

Keep on Growing to Avoid Stagnating

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In a half a century of full-time ministry and missions, 57+ years of preaching, across seven different decades, I have tried to develop practices and habits that would keep me growing. I have begun and failed, only to begin again. I want to grow spiritually. I want to grow in God's Word. I want to improve constantly in the ministry and mission God places before me. I have adapted, adjusted, and changed.

At the beginning of another year, I analyze, evaluate, seek to plan strategically, recommit with new promises. I do not want to go backward. I do not want to march in place. I do not want to grow weary with the sameness. I want to escape boredom, experience vitality, share excitement. I want to dream, encourage more people to join the journey, help God's people forward, encourage involvement. These goals begin in who I am. Five commitments are an important part of my spiritual life. Being intentional avoids **stagnating**.

→**Dwell in the Word!** In the early years of my ministry, I read the New Testament every month. I continued that practice with few interruptions for over ten years. As a general practice, I read the entire Bible every year. I want to interact with God's Word. I read, write, study, and seek to stay "in the Word" in a variety of ways.

→**Talk with others about what God is doing.** Learn from your own experiences and the experiences of others. Spend time with others who are on the same journey. Balance learning, teaching, and sharpening.

→**Commit to lifelong learning—reading, rereading.** Be on the lookout for ideas. Keep putting ideas in, because what comes out is the result of what goes in. Read widely, across different types of literature and different subjects. Especially for preachers, engage in reading and study beyond what is necessary for class and sermon preparations. [And an important word in our contemporary world: learn the difference between lifelong learning and social media browsing!]

→**Write consistently.** I have never developed a rhythm for journaling. I write. I write out loud. I want to understand what God is doing in my own life and ministry. I read and reread what I write. I have come to believe that I write for me more than for others. If others like what I write, that is an added blessing. But I write for me – so that I will keep growing, seeking understanding, answering new challenges.

→**Develop prayer rhythms** to maintain connection with God and to see his presence more clearly. Effective prayer rhythms help with my prayer commitments.