

Strengthening Your Weakest Link

by Gary Wilkerson

Gary Wilkerson emphasizes the importance of addressing personal weaknesses to sustain a healthy and joyful ministry.

Duration: 43:54

Scripture: Proverbs 17:22, Matthew 11:28-30, John 10:10, Romans 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Galatians 6:2, Philippians 4:13, 1 Thessalonians 4:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 12:1-2

Topics: "Christian Life", "Wholeness in Ministry", "Strengthening Weaknesses"

Description

Gary Wilkerson emphasizes the importance of addressing the weakest links in our lives and ministries, sharing five practical elements that can lead to a sustainable and joyful ministry. He encourages listeners to focus on their spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being, highlighting the need for balance and wholeness in every aspect of life. Wilkerson stresses that true success in ministry comes from being pleasing to God and maintaining healthy relationships with family and friends. He reminds us that our identity should not be tied solely to our ministry success, but rather in our relationship with Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a commitment to strengthen the frayed areas of our lives to serve God effectively.

Transcript

Well, this morning I want to be very, something I usually don't do when I'm preaching. I'm gonna go the very opposite, take a very opposite tact, and I'm gonna get very, very practical with you. I just want to talk about five things that I think are gonna help you in the long term of your ministry.

These are things I did not think of when I was a minister at 25 years old. Now that I'm in my 50s, I think of them every day. These are five elements to our daily life that I think will bring us to be able to finish the course, having run the race well.

So pray with me and ask the Holy Spirit to allow us to learn some practical things today that can help us sustain a healthy ministry, a long-lasting ministry, and a joyful ministry. Thank you, Jesus, for the joy. The Lord is our strength, as we heard just a few moments ago.

And I pray that this message would just add one more step on the ladder coming up to the highest things you have for us. You have good things planned for your people. You love everyone in this room so much.

I pray specifically for the one that might be in this room right now that just feels like, man, I think I used to perform better, and maybe I had more of God's favor and love, and now I feel like I'm struggling, and

there's a sort of a separation or a departure. And I pray right now in Jesus' name that you would show them the Father's love for them, that they are not abandoned, not forsaken, not looked down upon as second class, that you love them just as much as you've ever loved them, and your love will continue forever. I pray these practical teachings would be something that would just give us more get up and go in Jesus' name.

Everybody said amen? Amen. The title of my message today is Strengthening Your Weakest Link, Strengthening Your Weakest Length. The other day I was on the highway, I-25 in Colorado Springs, and a pickup truck was on the highway, and it had a strap, you know, this kind you sort of crank in a little closer.

It looks like a belt, it's made of nylon, and he had a strap, and it was a pickup truck, and had a car behind him, and he's on the highway, and there's this guy driving the truck, and the other car, somebody was driving it, but it was probably like this far apart from the other, and this little strap, and the car was going like this, and then when that car would speed up, that strap would go poof, and then it would slow down, and then he'd have to hit his brakes, and I'm going like, that's not safe. That's not safe. Another thing I saw is, my wife and I like to hike, and we went up to the mountains, and these guys use ropes to climb up these huge cliffs in Colorado, mountain climbing is crazy.

People do, you know, they kind of by fingertips or clong their way up peaks and angles that you would never even think about getting near, and so they put these ropes up higher in case they fall, these rope catch them. Now I want you to imagine if you were doing that, and you got your rope out, you were preparing, you're getting ready for this, you know, 200 foot cliff, and that one rope was all you had between life and death, and you opened the rope up, and you're examining it, and you notice it was frayed, and it was ripped and torn apart, so this part of the rope was this thick, but the little part in the middle had been torn and pulled apart. Would you say to yourself, it's just one small part of the rope? Or would you say, that bungee cord holding that pickup truck and car, it's okay, you know, even if it's starting to pull loose a little bit.

Or would you say, no, even though it's a small part, I need to pay attention to that small part. So I want to talk about small parts of ministry, strengthening the weakest things in our life. Now when I say strengthening the weakest link, some of you as pastors, you're like me, you're going like, yeah, that's Ed, that's Ralph.

I think of people in my church that are, they don't give, they don't tithe, they complain, you know, they walk out halfway through sermons if they don't agree with you. But I'm not talking about that kind of weakest link in your ministry. I'm not talking about the weakest link in your family, it's like your third child, you know.

I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about in your own life. If you were to look at, if you could compare your life, silly as it may seem, compare your life to a rope, and you found certain areas that were frayed, tearing, maybe not being able to sustain the weight of what God's glory wants to be accomplished in your life, what would you do? You would address that situation.

