

After 50 Years of Ministry: 7 Things I'd Do Differently & 7 Things I'd Do the Same by Bob Russell, Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL, 2016. (72 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. Ministry Is Much Harder than It Looks.

We have a tendency to view other people's jobs in their public "glamour moments," overlooking the tedious effort that goes on behind the scenes—work that is essential for success. [page 16]

2. Ministry Is a High, Holy, and *Hard* Calling.

Some people see a preacher standing before his congregation on Sunday morning teaching the Bible and encouraging the people to live for Christ and think, "I should have been a preacher! What a rewarding life! And you work just one day a week!" They don't see all the tedious and time-consuming effort behind the scenes. They don't see the week-by-week cramming to come up with a sermon, the exasperating breakdowns in communication with staff members, the family vacations that are interrupted with yet another emergency, the board member who has a complaint, or the volunteers that didn't show up.

Ministry is hard. It's rewarding. It's a divine calling. It's gratifying. But it's a very difficult task day in and day out. We've probably all seen the statistics on pastors who leave the ministry, the state of clergy marriages, ministers who battle depression, and more. Some studies paint a very dark picture; others are rosier. But regardless of the numbers, the point is that the ministry is a high, holy, and *hard* calling. [pages 16-17]

3. There's Much about Ministry We Love.

Most of us are quick to admit that there's much about ministry we love. What a privilege to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ week after week. What an honor to deal with the major issues of life as we study God's Word and prepare lessons containing eternal truth. How rewarding it is to counsel with God's people and shepherd them through the valley of the shadow of death. Like the apostle Paul we say, "Woe is me if I don't preach the Gospel." Sure there are criticisms, but there are also a lot of encouragements. Sure there are daily pressures and occasional setbacks, but there are many accomplishments and meaningful victories that absolutely warm the soul. [page 18]

4. Fear When You Think You Are Strong.

Don't fear your weaknesses—God supplies all the strength you need. Be afraid of those moments when you think you are independently strong. – Paul David Tripp [page 22]

5. You Can Survive Fear.

Comedian Steven Wright once asked, “What happens if you get scared half to death twice?” I was scared half to death multiple times and still survived. [page 23]

6. What Fear Does.

Fear of tomorrow robs today of its joy. Fear makes us irritable and inhibits our personalities. Fear stifles the Holy Spirit in our lives. Fear minimizes leadership effectiveness. Fear blinds us to the goodness of God. Corrie ten Boom said, “Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows. It empties today of its strength.” [page 26]

7. Worry Is Infidelity.

Oswald Chambers wrote, “It’s not only wrong to worry, it is infidelity, because worry means that we do not think that God can look after the details of our lives.” Faith is trusting God to fulfill His promises. Worry is disbelief and an insult to God. I wish I would have trusted more because over and over again I discovered God’s promises are true. [page 30]

8. The Lord Your God Goes with You.

In his older years Moses taught Joshua and the Israelites a lesson he had learned, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6). [page 35]

9. The Blessing of Ignorance.

There are many things of which a wise man might wish to be ignorant. – Ralph Waldo Emerson [page 36]

10. Family Time Brings Family Conversation.

My son Rusty is the minister of a church in Port Charlotte, Florida. He and his wife, Kellie, have four children. They are intentional about eating their evening meal together, and no one is allowed to leave the table until they read a passage of Scripture and then pray for someone in the church who sent them a Christmas card. They keep all the cards they receive and discard them only after they have taken time to pray for the one who sent it.

