

Embracing Growth

“Allowing Your Pastor To Grow”

(Part 1)

Intro: Today we begin a 2 week series about embracing growth. We are going to start this series with a much avoided topic in most churches...the need for your pastor to grow. The internal life of most pastors is shrouded in secrecy...but today, I invite you in. That’s what this window represents. Today I invite you all to look through the window of my life and into my heart; and have a greater understanding about my need to keep growing as your pastor.

I. The Growing Demands Of Ministry Requires Continual Growth

- God expects growth!

*Eph. 4:15 “Instead, we will speak the truth in love, **growing in every way** more and more like Christ...” (NLT)*

*II Peter 3:18 “Rather, you must **grow in the grace and knowledge** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...” (NLT)*

*Rom/ 12:2 “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but **let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think...**” (NLT)*

- God expects your pastor to grow! (Working with Pastors in my past – share)
- Therefore, I must continue to grow in three key areas (Head / Heart / Hands) This has been my arrangement with the Lord since starting Foothills. - explain

A. I must continue to grow in wisdom (Head)

Ecc. 10:10 “Using a dull ax requires great strength, so sharpen the blade. That’s the value of wisdom; it helps you succeed.” (NLT)

1. As Foothills continues to grow and gets more complex, it requires more wisdom to make right decisions. I’d rather learn to work smarter not harder. My natural tendency is to just work harder. Not very wise!
2. Wisdom is not the same as knowledge. Wisdom is the correct application of knowledge in a given situation. I’ve worked with a lot of highly educated people over the years who didn’t have a lick of common sense.
3. The wisdom that was required 10 years ago versus today is radically different. Things were very simple back then (explain). Things are very complex today. (explain)
4. Praying for wisdom is a constant prayer of mine. If I don’t grow in wisdom, I will negatively impact the church by making wrong decisions.

B. I must continue to grow in character (Heart)

1. Everything I do as a Pastor flows out of who I am...it flows out of my character. What I do is not a job or a performance. It is who I am! It flows out of my growing connection with Christ.
2. The only way I continue to be an effective Pastor at Foothills is for my character to

continue to grow and develop. Character stagnation is a death sentence for a Pastor.

3. Many churches never give their Pastors an opportunity to grow in this area. WHY? Because there is an expectation that Pastors are supposed to be perfect...have all their stuff together...be above struggles and flaws...not supposed to be human.
4. This is why I try to be so transparent with all of you. I don't want that expectation placed on me. I'm working on stuff just like you are. I'm growing just like you are. I have bad days just like you do! I can get selfish just like you do!
5. There's a lot of growing that still needs to happen in this heart of mine. As Foothills grows, my character needs to keep growing along with it. It's the difference between a running stream and a stagnant pond. Which do you want to drink from? Explain

C. I must continue to grow in skills (Hands)

1. I not only want to be a wise, godly Pastor, I want be skilled at what I do. Not for my benefit, but for the Kingdom of God. God deserves the best I can give Him, therefore, I want to keep getting better at the gifts and abilities He has put in my life. Like what?
 2. I want to be a better communicator. I want to sharpen my skills at communicating the word of God in creative ways to all of you. There's just more I want to do with this...more creativity I want to implement.
 3. I want to grow in my leadership skills. As Foothills grows the need for additional leadership skills continues to be a need. I've never been the Pastor of a church this large before. I need to keep learning new skills.
 4. I want to discover new skills God has put in me that are untapped. I have said for years to all of you that God has put more in you than you have any idea. BUT, I believe that's true for me too. I want to discover more.
 5. Like what? I want to explore writing. In fact, this summer I plan on finishing my first book. Secondly, it's time for me to give myself permission to speak outside of Foothills. Up to this point I have turned down pretty much everything. The Lord is telling me this needs to change.
- If I stagnate in any of these areas, how can I expect you to grow? God and I both expect you to grow in these three ways. My job is to model this for you. I hope you give me your blessing to grow in these areas. WHY? Because it's not easy for Pastors.

II. The Growing Demands Of Ministry Can Destroy A Pastor's Life

Ps. 127:2 "It is useless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, anxiously working for food to eat; for God gives rest to his loved ones." (NLT)

Prov. 12:25 "Worry weighs a person down..." (NLT)

- Long hours and anxiety tends to destroy the life of pastors.

A. The sobering statistics

1. Share statistics regarding pastors and their families. Put on slides

2. After looking at these statistics, I'm left with a feeling that something is very wrong, yet very few people are openly talking about these things.

Prov. 18:14 "The human spirit can endure a sick body, but who can bear a crushed spirit?"
(NLT) Ministry can literally crush you!