So I want to talk about five situations we want to address. A couple verses to bring to bear is 1 Thessalonians chapter four. 1 Thessalonians chapter four, verse one.

Are you turning? Back when I was, yeah, when I was a kid in ministry, you'd say, turn, and you'd hear, you'd hear that. Now you just hear nothing. It's kind of weird up here.

1 Thessalonians chapter four, verse one says this. Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to live in a way that pleases God as we have taught you. Live this way already, and we encourage you to do it even more.

So to strengthen that core, to strengthen the weakest link, to strengthen your life in ministry, the desire of our heart is not just to have a successful ministry or to feel good about our ministry. The desire of our heart is to be pleasing to the Lord. So what I'm encouraged about in sharing this message with you is that what I'm telling you is pleasing to the Lord.

It may not be pleasing to us, especially when we first get started in strengthening these areas, these five areas I'm gonna talk to you about in just a moment, but it is pleasing to the Lord. 1 Thessalonians chapter five, verse 23 begins to nail down a little bit more about what I wanna talk to you about this morning. 23 says, now may the God of peace make you holy.

Can you say holy with me? Holy, very good. In every way, say every way. Okay, so we wanna be holy in every way.

In every way. Not just certain ways, not just spiritual ways, not just prayer ways. We wanna be holy in every, say it one more time.

Every way, very good. In every way, and may your, what's the next word there, whole. Say whole.

Your whole. Okay, so every way and whole. W-H-O, so the first word is, there's two powerful words here.

The first one is holy, H-O-W, H-O-W. E-L-M-G-Z. No.

Holy, H-O-L-Y. Holy, another one is spelled with, I better look at it, make sure. It's spelled holy, W-H-O-L-Y, holy.

When we think of holy, you think of, you know, like the brother from Ukraine was talking about, like, you know, they were young, they finally got a TV. When I was his age, when he got a TV, my dad got rid of our TV. And so we were in very different, different worlds.

So, you know, we contend to grow up in thinking holy in terms of what I don't do, what I shouldn't do, what I better do. And we don't think of it in terms, oftentimes, as holy with a W in front of it. Holy in everything, in every single way.

And to be honest with you, this has caused many pastors, leaders, spouses, families, Christian families who are in leadership to be very unhealthy, to be extremely unhealthy, to be near borderline depression, to be mental breakdown, physical exhaustion, mental exhaustion. It's caused many pastors and leaders to quit the ministry, 1,700 a month leave the ministry now. It's caused many pastors to bootstrap it, you know, kind of just, wake up and try harder every day, because that's pleasing to the Lord.

Just, I'm exhausted, I'm weary, you know, I'm just worn out, but I'm gonna keep pressing on because that's my calling. And that's not the way the Lord wants you to live your ministry. I'll tell you more about that in just a moment.

So he says, may your whole spirit, okay. I think everybody in this room could put a check mark by that. Your whole spirit is pleasing to the Lord, as the previous verse we read.

Live pleasing to the Lord. So my spirit life is pleasing to the Lord. I think everyone in this room could say, I wake up in the morning and I have some quiet time with the Lord and I study the scriptures and I pray and I fast and I have a heart after God and I am pressing into the kingdom.

And so spirit is one that I think we can always continue to be encouraged in, but let me look at these next two. The soul, I've heard described soul as being your will, your mind, and your emotions. And so now we see, okay, so you've got your spirit and we're paying attention to it and we're thriving and we're alive in that, but then all of a sudden comes the soul and also, wait a minute, my mind, my emotions, my will, those are being affected in a way.

Maybe I'm not as strong in those areas. Just as an example, I find that most pastors read only books that you find in your Christian bookstore or you buy online from the Christian section. And I'm not advocating sort of reading silly novels or things like that, but I am advocating to stretch your mind, read some things about science, read some things about philosophy, read some things and then you'll see that those can be easily integrated into the spiritual part.

Not that the soul is not spiritual, but when I use the word spiritual, I'm talking about more your devotional life, your intimacy with Jesus, your prayer life, your fasting, your study of the word of God. And then the soul comes along and says, okay, I want my mind to expand. I wanna learn new things.

I wanna talk to other people and ask them questions about their life and their experiences. So your mind expands. In here is your will, the choices you make, making right choices about the things we'll be talking about here in just a moment.

Your will to say, I'm gonna live that way. Not to get beaten down to where you get to the point where you have no faith left saying, I can't live that way, I've tried before. Well, God's gonna give us hope here in this room today.

And then the third one, and then emotions. Emotions, if you're exhausted, if you're overworked, if you're stressed, if you're living in anxiety, if you can't sleep at night, then the emotions are gonna be affected. Your emotions will give you trouble.