But Rusty’s family practices another positive habit. They play a lot of games as a family in the evenings. Instead of turning on the television and vegging out, someone will ask, “How about a game of Rummikub, Scrabble, Clue, or Monopoly? During those family times occasionally serious conversations develop, and it’s a teaching and bonding time for the family. That doesn’t happen when the television is on continuously. [page 45]

11. Christ Changes Lives.

Dr. Matthew Sleeth is a former emergency room physician and chief of staff at a New England hospital. Matt and his wife, Nancy, were dramatically converted to Christ a little over a decade ago. They left their affluent, hectic lifestyle on the coast of Maine and now dedicate their lives to leading others to the Lord. He's the founder of Blessed Earth Ministry, the author of *24-6*, and a popular speaker and lecturer. [page 46]

12. Our Minds Are Too Much in the World.

I asked Dr. Sleeth, "What about the news? How do you keep abreast of what's going on in the world?" He responded that in his opinion most of us are way "over-newsed. People used to get all the news they needed in fifteen minutes at the end of the day ... Now we're too much involved in the news. The twenty-four-hour news stations can suck you right in and do nothing for you. They find ways to extend and exaggerate the day's events to improve ratings. Jesus said, 'Each day has enough trouble of its own' (Mathew 6:34). You can find out what's going on in the world by reading a newspaper about thirty minutes a week." [page 47]

13. Fill Ourselves with Light.

"I don't want that stuff in my brain," he said. "I believe that Paul is telling us to fill ourselves with light. 'What partnership does light have with darkness?' It doesn't—all you get is gray. Our family is also much more intentional about what movies we watch. It's better to watch a good movie three times than a bad movie once." [page 47]

14. Praise and Criticism Cause Us to Stumble.

You can't let praise or criticism get to you. It's a weakness to get caught up in either one. – John Wooden [page 50]

15. Coping with Criticism.

However, unpleasant, effective leaders must learn to live with the criticism. Someone said, "If you're going to carry the ball, you're going to get tackled." If you're going to lead, you're going to be attacked. The Bible says, "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:3). Nobody received more vicious or frequent criticism than Jesus—yet He didn't quit. And, "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Hebrews 12:4). So don't grow weary and lose heart. [page 58]

16. You Get Shot at in the Front.

Remember all effective leaders are criticized. If you are on the front lines of battle, you're probably going to get shot at. It's that simple. We are involved in an intensifying spiritual war and the enemy is becoming increasingly malicious and mean-spirited.

One gets the impression that if the world can just prove enough Christians are phony then they'll feel vindicated in their unbelief.

If you dare to speak God's truth or attempt to lead God's people, you are going to be attacked as a hater, hypocrite, or a fool. Expect it and toughen up. Oswald Sanders, in his classic book, *Spiritual Leadership*, suggests maturity is moving from a thin skin and hard heart to a soft heart and a tough skin. [page 59]

17. Listen to Members of the Congregation.

Sometimes if leadership gives them an ear, they are less likely to complain to others in the congregation. In an article entitled "Service is King," Danny Meyer, creator of New York's Union Square Café and other popular restaurants, suggests, "The customer is not always right, but the customer wants to be heard."

The same principle applies to preaching. If I had ministry to do over, I would find more ways to get feedback from the congregation and not just rely on suggestions from family or staff people. Once when I did a series on divorce and remarriage, I invited five divorced couples to meet with me in the office after the Wednesday evening service to discuss my upcoming sermon.

On another occasion I had a sermon on improving race relations and invited six African American members to meet with me to discuss the subject. Both times I benefited from the input of the congregation, and those who met with me were my biggest advocates. In hindsight I should have done that kind of thing more often. But it was easier just to discuss it for a few minutes with associate ministers because they were more available. [page 65]

18. Home Life.

Let the wife make the husband glad to come home, and let him make her sorry to see him leave. – Martin Luther [page 66]

19. Eliminate Martial Counseling.

Most preachers would be wise to eliminate martial counseling. The majority of moral failures can be traced back to intimate conversations that surfaced while discussing martial problems. The initial temptation is usually more ego driven than sexually driven. It's not physical attraction but emotional identification that plants the seeds for an affair. [page 72]

20. Numbers Are Valuable Only in Reference to Our Own Experience.

This is not to say that numbers are consequential. Someone counted 12 apostles, 120 in the upper room, 3,000 converted at Pentecost, and 5,000 men in the early church. Numbers matter because they represent people. The good shepherd counted the

hundred sheep and discovered one was lost as a result of his concern for numbers. But numbers are valuable only in reference to our own experience, not in comparison with others. [page 83]

