

## **What does a ministry in the Word of God look like?**

**By Bob Young**

**My story.** Beginning with some meager efforts while I was still in high school, and then a weekly preaching appointment beginning my sophomore year of college, now across almost 60 years I have tried to understand the nature of an effective ministry in the Word of God. As I look back, I see more clearly the things that were most helpful to me in developing a ministry focused in the Word of God.

During my college years at Wichita State University, I came face to face with my lack of knowledge of Scripture. I was around students who were asking serious questions but I was not prepared to answer. I became more serious in my study of the Bible, reading through the Bible for the first time and using a study Bible for more detailed study.

I transferred to Oklahoma Christian College after my sophomore year to increase my knowledge of the Bible. Among my favorite classes were the Old Testament offerings (I took all of Dr. Jones's Old Testament classes, even though he had a reputation of being a hard professor). I took as many Bible classes as possible. I took as many biblical language courses as I could during my nine semesters, 169 hours of undergraduate studies.

I remember a discussion that several Bible majors shared. Some of us affirmed that a preacher should have a pretty good idea about the context and meaning of every Bible passage. Others argued that such was impossible! My commitment was to understand as much of Scripture as possible.

When I began preaching full-time, I resolved to read the entire New Testament monthly, a practice which I continued for almost 15 years. In my early ministry, I was impressed by visiting preachers who could quote large sections of the Bible. I wanted to be familiar with the Bible in the same way. At church camp, I developed a "game" called Preacher-on-the-Spot. We preachers who were serving as counselors would let the campers read any New Testament verse and we would tell them where it was and share a little about its message. (We were very seldom stumped!) My current commitment is to read the entire Bible at least annually.

**A word to those involved in ministry training.** Perhaps you are contemplating or preparing for ministry. I spent a dozen years in Christian higher education training ministry students. In most ministry training curricula, there are options. Some students choose easy courses. I encourage you to take the hard courses. Study long and hard; be willing to go deep in biblical and theological studies, and in developing your exegetical tools.

In ministry, you can always read more books. Ministry training is a unique opportunity to develop your skill set in the Word, to work in the biblical languages. With adequate skills, it is easier to develop the habit of deep Bible study. Such skills and habits will serve you for years as you rely on them for Bible study in ministry.

Preachers who do not develop and maintain such skills tend to get their sermons from the books they read more than from THE Book. Learn how to drink from the well. Preachers should not be drinking only the water that has been drawn by others. You do not need bookshelves in your office as much as you need a well to which you can continually go.

Learn the languages as well as you can. Develop the ability to use them if you do not have opportunity to learn to read them. Read Scripture in the original language (or carry a parallel Greek-English Bible). Use the languages in your own study and reading, not just for sermon or class preparations. You will find that eventually your teaching and preaching will come from the overflow, from your own engagement with Scripture.

**A word to those currently involved in ministry.** If you are involved in a church ministry role, whatever that role may be, I encourage you to spend time in God's Word, using the tools and skills at your disposal. Make your Word time more important than your work time. A high bar? Yes, but in my observation, the goal is attainable. The question is whether you are serious about deepening and maintaining your knowledge of Scripture so that you can bring the light of the Word to the lives of all you touch.

The beauty of such a commitment is that eventually you have a storehouse of knowledge of Scripture based on your own, personal in-depth study, and you do not have to acquaint yourself with the basic, fundamental message of various texts again and again.