There was a survey recently done by Duke University and they surveyed the staff members of the senior pastor. And if the senior pastors would read this, I think they'd be blown away. Not one of those things, did any of the pastors score above 50%? Are they friendly? Majority said no.

Are they easily approachable? Vast majority said no. Are they kind and generous? 70% of their staff said no, they're not. And so this is an emotional problem that we have.

This is a problem we have, just God is wanting us to be a people who are whole and can I say it just real nicely? He wants us to be friendly. He wants us to be deep and strong, but he wants us to kind of be nice too. That's not bad, right? I know it's not one of the fruits of the spirit like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and niceness, but it's good if you're a leader to be nice to your people.

Be kind and gentle and generous and thinking of them. The people in your ministry don't exist to make you successful. You exist to make them successful.

You are there for them. You are there to serve them, live for the benefit of other people. And most of us in the ministry are so driven.

We are so, our identity is so meshed in our ministry. If our ministry's successful, we feel successful. If we, our identity is so wrapped up in our church that if the church is going good, then our emotions are going good.

If the church is going bad, then our emotions are going bad. That's baloney. Jesus wants us to live no matter how bad things are in the joy of the Lord.

No matter how much trouble you find yourself in, no matter how difficult the circumstances that you're in, if there can be a healthy detachment from your work, and that's very difficult in ministries. Most non-ministry types of work have that, but in the ministry, there's such a close attachment to the work that we're doing. We consider it, because it is a holy work, we consider if we're not doing it extremely well that we are unholy.

And if you have ministered for 40 years, there's going to be seasons where you're not doing it very well. And you can't see yourself as being, oh, now I'm unholy, now I'm displeasing to God. And so identity is not wrapped up.

How many of you have done that? On Monday morning, if any of you have the kind of churches that count how many people are in your church, maybe the ushers count for you, and you get the report maybe by email on Monday morning, and they say there was 412, and then the next week there's only 380, and you're like, I quit. I hate ministry, I'm a loser, I'm no good. That's an emotional crisis.

And it's an identification that your identity is wrapped up in the work that you're doing, rather than your identity being in the same identity that was in Jesus. Who are you? I'm the son of God. He's well-pleased with me.

Well, why? You didn't preach any sermons yet? You didn't heal any sick yet? You didn't gather the crowds and multiply the bread yet? You haven't done anything yet, and he still says he pleases you? Absolutely. He's pleased with you when you've done nothing. He's pleased with you because of the cross of Jesus Christ.

He's pleased with you because of the blood of Jesus Christ that has caused us to. So he wants us to please him in every way, in every way. And we tend to be strong in the spirit, but often ignore our soul care, and often ignore our bodies.

We ignore our physical bodies. The same survey from Duke said that 20% of pastors have in the last year not taken one day off. 20%, two out of, one out of five pastors.

If that statistic holds true, you could look at your row, and there'll be somebody in there. And if you wouldn't mind just pointing to them right now. I'm joking.

There are pastors in this room that have not taken a day off this last month. All right? We talk about sin of adultery. We talk about sin of lust.

We talk about sin of anger. But what about keep the Sabbath holy? It's like, let's do that one too, okay? Let's be convicted inside saying, like, it's not healthy. It's not like, well, I'm a man of God because I work seven days a week.

I'm a woman of God because I work seven days a week, 24 hours a day. So I'm more of a man of God. I'm proving it because I'm getting after.

No, you're in sin. You're not obeying God to take that Sabbath, to take that rest, to take that day. It is important.

I would actually advocate you take two days off. You want to know how to be happy? Just quit being a pastor. I'm serious.

You're laughing, but I'm serious. I've never been happier. About a year ago, I stopped.

I turned the church over to my associate and he's a pastor there now. And I'm free. I'm happy.

Well, I take two days off a week now. For 40 years, I didn't know what it was like hardly to take one day off a week. Now I'm taking two days off a week.

My family's looking at me going like, what's wrong with you? I'm like, I just asked you if you wanted to go to the park or to the zoo with you and the kids and grandkids. It's Saturday. See, I would take Saturdays off sometimes, but it would be like, but I need four hours to finish up my sermon.

So it was just like kind of half a day off. And the other half a day off that I was taking, if I was with my kids, maybe having a meal, I was going like, so that John chapter is, John 17, maybe I should add John 15 to that. And that linked, and I'm thinking sermon while I'm with my kids.

And my kids are going like, they don't, he doesn't know we're even in the room. And so these are dangerous. And these are the weak links in the chain.

These are where the ropes are getting frayed in our life. So the soul care, taking care of ourselves by, 40% of pastors say they're emotionally exhausted. And again, look at your row.

