Money has to grow. It's the latter years of most investments that pay the biggest dividends.
3. There are so many ways to prepare for your latter years: from simple savings accounts to growth funds in the stock market to real estate to annuities. The possibilities are almost endless.
4. The key is to start. Yes, **start!** Start somewhere, and start early. Don't allow yourself to be like the man in **Matthew 25** who buried his talent.
5. It is not altogether *how much*; the thing that is most important is that you do something; and that you do it systematically, routinely, regularly. Many preachers say, *"I don't have enough to invest."* That's equivalent to saying, *"I don't have enough to tithe."* Those with much can invest much, but those with little can invest little. The key is to do something. Doing nothing means death in the pot when you get old, are in poverty and have anguish of soul.
6. The sad thing about so many preachers is that for one reason or another when they are younger, they don't look into the future. They have no vision. They can't see what's coming, and thus they have no plan and make no provisions for that which is certain to come. For one lofty reason or another, many of them even opt out of Social Security. I assure you that there is a long trail of tears.
7. To the young men who listen to what I am saying, I cannot over-emphasize the importance of vision and planning for your post-pastorate years. In a very real way, your financial longevity depends on it.

**D. Before I conclude this session, I will spend a little time being very personal and practical.**

1. I am not a man of great material means; however, many years ago I did come to grips with the fact that barring a premature death, I would get old and unable to continue a gospel ministry role that would generate enough money to sustain me and my wife. I knew that I would still need money to live, and I prayed that I would not have to live with my children or on welfare. To avoid that, I knew that I must make some sort of provision for my post-

pastorate years. The need to think about my future was made painfully clear to me when I had a head on car wreck on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 1967.

2. At this point, I will give you a little insight into my own personal trip from being a young pastor to post pastorate years. It started in 1968 when I attempted to open a savings account with \$10 at Gibraltar Savings and Loan in Beaumont, Texas.
3. Two of my preacher friends bought and sold houses. Another invested in rent houses. Another bought and sold cars, and lots of other things including land. None of us got rich, but none of us had to live with our children or in abject poverty. We all did something, and we didn't wait until the last minute to do it.
4. Again preacher, I plead with you to open your eyes and pay attention to where you're headed. *"God feeds the sparrows, but they all have to dig for worms."* Leadership has vision, and vision demands a plan. Your longevity, and even more the longevity of your wife depends on it.