MY DREAM FOR THE CHURCH

Threescore. A long time! This month I mark 60 years of ministry. During my four collegiate years, I served in campus ministry, worked in inner city ministry, and preached weekly. Add 25+ years of full-time ministry. Those 30 years flew by! Another 30 years I spent in the universities and mission work. Mission work has been my focus for the last 20+ years!

In sixty years, one should learn a few things. When I began ministry, AI was barely a dream. Now AI can eloquently summarize the lessons I have learned in ministry (condensed for brevity).

Bob Young's "If I Could Start Over" series is a reflection on church leadership, evangelism, and ministry. Grounded in 60 years of experience, it focuses on building a relational, intentional, and reproducible approach to ministry rather than relying on reactive or traditional programming. Core themes of ministry, based on materials from his website include:

- **Focus on a Reproducible Process:** Avoid the trap of waiting for visitors to initiate connections. Implement a proactive, seamless relationship-building flowchart to welcome, assimilate, and disciple.
- **Focus on Relationships:** Emphasize that Christianity is rooted in a living relationship with Jesus and daily communication, rather than just completing religious rituals or checking off boxes.
- **Evaluate and Adjust Plans:** Use intentional planning for spiritual leadership. Reflect on what has worked in the past, what actions drive spiritual growth, and identify recurring obstacles.
- **Handle Setbacks Gracefully:** Learn from biblical examples to avoid becoming bitter, critical, or destructive when things do not go your way.
- **Prioritize the Essentials:** Ensure your ministry relies on things that truly build up the church and help it grow numerically and spiritually over time.

If I could start over, what would I do? Here's my list. Seven things, powered by prayer.

Evangelism must be the unspoken, always present purpose of the church.

Build relationships with everyone—leaders, members, visitors, in the community. Relationships enable evangelism and ministry.

Have a solid **discipleship** plan. Every Christian must continue to learn and grow. Discipleship is equipping, mentoring, walking along side.

Make sure something happens in **worship**, facilitate spiritual growth, facilitate the vertical relationship that sustains faith. Quality worship is essential, invest the necessary time to preach well consistently, 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. Encourage spontaneous fellowship and sharing.

Every member a minister (servant). Reaching this goal demands thoughtful, intentional, and creative development of ministry and service opportunities.

Keeping evangelism at the forefront will drive biblical **mission** work. Maintain the focus, make sure the church never forgets its primary purpose.

If I could begin again, I would be more diligent to bathe everything in **prayer**. I would seek fresh models, opportunities, even excuses for prayer. I would make prayer easy, frequent, and constant in the life of the church.

Not only what I would do if I could start over. Also, my dream for the church!