Four out of 10 would be just, you've come to this conference exhausted, just nearly burned out. One in 10 are living right now in moderate to severe depression. One out of 10, that'd be probably 30, 40 people in this room in moderate to severe.

Eight out of 10 feel like they're right now in a struggle in their life. And this one you might not like, but it's, I just wanna, I'm just reading my notes, okay. But 41% of pastors are obese.

41%, another 29% are extremely overweight. And that leaves only 20% who are living in the normal range. That's not whole, okay.

And that's not, I'm not, there's not conviction. There's not, there's not condemnation here. There's, there's not guilt here.

There's not shame. There's not, there's, there's, you know, we don't have a tape measure at the back of the church to say like, you know, let's, let's check the, the, you know, I was gonna almost entitle the sermon pastors and pot bellies, but I thought this, that's strengthening your weakest link is a little more genteel. But literally, I mean, I go to pastors conferences all over the world.

Places where people are starving and the pastors gather, there'll be four or 500 pastors and they all have, like, they're all huge guys. It's like, somebody's got some food here in, you know, Ghana, Ghana, you

know, or Kenya. It's, it's, it's, and same as in America.

Look at this, 80%, 40, yeah, 80% are struggling with physical health in, in our bodies and we're having a hard time. There's a, there's a guy named Pastor Davis who was, he was constantly sick. He was, he was, he was always exhausted.

He, food was his comfort. He would go to, he would go to, he'd have a tough counseling session or maybe get an email of somebody, you know, sort of bad mouth in the church or something and he would immediately go to the refrigerator and like, ah, Krispy Kreme or Dunkin' Donuts or, you know, scoops of ice cream and he would do that and he loomed up to, like, way over 300 pounds. He literally said, and his church was similar like this, he literally said, by the time I walked up to the stairs to get to the pulpit, I had to take a few seconds to catch my breath again.

Whew, you know, just, just exhausted going up four steps, the thing. Eventually, he got so bad, he had to bring an oxygen tank to preach when he was preaching with oxygen up in his nose here and, and he finally just said, that's not, that's not what we're talking about in Thessalonians here. That's not Paul's admonition to us.

Whole, be whole, spirit, soul, and body. So you got your emotions, you got your will, you got your mind, and then you have your physical body as well. So these are the three areas that Paul admonishes the young leaders at Thessalonica to live whole like this, to live full like this and so this pastor, finally, Pastor Davis went on a, he went on a fast and a diet and started exercising, started working out, and he was shocked.

He never realized he could be so happy in ministry. He never realized he had time and energy, not only to serve his church well, but then go home and when his kids gathered around him, he actually had some time to play with them on the floor and do something besides lay on the couch and ask his wife to bring him another bag of chips. And literally, a lot of pastors do that.

They come home, right, they come home exhausted and then you find yourself nothing to give to your friends or family and so he did that and it was a total life change. He made a commitment. He did something that's difficult for many of us to do when you get a little bit older.

You've tried diets and you've tried exercise and you get to the point where you go like, I tried it and I keep quitting so it's not gonna work. I'm not gonna do it anymore. I just, it's just not me.

This is who I am, I'm gonna accept it. I just live this way. I live tired, I live exhausted, I live burned out.

I live burning the candle at both ends. I don't take days off and I just, I've tried to change. I've tried to commit myself to a day off a week.

I've tried to eat better. I've tried all that but it doesn't work and so what happens, it puts a ding in your faith. Your faith, you don't believe any longer you can do it and faith is the essential key to accomplishing anything in your life.

And so I hope today that I not only give you some practical insights but I hope today that I restore faith. I wanna tell you, you can do this. You can change.

I asked Tim's permission to share this a little bit ago. Not long ago, Tim was bigger. Obese, you literally fit in the guidelines of obese and he went to, the doctor told you're obese.

Don't go to Tim's doctor, that is very rude. Tim, I gave him permission, he said he was obese. He didn't exercise, he had high levels of cholesterol, danger levels of cholesterol, the low good cholesterol.

That's near physical burnout and leads to the body, speaks to the will, if your body's weak, your willpower's no longer strong. And some of us say, well, I can't do it because our bodies are so weak now that we no longer have the will to say yes to the things that are good for us anymore. And so Tim, they wanted to put him on cholesterol medicine for his heart and he was just, I think the Holy Spirit spoke to him, just said, no, no, don't go that route.

Just live whole like the Bible says, spirit, soul, and body. Give yourself to this thing. Live your life, you know what I mean? Live your life.

I'll talk about that in a minute. So he did that and he lost like almost 30-something pounds. This lean, mean fighting machine.

