

What Matters Most

For more than 30 years, Rick Warren, a fourth-generation pastor, has championed and encouraged local church pastors. We asked him to share his thoughts on what matters most in ministry.

I could not count the number of times I've felt like resigning from ministry due to discouragement, conflict or disappointment. As pastors, we live with the constant tension between the ideal (our dream for our church) and the real (how things actually are). When you feel down, remind yourself of certain truths. Rip out this page and tack it to your office wall.

churches. Instead learn from these churches' models. The moment you stop learning, you stop leading. You can learn from anyone if you ask the right questions.

5. Never compare your ministry to others.

God says it is foolish to compare yourself to others (2 Cor. 10:12). Why? First, you can always find someone doing a better job than you, and you'll get discouraged. Second, you can always find someone you're doing a better job than, and you'll become prideful. Either can sabotage your ministry. When you get to heaven, God won't say "Why weren't you more like (some other pastor)?" He made you to be you. If He didn't want you to be you, he wouldn't have created you!

1. Ministry is a marathon, not a 50-yard dash. It's not how you start that matters. It's how you finish the race. Sustainability counts more than speed. Paul tells us to run the race for a "heavenly reward that never disappears" (1 Cor. 9:25). Live in light of eternity.

6. Live for an audience of One.

The moment you start worrying about what other people think, your ministry is sunk. If the criticism is true, listen and learn from it. If it is false, ignore it and forget it. Remember that God is the ultimate judge of your life and ministry. Maintain a tough skin and tender heart.

2. Every church is large in God's eyes. There is no such thing as a small church. Jesus died for your church. That's how much your ministry matters to God. It is the Body and Bride of Christ. The Church is the only thing on earth that will last forever.

7. Never criticize nor envy another ministry.

I've seen more pastors defeated by these two traps than anything else. A critical or an envious spirit quenches God's anointing. He is watching your reaction to the failures and successes of other leaders. We are to "rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." (Rom. 12:15). Keep your spirit sweet.

3. There is no correlation between the size and strength of a church. A church can be big and flabby, or it can be small and wimpy. Neither big nor small is better. Healthy is better. Strong is better. Focus on developing people in your midst, and God will build His church.

8. Be humble.

Whenever I'm prideful, I become the enemy of God because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble people are teachable and don't rush to judge oth-

4. Learn from everyone. The danger of lists like the 100 Largest and Fastest-Growing Churches is that you'll want to compare and compete with other



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ers. Humility is being honest about your weaknesses. Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less!

9. Remember that all growth is seasonal.

Every living thing goes through seasons of growth (spring and summer) and dormancy (fall and winter). Right now, your church may be in fall (no leaves, no fruit) or winter (everything seems dead). Keep on believing, learning, loving and putting down roots. Spring and summer are coming!

We're all in this together, my brothers and sisters. We're on the same team. We rejoice and weep together. And one day, we'll all celebrate together at the feet of Jesus. Be faithful. Keep your eyes on Jesus. I charge you to "serve God's purpose in your generation" like David did (Acts 13:36). God created you. Jesus died for you. The Holy Spirit lives in you. Never give up!

Rick Warren is the founder and senior pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., and author of several best-selling books, including The Purpose Driven Church (Zondervan). Got an opinion on this column? Email TellUs@OutreachMagazine.com.