21. It's Not about Me.

Someone said, "If you worry too much about what other people thought about you, you'd probably be disappointed to discover how seldom they did!" Perhaps it's time for me to take a major step of maturity and accept the fact that it's not all about me—it's about serving God and shepherding His people and learning to be content with where I am instead of making myself miserable with unrealistic comparisons. [page 92]

22. Being Nice Goes a Long Way.

Remember, man does not live by bread alone. Sometimes he needs a little buttering up.
– John C. Maxwell [page 94]

23. Give Freely.

I wish I had reached out more to staff members and other preachers struggling with financial stress. God's Word says, "Freely you have received; freely give" (Matthew 10:8). For many years I was satisfied giving freely to the church and used that as the excuse to be overly frugal in other areas. [page 95]

24. Use Worldly Wealth to Gain Friends for Yourselves.

A magnanimous spirit opens doors to witnessing to the lost and enhances credibility with believers. Jesus said, "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings" (Luke 16:9). [page 96]

25. Excelling in Giving.

Howard Brammer is another preacher who excels in giving. Howard ministered to the Trader's Point Christian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, for several decades. He recently related that he and a group of other board members of a parachurch organization went out to eat after their annual meeting. Following the meal, the chairman, a blustery preacher, said to their waiter, "Jeremy, we're a bunch of preachers here. We appreciate you serving us tonight and want to ask you if there's anything we can pray for you before we leave."

The waiter responded, "Well, as a matter of fact, there is. My wife recently had some fairly serious health problems and has lost her job. As a result we're \$487 behind on our gas and electric bill. If we don't pay it by the end of the week, our electricity is going to be turned off. Would you pray that God would somehow supply that need?"

The preacher led a moving prayer and the waiter genuinely thanked them all. When the waiter left the chairman said, “Guys, let’s be a real blessing to Jeremy. He needs help. I’m going to leave \$20.” The next guy said, “I’ll give \$10,” the third put down \$20, and finally it got to Howard Brammer and he counted the stack of bills and they had over \$150 to leave as a tip. Howard said, “I’ll tell you what guys, let’s really bless this guy. I’ll make up the difference and let’s make it \$487.”

“Oh, no, Howard! You don’t have to do that by yourself!” the others quickly blurted out. I’ll give \$20 more.” “I’ll do the same.” I’ll give \$30 more.” Howard said by the time it got around to him he counted it and he didn’t have to give a dime! Not really. But his generous spirit was contagious. That day they left the waiter a \$487 tip!

Howard said he often wondered how that waiter reacted when he picked up the tip. A year later he was back in the area and went to the same restaurant, hoping to see Jeremy. He was disappointed that he wasn’t serving that night, but after the meal Howard asked his waitress, “Say, could you tell me, what’s the biggest tip any server in this restaurant has ever received?”

She said, “You wouldn’t believe it. A bunch of preachers were in here last year and they prayed with a waiter and then left him a \$487 tip. Then she added, “Would you pray for me?”

I guarantee you that today when employees in that restaurant think about Christian preachers they think of them in a more positive light than a year ago. That’s using worldly wealth to make friends for ourselves! It’s also softening hearts to receive the seed of the gospel. I could have been a much better ambassador to the community if I had done that kind of thing more often. [pages 96-98]

26. Giving Help to Younger Preachers.

I’m trying to make up for my deficiency in this area in my retirement. I’m conducting monthly mentoring retreats for preachers and trying to be an encourager to young preachers the way Barnabas encouraged Paul in the New Testament. Preachers get their share of criticism and often experience insecurity, so a little boost from an older minister sometimes means a lot. [page 100]

27. God Puts You in Tight Spots.

So if you find yourself in a difficult spot, remember: you are there by God’s appointment, in His keeping, under His training, and for His time. All the evidence to the contrary, there’s no better place to be. – Robert J. Morgan [page 104]