He's always been more handsome than me but now he's thinner than me and more muscular. The guy's doing it, he had a life change in his early 50s. It's never too late.

It's never too late to change. It's never too late to give yourself to be the best kind of person that you can be to serve God the best you can be. John Wesley said it well.

When God calls a man or woman into ministry, he gives them two things, a message. Oh, I love that, you have a powerful message. But then he gives them a horse and the horse carries them around to all the villages to preach the message.

He says if you wear out the horse, the message can't move any further. And so many of us are wearing out our horse, our physical bodies. We're wearing it out by the way we are overworked, over-stressed, overeaten, under-exercised and we're not even walking, we're not even moving.

We're not doing things that will change our life. So real quickly, what time is lunch? I was actually just seeing how much time I had left. I wasn't trying to be funny.

Okay, so real quickly, five things. And we're already talking about it. Number one is food, okay, number one is food.

Up till a few months ago, you wanna know what my breakfast was? Whatever was left over from the dessert I made the night before. Usually a tray of brownies and I would eat maybe half a tray at night before I'd go to bed. And then, so I would eat the other half for breakfast, not the other half, but maybe two or three brownies for breakfast and two Dr. Peppers.

All right, so, sorry, excuse me. You guys are very judgmental, my goodness. So I'd have two Dr. Peppers.

So there are 17 scoops of sugar, teaspoons of sugar in each Coke or Dr. Pepper, 17. So you wake up in the morning and you have probably like 20 teaspoons of sugar in the brownies and then you're having 17, what's 34? 34, can you imagine doing that? I got 34. The average American eats 66 pounds of sugar every year.

If I wanted to, I didn't have time to do it, but I wanted to do one of those like illustrated sermons where somebody comes in a wheelbarrow with 66 pounds of sugar and say like, here, eat this. You'd be like, no, of course not, but over time of year. And so, I was fat, I was overweight, I was tired, I was exhausted.

I literally come home and I just lay on the couch and sometimes we'd have a family dinner, all four of my children and five grandchildren live in Colorado Springs where we live and they'd come over for the table and I just find myself like kind of lifting my fork to my mouth and they were having a conversation. I'm just going like, I'm just too tired to enter in. It's like, I hear what you're saying, but I'm not engaged.

I don't have the energy, I don't have life, let alone the kids, grandkids, which are ridiculous. They're like, come lay on the floor here and flip me in the air and catch me. I was like, I can't even flip this paper in the air.

I was like. And so, and so, you know, just, and fast food. Pastors are notorious for fast food.

We go to these poison places and get, you know, we order like the big happy meal and it's like, you know, the 36 ounce thing or whatever and there's like, you know, you don't need me to go on. Like, but you just know what I'm talking about. It's because of your schedule.

Your schedule, you're overbooked, you're over scheduled, so therefore your food then becomes affected because you don't have time to, you know, maybe cook a meal with your wife, maybe cook the meal with your family. And so you, I told you I'd be gonna be practical, right? Pastors who cook are beautiful people and buy some good groceries and actually cook some good food. So I ate like that for breakfast.

For lunch, I would go to McDonald's or Taco Bell or have a quesadilla for dinner. I'm a steak guy, so I would have like a, you know, as much as I could afford, a 16 ounce steak, you know, maybe every other night and some of that's okay for you, but just, and so just totally, this was a threat. This was the rope being pulled and my physical body was, again, like Tim before he made those changes, his life was affecting me.

And so here's a quick little story. There was some religious leaders and they looked in through a window and they saw a man and he was pigging out. I mean, food was just everywhere.

It was coming out of his eyes, his ears, and they grabbed him and they take him before Jesus and says, Lord, we caught this man in gluttony. What should we do with him? Stone him and Jesus says, no, and he forgives him, but then he says something, doesn't he? Tell him, go and sin no more. That's what he tells the woman.

That's what he tells us. It's not a condemnation. It's not a guilt trip.

It's a challenge. It's an encouragement. It's a word of blessing to you.

It's a word that will literally change your life. Ask Tim, ask me, ask my wife. This is changing our life.

There's energy, there's freshness. Last year at this conference, I talked a lot about healing and I still do that everywhere we go. We're praying for the sick and we're seeing people healed.

We're seeing salvations at airports. People just get, like every week, somebody's getting a powerful story. But I noticed sometimes I was praying for people who were like, you know, maybe like 400 pounds and they were limping.

And I prayed, Jesus, heal that leg. Well, it's gonna get bad again. Does that make sense? If you're carrying that kind of weight, it's gonna get bad again.

