

12. Dealing with Difficulties/Long Term Success

Daniel Darling, writing for *Leadership*, asks Don Carson, “You’ve often said that the Church is three generations from losing the gospel entirely. What advice would you give to pastors and church leaders to ensure that this doesn’t happen?” Here is his answer:

This question is an important one, but very difficult to answer in a few lines.

Read and meditate on the Scriptures constantly, and self-consciously place yourself under Scriptural authority.

Walk with epistemological humility—and that means carefully learning from Christian leaders in the past so we do not tumble into precisely the same mistakes.

Devote yourself to disciplined prayer. A prayerless person is a disaster waiting to happen.

Never stop evangelizing: it is much easier to get sloppy about the gospel if you are not proclaiming it and seeing men and women come to Christ.

Develop close attachments with a handful of trusted people who are experienced and discerning, and make time for edifying fellowship.

If you are a pastor, read widely—commentaries, theology, historical theology, devotional literature, and so forth. A pastor must be a general practitioner. One is far more likely to make mistakes of proportion and judgment where one sees oneself as a kind of specialist.

12.1 Dealing with Difficulties

12.1a When I don’t see fruit/change

what happens when I don’t change/desire?
contra the quick fix mentality

- perseverance in the faith - promises, warnings
- trusting the gospel more than my emotions/experience
 - Lloyd-Jones - preach to ourselves vs listening to ourselves

Tortoise and hare - long term faithfulness better than “spiritual” fireworks that do not last

Parable of two sons

- one promised obedience, but didn't follow through,
- one did not promise, but repented and obeyed

Don't trust techniques, processes or programs, trust the person of Christ

let this class serve you, don't serve this class

let this class point you toward Christ Himself, not just talk about Christ

- see the glory and goodness of Christ by faith

12.1b When I fail

- what happens when I sin?
- move to God or run from God (believe the gospel or don't believe the gospel)?
 - atonement is for past, present, and future sin -

Failing well - repentance and faith

- learn from failure and patterns of sin
 - develop clear biblically informed convictions about the area of sin you are struggling with and understand how the gospel speaks to that problem

Repent and believe in the Gospel

Confess and take advantage of the resources of the church

12.1c When I am weary of well doing

sowing and reaping - Galatians 6:7-8, 9-10

- stop focusing on yourself
- it's not a performance

Remind self of already/not yet - tension, don't have an over-realized eschatology

Remind self of delay/certainty of harvest and faithfulness of God

Take a Sabbath - rest in God through the gospel

- Recharge in Gospel/Devotion

serving others - loving others

12.1d When I find resistance (from society/family/desires, etc.)

Hebrews/Revelation - look at long view and results and pay the cost

12.2 Long Term Success

12.2a Cultivating/maintaining a heart of worship

12.2a1 Psalms as guides to spirituality

godly emotions
honesty AND hope
praying and praising from a Biblical Theology

12.2a2 Faith and repentance on a day to day basis

how to and what it looks like
cultivate godly sorrow for sin - see Owen, Mortification
godly sorrow vs. worldly sorrow
smash idols - don't toy with them and keep them near

12.2a3 Very positive, not just negative avoid idolatry,

but putting on life of Christ - joy of better God - fight for joy
sow to the Spirit - Gal 6.
present yourself as slaves to righteousness - Rom 6
3 trees - pull the weeds and water the good root

12.2a4 Christ and His resources for living

Justification
Presence via the Spirit
His present intercession
His Word
His people
His providence
Eph 6:10-20 - armor of God

12.2a5 Put yourself where God is blessing- Means of Grace

Acts 2:42, 47
Devotional life - listening in the manner that God is speaking
Josh 1:7-9
Church involvement - be present where God is working
God-Centered Worship
Service to others
habit of cross-centered faith and repentance
surround yourself with Gospel-filled, joyful, thankful people
seek out biblically informed counsel and correction

12.2b Means of Grace

"There is a kind of paradox here: On the one hand I say, I need you. God has appointed you as a means of grace to help me endure to the end. But on the other hand, I must say that the only way you can really help me is by saying something or doing something that will cause me to depend on God and not you." -John Piper

"Breathing is the means that God uses to sustain life. So the command to breathe is the command to fall in with the purposes and patterns of God to give and sustain life. This is what I mean by the term, 'means of grace.' 'Grace' is the free keeping-work of God to sustain our spiritual life that leads to everlasting joy. The "means of grace" is our 'keeping ourselves in the love of God.' God's 'keeping' inspires and sustains our 'keeping.' His keeping is decisive and our keeping is dependent on his." -John Piper

"The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation." - Shorter Catechism

2.2b1 Bible reading, study and meditation

12.2b2 prayer

12.2b3 community

12.2b4 Sacraments (2)

12.2b5 Fasting/Self-denial

12.2b5 guard the heart

- idols vs worship, root and fruit (diagnose our own hearts)
- in the presence of Christ

12.2b6 keep the gospel

- "of first importance" always!!! - looking to Christ
- Intentionally Gospel/God centered in all things

12.2b7 Love/serve God and Love/serve others

12.2c Landmarks/Signposts

12.2c1 Memorial stones

- of God's great acts. cf. Josh
- Remember where you have come from
 - and how much God has changed your life
- Make Scripture and God's character and Gospel the primary memorial,
 - not just our experience and emotions
 - these are fleeting, God's Word is permanent
- remember from where you have fallen, repent, do the works you did at first
(Rev 2:4)

12.2c2 Goalposts

Keep the eschatological goal in mind always

Return to the big picture narrative with which we began

return to your first love

God is the Gospel

- keep the prize as the motivation for the running, Phil 3, I Cor
9:24ff.