28. The Church Be Distinctive from the World.

Paul's counsel is that when a leader stumbles and falls, the church should not cover it up and pretend nothing serious has happened. Leadership requires a higher standard. A leader's failure is to be made public, with discretion, so that others realize that sin is serious and the church is to be distinctive from the world. It also provides the most likely scenario for a fallen leader to be restored. [page 106]

29. Safeguards to Prevent Immorality

I established some safeguards against immorality based on the guidelines I had read that Billy Graham established for himself and his team. Billy Graham had a guiding principle that he would not meet, travel, or eat with another woman alone. It came to be known as the Billy Graham rule and has been widely embraced by evangelicals over the past sixty years to prevent infidelity or even the "appearance of evil."

I set forth the following principles for our church staff:

1. Staff members are not to ride in a car alone with a member of the opposite sex (other than their spouse) except in cases of emergency.
2. Staff members are not to meet a member of the opposite sex for a meal unless at least one other person is present.
3. Staff members are not to counsel a member of the opposite sex for more than three times. There is always to be a person in the adjacent room and preferably a window in the door.
4. Staff members are not to go into the home of a member of the opposite sex when there is no one else in the house (or the person is quite elderly). [page 107]

30. Evidence of Repentance.

Don't focus on restoration until there has been evidence of repentance. Our first reaction is to forgive, embrace, and attempt to expedite the restoration to fellowship and even leadership. But John the Baptist urged the Pharisees to "produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8).

When King David was confronted with his sin with Bathsheba, he quickly produced fruit in keeping with repentance. The evidence of repentance includes an open admission of guilt, a contrite spirit, a transformation of behavior, an attempt at restitution, and a willingness to assist others in overcoming the same temptations. [page 111]

31. Preparation.

A prepared heart will make a prepared sermon. – E.M. Bounds [page 114]

32. Saying No to Distractions.

The best thing you can do for your congregation is to feed them the meat and milk of God's Word each Sunday. John MacArthur once told his Los Angeles church, "If I say yes to meeting with one person on Thursday morning I'm saying no to seven thousand on Sunday morning." [page 118]

33. Being in Ministry.

"Study God's Word in the morning and God's people in the afternoon." [page 118]

34. Differences Between Conference Speakers and Preachers.

There is a big difference between a convention speaker and a pastoral preacher. A convention speaker can wow an audience with a dynamic delivery. But a pastor who gets up to feed the same people every week soon discovers that content matters much more than delivery. And substance, the bread and meat of the Word, takes time to develop. It doesn't just come off the top of your head on Saturday night. [page 119]

35. The Discipline of Time.

It's my observation that more guys fail in ministry due to lack of discipline of time than because of lack of talent. I'm convinced my rigid discipline of studying the same time every week was a huge factor in my lengthy stay and growth of Southeast Christian. [page 121]

36. Focused Study Time.

My suggestion to younger preachers is leave the cellphone with your secretary—or turn it off completely when you first walk into your office and don't check it until noon. When you sit down at your desk, go directly to sermon study, not to voice mail, not to letters, nor to administrative responsibilities. It's not just time that's needed—it's focused time. [page 121]

37. Your Congregation Deserves Your Best Effort.

Every time we step into the pulpit those sitting in front of us deserve the best effort we can give. Sometimes the way we tell the Lord we love Him is to walk into the study and begin writing a sermon when it's the last thing in the world we feel like doing at the moment. [page 122]

38. Teach, Apply, and Illustrate.

In Bible college I was taught to teach the Bible and illustrate the Bible. A light went on for me in preaching when that sequence changes to teach the Bible, apply the Bible, and then illustrate the application.