So I want to continue in on the supernatural healing. But the Lord began to encourage me too. Let's believe for pastors and leaders to look at emotional healing and physical healing and healing of our diets and all those type of things so we have a healthy, whole life.

So we at Times Square Church and at the school and my ministry at World Challenge, we believe in and preach regularly and strive to help people come and understand the new covenant. And I'll just use one phrase, it is finished, is maybe a capstone you could put on that. But here's some things that are not finished because a lot of people ask you, like what is God's part and what is my part? The new covenant covers everything.

But let me tell you a few things. New covenant does not take calories away from a three scoop, double fudge, chocolate brownie ice cream, okay? You can't say, it is finished, Jesus paid the price for my calories. You can't do it, you can't do it.

So there's some things that the new covenant will not do for you, all right? There's actually, I saw this video this week on YouTube of a pastor in Africa who is praying for fat people to get thin. And Jesus, he's casting out fat. And I saw the video and you could see how fake it was to get people going like, oh, miracle.

It's just ludicrous. So calories, fat, fat burning, those things are not under the new covenant, okay? The grace to begin to make the changes are, but there has to be something in you, a gumption, a fire in your soul, a saying to yourself, I wanna live healthy, I wanna live holy, I wanna live, with an H-N-O-W, I wanna live holy the rest of my life and serve God and serve others well. So let me go on, number two, fitness.

The Bible says to serve the Lord with all your strength, all your strength. If you can't walk up these three or four stairs here without sort of having to catch your breath, then maybe something's wrong. And so giving to all your strength.

And I just wanna real quickly encourage you to spend some time while you're here. Just go outside and go walk around the lake and begin to say, like, I'm gonna start this now. I'm gonna start today.

My food is gonna change. My fitness is gonna change. I'm gonna start working out a little bit.

Pastor Carter, I love it. I've known him for many years. The whole time I've known him, he goes to the gym, I think, almost every day, every day.

And you don't take a Sabbath day? No. Seven days a week, he's on the elliptical machine and working out. That's why he actually overcame a near-death experience because of mold in his lungs.

And I believe part of it was obviously through prayer and through community, praying for him. But part of it was that he was gonna work. He was gonna work his body and clear up his lungs and get strong and be able to breathe better.

And so just this idea of having fitness. You okay? Everybody all right? All right, everybody feeling like, let's go back to the other type of preaching. Here's a real practical step.

This is something I've adopted in my life and maybe this will work for you. I used to try to get up in the morning early, like you're supposed to read your Bible and pray in the morning. I would get up in the morning, I'd be like, I hate my Bible.

This is the most boring book in the world. I literally, no matter where I'd go, like I'd be standing up, like okay, I can't do my devotion sitting down, I'll fall asleep, I'm just like. And so the first thing I'd do is I'd go to bed.

The first thing I'd do is move a little bit. I'd take a huge glass of water because at night your body gets dehydrated and that kind of wakes you up a little bit. I'd walk outside, just get a little fresh air.

If there's sun, if you live in Manhattan, it might be a little harder because buildings block it, but just get a little fresh air. Breathe a little bit, drink your water and then start moving a little bit. Maybe do five jumping jacks, do one pushup, do whatever you can do.

Just your body starts moving, you get a little bit healthier and then all of a sudden you go to the Word and you go like, ah, I want to dig in this thing. I'm awake now, I'm awake now. So like when I first wake up, my wife knows that I'm not a morning person.

I don't go like, hey, this would be a great time for us to share our hearts with one another. Just tell me, tell me, tell me what's on your heart. What do you be going through? You know, just, she asked me that in the morning and I'd be like, eh, I've never abused you before, but we're getting close, we're getting close right now.

So she knows, give me a little bit of space in the morning. Give me some room and so I'll take the space and she gives me some space and I wake up. So but I do that with the Lord too.

He knows that my, you know, the first 30 minutes is not my best time with Him. And so don't get under the guilt trip of saying like, okay, I have to. So my advice to a lot of you in this room, you'll have a better devotional life in the morning if you'll wake up and just do what I just mentioned to you.

Go outside, move, water, sun, move. All right, I know three real quickly and I'll really move as fast as I can through this. Friends, if you don't have friends, a lot of pastors, I was in Poland last weekend.

There was like five different speakers and all of them were like powerful sessions. But one guy got up and talked about what he would do different. He was retiring from ministry, an older man.

He said, here's what I would do different if I started my ministry again. And I loved what he said. His whole message was, I would have friends.

Oh, my heart broke. I was just like, poor guy, man. He's like 70 and he's retiring from ministry and he's longing.

I wish I had some friends. I want friends. And he talked about how he later life developed friends.

He developed some friends and he goes, man, it encouraged him and it strengthened him and it built him up and it challenged him about the things I'm talking about, food and fitness. He had some accountability in his life. And so many of us as pastors, we don't have friends.

How do we know if we have friends or not? Well, let me ask you, look at the last couple times you've gone out to eat with somebody. And if all you talked about was ministry, you don't have friends. If all you talked about was, if you go out with members of your church and all you talk about is, what are the deacons doing next month and when's the next missions trip? If your whole conversation's wrapped around your church or your ministry, you don't have friends.

Friends are meant to be somebody you just enjoy and you just talk about everything or nothing and you just be with them. It's not just a ministry associate or acquaintance. It's a friend, it's somebody who's deeper than a brother.

Tim taught me this. You hold up your five fingers if you would, hold up your five fingers. We should be able to count without thinking five people that we're really devoted to and devoted to us.

Five people that love us and that we love deeply. And Tim is one of mine on that list. And so the first time he told me that, I was like, that's easy.

Tim, because he's preaching, I have to say Tim. Yeah. Because he might ask me afterwards who the, no, he really is one of my five.

My wife, my, well, I have six because I have four kids. And then afterwards he says, and it can't be your wife or kids. I'm going, okay, so Tim.

See. Yeah, it was trouble. It was trouble for me and I needed to make some changes.

And you can't make changes if, again, if your identity is totally wrapped up in your ministry, you're gonna be so driven to just be successful at ministry, you feel like friends are a waste of time. They're not helping me advance my ministry. That's just a sidebar.

That's just an issue that is kind of over here for weak pastors who aren't giving themselves wholeheartedly to the Lord. No, you're giving yourself wholeheartedly to the Lord when you have good friends. Your good friends are just as important as your pastoral ministry.

Your good friends are just as important as a growing church, as anything that might be on your radar as being value to you. Value friends, have at least five friends. Another trick of the trade, so to speak, would be to look at the last 15 texts you have or the last 15 emails you have.

And if they're all about business, about problems, about things you need to fix, solutions you need to bring to the table, then you're having a problem with friends. Most of your texts and emails should be from your friends. The people that you're texting should not be problem-solving texts, leadership texts.

They should be, how are you doing today? My wife and I just had a wonderful walk through the park. Hope you're having a good day. Just things like that where, so look at your last, if you don't know, you probably know just from me saying that, your text, and you'll be able to know.

Spend a night out with your friends. Enjoy company. Have a meal, have a dinner where you invite people over to your house that is not a church, like an elder meeting or a deacon meeting or a leadership training meeting or a small group leaders training.

Have it like just with some friends. Maybe it's people from other churches, other pastors, and you don't talk shop. You just talk how you're doing, how's life, friends.

Number four, family. Enjoy them. Don't be so busy, don't be consumed.

Church is a second to your family, and it's a distant second. Church, family is much more important. Now, the church of Jesus Christ, yes, we're meant to be devoted to it, but the first people in your church is your own family.

What does it profit the world if you gain his own soul, gain his own life, but lose his own family? He's worse than an infidel if you lose your own family, so pay attention to your family. Be close to them, be present to them. Have enough energy in your body, physically, and healthy foods in you that give you nutrients to be able to have energy for your family.

My daughter, when she was about four years old, three, four years old, I got home from the church office and I was exhausted. I picked up the newspaper and I just went like 10 minutes quiet time alone to be able to, and I wanna look at some sports, it's just an escape, and I just got my paper up, and my little daughter, I was sitting down in the lounge chair and had the paper like this, and all of a sudden her little head came up through the newspaper, like, hi, daddy, and I went, hey, Annie, just a minute, I need a minute, and I pushed her head back down under the paper, like, it's like, I can't get away from people, like, I was just like. And then she popped her head up through it a second time, I was like, daddy, daddy, and I said, Annie, I told you I need five minutes, okay, five minutes, I'll tell you when my five minutes is up, then I'll come get you, and she went, okay, daddy, and I pushed her head back down, and it's like, the third time she came up under this paper, I'll never forget this, she had tears in her eyes, she goes, daddy, if it's okay, I just wanted to tell you I love you.

I was like, I'm a miserable person. Yeah, she just wanted to say I love you, and so take that time with your family, pay attention to them. Maybe have a certain time where your phone goes off.

The phone is an addiction now, did you know that? Food addictions and phone addictions, they're as bad as some other things, and so be careful, set a day where you don't carry your phone around with you. I don't have mine with me right now. I gave it to Corey just before I started preaching.