When I studied the passage of Scripture that was coming up next, my first question was, “Where does this passage apply? What need is met from this section of Scripture?” That need became the lens through which the entire passage was explained. [page 123]

39. Expository Preaching Is Healthier.

God can bless topical preaching. We’ve all witnessed that. Whether you take the horse to water or bring the water to the horse, it still gets a drink. But I think, in the long run, expository preaching is healthier than topical preaching—for everyone. [page 124]

40. Expository Preaching Gives *Balance*.

Expository preaching gives preaching *balance*. It avoids pet themes and gives context to relevant topics. [page 124]

41. What Happened to the Shepherds?

Shortly after I retired Judy and I visited a church the first Sunday in December. That morning the preacher announced, “Today we’re beginning a Christmas series on ‘The Perspectives of Christmas.’ Our associate will preach today on ‘The Perspectives of the Shepherds.’”

The associate had just one line about the shepherds at the beginning of his sermon. He said, “The shepherds were abiding in the field at night when suddenly they looked up in the sky. And that’s what I want to talk about today. I want you to think about the vastness of the universe God has created.

He went on for twenty-five minutes on the immensity of the universe. He quoted statistics from astronomers about how long it takes light to travel from the nearest star, how big Betelgeuse is. He showed a picture of the earth—just a tiny dot from outer space. But he never came back to the shepherds.

When we left I thought, “I’m too critical of preaching. I’m not going to say anything to Judy about it. Maybe she got a lot out of it.” We walked to the car. She shut the door, looked at me, and asked, “What happened to the shepherds?”

It’s strange. I’ve been going to church for seventy-two years. I know the story of the shepherds like the back of my hand. Yet when I go to church at Christmas I still want to hear that old, old story about the shepherds. Get me inside their robes. They were sore afraid. How afraid is that? After the angels left did anyone volunteer to stay with the sheep? Did they have a hard time finding the stable? Was Mary reluctant to let these smelly shepherds hold the baby. Did they kiss Him on the forehead? The Bible says they returned “glorifying and praising God” ... did anyone hear them in the middle of the night? Were they told to be quiet?

Just maybe you might say something fresh I never thought about. But even if you don't, there's something about that familiar account that feeds me. C.S. Lewis said we don't need to be taught new ideas so much as to be reminded of old truths. Jesus said, "Man doesn't live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). [page 126-127]

42. Small Things Matter.

Often it's not the mountain ahead that wears you out—it's the little pebble in your shoe—Muhammad Ali. [page 128]

43. Pastoral Expectations Are Endless.

Having been the minister of both a large and a small church, I have concluded that all ministers have a challenging, stress-filled job because so much is expected of them: preacher, teacher, counselor, administrator, organizer, committee chairman, visionary, community influencer, bus driver, coach, youth sponsor, custodian, and senior citizens program director. The expectations are endless. [page 128-129]

44. Keeping Focused on the Main Thing – Jesus Christ.

Oswald Chambers said, "If I am devoted to the cause of humanity only, I will soon be exhausted and come to the place where my love will falter; but if I love Jesus Christ personally and passionately, I can serve humanity though men treat me as a doormat." [page 140]

45. Humor Will Relax Tension.

Our sense of humor is a gift from God that should be controlled as well as cultivated. Clean, wholesome humor will relax tension and relieve difficult situations. Leaders can use it to displace tension with a sense of the normal. – J. Oswald Sanders [page 141]

46. Humor Helps.

A sense of humor helps us avoid becoming jaded and melancholy. Henry Ward Beecher said, "A person without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs jolted by every pebble in the road." [page 142]

47. Humor Is Persuasive.

Webb Garrison in *The Preacher and His Audience* argues that humor is a powerful, persuasive tool. "It is an affront to the God we serve to neglect the skillful use of humor in our preaching." [page 144]

48. Differences in Humor.

Phillips Brooks wrote, “The smile that is stirred by true humor and the smile that comes from the mere tickling of the fancy are as different from one another as the teachers that sorrow forces from the soul are from the tears that you compel a man to shed by pinching him.” [page 150]

49. Teamwork Is a Necessity.

Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships – Michael Jordan. [page 152]