A date night, take a date night. Take two days off some weeks if you can, so you have a back-to-back, so you have like a normal life, normal life rhythm as people have Saturdays and Sundays off. Try that some week, you know, if it's only two, three times a year, take a weekend, then when you do that, take a day with your wife or husband, then take a day with your family.

Take them to the zoo, have some time alone with them. Go on a vacation. Some of us haven't been on vacation for a long time, and plan that until you think, well, I don't have money, do it, go get a tent, you know, buy a used tent, and go do that.

Lastly, fun, fun. Have you ever heard any sermons on fun? Probably not, but have fun, okay? Have fun. Life is meant to be lived.

Jesus said, I come to give you life, and give you life abundantly, and if you're not having fun, that's not very abundant. It might be hard work, it might be diligent, it might be faithful, it might be successful, but it's not fun, and there's nothing wrong with having fun. It's not unbiblical.

Some people have told me, well, I don't go to movies, or I don't go watch TV, and I tell them, that's why you're so boring. Literally, like, you don't have any fun, and I don't mean just go to movies and TV, but they're trying to tell me, like, look how holy I am, because I don't do these things. Well, yeah, but you're

also not happy, and holiness should equate to happiness.

We should be happy. There should be joy, there should be delight, there should be fun, there should be laughter. Laughter's not a sin.

Years ago, Tim and I were pastoring together in Detroit, and there was a girl in the front row, and she had a pen, and she was chewing on the pen, and Tim was sitting over here, and she was chewing on the pen. I'm in the middle of my sermon, and she was chewing on it, and it broke, and she didn't know it broke, so it was dripping down her face, and then she was going like this, and then she'd go like this, and then she'd go like this. Literally, she had ink all over her face, right? Okay, so when I was younger, and maybe a little bit today still, I had a problem.

Sometimes, if I saw something funny, I would start laughing, even in the middle of my sermon. I was like. So I kind of go like, oh, this is easy.

I'm just gonna go and look at this side of the church, and Tim's sitting over here, and he's going. I go, Tim, Tim, and stuff, and literally, I started laughing. I mean, like, you ever get those kind of giggles when it's inappropriate, like at a funeral, or, and I started giggling, and I was just like, and I look at Tim, and he goes like, check out the girl, and I was just like, and then I look, I gotta look away from Tim.

Oh, there's the girl. It's like, and so I just like, I literally, I just kept laughing and laughing. I couldn't stop laughing.

I just said, church is over. I did. I just sent the people home.

It was like 10 minutes into my sermon. Don't you think, don't you think serving Jesus is fun? And if not, let's look at it that way and say, Jesus, just help us to be holy with the H and holy with the W. Lord, these frayed ends, these areas of the rope that have been stretched a little thin, help us to strengthen that particular area, because if you only strengthen the areas you're strong in, that weak link may break, and those strong parts won't be fruitful any longer, and so look at those little areas, and I'll close with this, and I literally mean close. This is the last thing I'll say, is one of my goals lately is to have, and this may sound strange, but to have one perfect day, one perfect day, and what I mean by that is each choice I make.

There's hundreds of choices you have to make every day. The first one you wake up and say, am I gonna move a little bit? Am I gonna breathe a little bit? Am I gonna drink some water? Second choice is, you know, am I gonna eat brownies and Dr. Pepper for breakfast, or am I gonna go with something healthy, and that's a choice you make, and one of my goals is to live one perfect day, just where I go like, every choice I made, instead of being bitter at some people and emotionally getting bound up inside, I'm gonna choose to love and forgive. All right, I'm gonna go that route, and it's not a works mentality.

It's a joy. It's almost like this would be fun to just go through my life and say, I'm gonna make this choice instead of that one, and the choice I pray that you would make today would be to say, I'm gonna do this. I don't care what my condition is right now, physically, emotionally, spiritually.

I don't care what my past has been. I've tried and couldn't do it. Like right now, I'm gonna say yes.

I'm gonna say yes, and I'm gonna tighten, strengthen those weakest links in my life. So Holy Spirit, we just pray we'd say yes to what you have for us. We'd say yes to the fullness of life, the abundant life, the joyful life.

Holy Spirit, we just rebuke the devil now in any spirit of condemnation he might put on somebody, saying like, I can't believe he talked about that in church, or, you know, well, look at me. I have this shortcoming or that. Lord, thank you that we're all brothers and sisters in Christ, and we all have need of you, and we all have need of life transformation, and we wanna be strong in the weaker areas.

Strengthen us, God, and some in this room are super strong spiritually, but maybe physically just aren't moving, or with food not moving, or family not moving into it, with friends, with fun. Lord, help us to look at those areas and shore them up so that you could make us strong for the long haul. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Amen, thank you guys. Thank you.

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