50. Delegation Needed.

So, several years into my ministry, I became intentional about delegating. I determined to focus my primary gifts (preaching and teaching) and channel other responsibilities to those who were more qualified. The church staff became more important to me. I tried to recruit staff members who were people of integrity and gifted in administration and then trust them to do the job. [page 155]

51. Focus on Your Strengths.

Delegate in your area of your weakness and stay focused on your strengths. The reason people get burned out is not that they work too hard but they work too hard in an area where they are not gifted. Working in the area of your giftedness energizes you. Working in the area of your weakness drains you. [page 156]

52. The High Calling of Lay Leaders.

They [The first elders] helped counsel people. They encouraged Moses. They shared in the decision-making. They defused criticism.

That’s the high calling of lay leaders to this day. The elders are to share responsibilities with the up-front leader so they can get as many people to heaven as possible. When Paul met with the elders at Ephesus, a church he established and then shepherded for three years, “he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him” (Acts 20:36-37). Theirs wasn’t an adversarial relationship, but a shared ministry. That kind of harmonious, caring teamwork creates the foundation for a health church. [page 159]

53. The Need to be Accountable.

It didn’t take me long to recognize the tremendous advantage of having a group of elders who were sharing the burden with me. For that to continue meant that I occasionally had to swallow my pride and be accountable, transparent, and flexible. I

had to accept the fact that I didn't always get my way. I wasn't running the show myself. [page 162]

54. Deferring to the Judgment of Other Leaders.

As Oswald Sanders points out, "Willingness to concede error and to defer to the judgment of one's peers increases one's influence rather than diminishes it." [page 163]

55. Knowing Yourself and Leading as a Servant.

Spiritual leaders are most effective when they feel comfortable in their own skin and yet lead with a servant's heart. The great stage and film star Sir Laurence Olivier was once asked what it took to be a great actor. He responded, "Humility enough to prepare and confidence enough to perform." That's the balance that's needed in ministry. Enough holy fear to remain dependent on God every day, yet enough confidence in our divine call that we remain strong and courageous no matter how challenging the assignment. [page 177]

56. What Works and What Sounds Good.

Much of the social history of the Western world over the past three decades has been a history of replacing what worked with what sounded good – Thomas Sowell. [page 179]

57. Obsessing over New Ideas.

But if we're too obsessed with new and creative ideas we can wind up reinventing church every four or five years and lose leadership credibility. People eventually dismiss our excitement about a new direction as another passing fancy and don't embrace the program. Charles Spurgeon had it right years ago when he said, "He who marries today's fad will soon be a widow." [page 181]

58. Stylistic Issues in Today's Church.

Think of the stylistic issues in today's church. What's a passing fad? What's a permanent trend? Casual dress, darkened auditoriums, preaching without notes, organic sermons, one-point sermons (divided five different ways), and the pulpit replaced with a round table and a stool. Calling Christians "Christ followers" and the senior minister the "lead pastor"; no invitations at the end of the sermon; the avoidance of patriotism or any display of the flag. Satellite churches, the emphasis on the arts, ZIP code pastors, missional churches versus attractional churches, building new buildings versus renovating supermarkets, more emphasis on discipleship, less on mass evangelism—are these passing fads or permanent trends?

The church has to change methods or we'll become a relic of the past. On the other hand, we can create havoc in the church by insisting on "keeping up with the times" when in reality we're chasing another passing whim and just trying to be cool. John

Piper wrote, “If you crave to be cool you will eventually compromise the truth. The god of this age will not allow truth to be cool for long.” [page 184-185]

59. Knowing When to be Second.

I like the droll humor of comedian Stephen Wright. One of favorite quips of his is, “The early bird catches the worm; but it’s the second mouse that gets the cheese!” Enough said. [page 186]

60. Can You Take the Bread of Life and Feed Your People?

The use of cutting-edge methods is, in my opinion, less than 10 percent of the basis of a healthy ministry. Ninety percent of your influence in the future will depend on whether or not you can take the bread of life and feed it to people. Can you make God’s word understandable, practical, and inspirational? If so, God will honor that because “the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword ... it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). [page 187]

61. Exalt Christ.

If you’re a preacher, I would challenge you to preach the Word. Revere Jesus Christ. Life up the cross. Honor family values. The secret to spiritual power is not being cool but exalting Christ. “See that what you heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us—eternal life” (1 John 2:24-25). [page 189]

62. Fix Your Eyes on Jesus’ Face.

So all you boomers just breaking into Medicare, gird your loins ... Fix your eyes on Jesus’ face at the finish line. There will be plenty of time for R and R in the resurrection. For now, there’s happy work to be done – John Piper. [page 190]

63. Love Your Community.

In my opinion one of the wisest things a young preacher can do is fall in love with his community. There is no perfect place, but it boosts the spirit of your people to know that you focus on the positives and like the apostle Paul, you have learned to be content wherever you are. [page 191]

64. Look to the Future.

Why would you want to go to a church with a great past when you’re at a church with a great future? [page 192]

65. Long-term Ministry.

I chose to remain at Southeast for forty years and discovered there are numerous advantages that accompany a long-term ministry. Stability for the congregation, expanded influence in the community, and in-depth pastoral relationships are a few benefits. I was blessed to perform wedding ceremonies for young people decades after marrying their parents. I was almost an honorary family member to several in our congregation. [page 193]

66. Not Your Ministry.

A ministry isn't really so hard to give up if you remember that it wasn't really yours in the first place. [page 198]

67. Retirement.

An exhausted minister who was on the verge of retirement was asked what he was going to do with his extra time. He quipped, "The first year I'm just going to sit on the front porch in a rocking chair." "Then what?" he was asked. "Then the second year I'm going to start rocking," was his response. [page 202]

68. Retirement – a Period of Service.

Retirement should be regarded as a period of service, not an indulgence. The Bible is full of examples of people who made their most significant contribution after age six-five. Moses was eighty when he led the Israelites out of slavery. Caleb was eighty-five when he led the Israeli army into battle. Sarah was ninety when she gave birth to Isaac. Anna was eighty-four when she identified the baby Jesus as the Messiah. The apostle John was over eighty when he wrote Revelation.

History is full of examples also. Colonel Sanders was nearly broke when he used his first Social Security check at age sixty-five to start Kentucky Fried Chicken. Ronald Reagan was seventy-three when elected president for the second time. Billy Graham preached to national television audiences at age ninety.

Sam Rosenberg was still playing trombone in our church orchestra at ninety-four. He once told me, "I must be a crazy old man. I'm ninety years old and just brought a new trombone." His doctor said that's probably why he lived so long and was so healthy. He exercised his lungs and had a sense of purpose. [pages 203-204]

69. Make an Impact on People's Hearts.

A good character is the best tombstone. Those who loved you, and were helped by you, will remember you. So carve your name on hearts, and not on marble – C.H. Spurgeon. [page 205]

70. Getting Back Up When You Are Down.

One of the tests of faithfulness is can you take a punch? Are you tough enough to get back up when you're knocked down? The Bible encourages us, "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Hebrews 12:3-4). [page 206]

71. Be Joyful.

No one wants to be around a whiner. No one ever says, "After church, let's go over to Bill's house—I just love to hear him gripe." No, we're attracted to people who are joyful. When you faithfully speak the truth with a spirit of joy, it's contagious. It lifts the spirits of others and is more likely to make you feel better in the end. [page 208]

72. Don't Quit.

Don't quit. Don't get discouraged by slight offenses or seemingly insurmountable problems. Be faithful in preaching God's Word and loving God's people. Be faithful in to your God-given wife and children. And do it with a joyful spirit. Laugh at yourself and be of good cheer since Jesus has overcome the world!

And if you act the way you wish you felt, you will eventually feel the way you act. Because "Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them" (Psalm 126:6). [page 209]