3. So this leaves many of you wondering about Lisa and I. How do we really feel? Foothills has an atmosphere of health unlike most churches and for this we are extremely thankful.
 4. BUT, to say that this journey has not taken its toll would be incorrect. It has. Lisa and I are both mentally / spiritually / emotionally fatigued...unlike any other time we have experienced in ministry. Even good things can wear you out.
- In addition to these factors, there is another one that can add to the pressure of being a Pastor

B. The fish bowl syndrome

1. Our lives are in a fishbowl constantly on display for people to see. Any level of anonymity is pretty much non-existent. As a Pastor, my life is everyone's business!
 2. My marriage is constantly on display / our parenting / our social life – I've had people mad at me because I didn't take them hunting – fishing – or I wasn't friendly enough at Bi-Mart. I've had people disagree with how I spend my days off or vacations I take with my family. (Everything I do is scrutinized by someone!)
 3. The fishbowl is more intense for me and my family living in Molalla because I grew up here. Sam jokes with me all the time about knowing everyone in Molalla. 90% of the time I love this fact. BUT...there are moments.
 4. In every context I'm in I am expected to be Pastor Dale. I am expected to function like a Pastor. I may be in Safeway mentally exhausted trying to find some meat for the BBQ and I of course, see people I know. Some people turn that encounter into an "impromptu" counseling session. (What happens if I don't engage? You're offended)
 5. Sometimes the fishbowl is exhausting. Sometimes people forget that Lisa and I are more than just Pastor and Pastor's wife but real people who are more than the ministry we do.
- One more factor leads to the internal wear and tear

C. The duration

1. On May 1st, Lisa and I will have been in the ministry for 25 years. I went on staff at a church May 1st 1985 when I was 20 years old. (What were they thinking!) The journey God has us on has been the most amazing / thrilling / rewarding / and painful experiences of our lives. (The last 12 have been by far the best!)
2. BUT, 25 years of ministry has taken a toll. It hasn't changed my commitment to the vision / my love for all of you / or my resolve to continue forward / It hasn't change the fact that I plan on being the pastor of Foothills for another 25 year!
3. Many Pastors get to this point and either leave the ministry altogether or find another

church. I have chosen to trust my people. I have chosen to model transparency and honesty in hopes this continues to become the character of this church.

4. Lisa and I refuse to be a statistic. In fact, I pray God allows us to help change those statistics someday! Maybe this is yet another way God is going to use Foothills in the future.

- Therefore, because of the need for my continual growth and the demands of ministry...

III. The Growing Demands Of Ministry Requires Times For Renewal

A. Renewal requires rest

- God has built rest into the cycle of life. Look at what God commanded Israel.

*Lev. 25:3-5 “For six years you may plant your fields and prune your vineyards and harvest your crops, but during the seventh year the land must have a Sabbath year of **complete rest**. It is the LORD’s Sabbath. Do not plant your fields or prune your vineyards during that year. And don’t store away the crops that grow on their own or gather the grapes from your unpruned vines. The land must have a year of **complete rest**.” (NLT)*

1. Every farmer instantly understands the wisdom behind why God commanded the Israelites to allow the land itself to rest. You can’t keep taking nutrients out of the ground without putting them back in. (They didn’t have Molalla fertilizer store to go to!) You have to give the ground time to rest so it can renew itself.
2. My life is no different. The role of a Pastor is one of constant giving. The church harvests what God puts into a Pastor, but without periodic rest, there’s just nothing left. The emotional / spiritual nutrients are spent.
3. I think this is a good description how Lisa and I feel...just spent. No major crisis...There’s just not a lot of nutrients left in the ground to give you. We need some rest in order to be renewed.
4. I appreciate the elder board recognizing this in us and giving Lisa and I some time away from ministry. I want you all to know that Lisa and I will be here the first weekend in May and then we will be gone the rest of that month giving the spiritual ground in our lives a break.
5. Please don’t anyone start some ridiculous rumor that I am looking for another church. I am not! Remember, I have another 25 years to go here!

- BUT, there’s more you need to understand...

B. Renewal requires retooling

Prov. 1:5 “Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance.” (NIV)

Prov. 24:6 “For by wise guidance you will wage war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.” (NASB)

1. A major part of renewal is being able to retool for the ministry. I’ve already shared with you how I need to continue to grow in wisdom / character / and skills. Where do I go to do this and how do I do this with the constant demands of ministry?

2. I want to give you the best I have. You deserve the best I have. BUT in all honesty, this is not what you're getting. Therefore I need to add to my learning and get guidance like the Scripture says.
 3. Therefore, the month of June is dedicated to this task. What am I going to be doing? You might call it my continual education. Many professions require continual education... the month of June is set aside for this.
 4. I will not be speaking or being in the office throughout the month of June so that I can pursue retooling for ministry. I will be spending time with other Pastors who are older / larger churches / more maturity so I can learn from them.
 5. I don't need a formal classroom setting, I need other Pastors who are further down the road in life and ministry to speak into my life. It is impossible for me to do this while I'm in the day to day trench of ministry. I have to be allowed to step out of it to grow.
 6. Why am I doing this? So I can be the Pastor God wants me to be and you need me to be! So what's going to happen in May and June at Foothills? The same thing that has happened for 12 years. God is going to keep showing up changing lives!
 7. Pastor Sam is going to take 2 weeks and Jim Velez is going to do a 6 week series on marriage and family. We're going to use this time for outreach. I expect Foothills to grow during this time!
- I will stay connected to Foothills through my blogs / facebook / occasional video clip of what God is doing in my life.

C. Renewal requires a congregational response

Phil. 2:1-2 "Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose." (NLT)

1. What will determine whether or not this will be a successful time away for Lisa and I to rest and for me to retool will be your response as a church. Just as God has some very specific things He wants to accomplish in my life during this time, there are very specific things He wants to accomplish in Foothills. This is what next week is all about.
2. BUT, your response to this will either encourage Lisa and I and be used to refresh us or the wrong response will simply add to the stress and anxiety of ministry. Will we be a church that is different?
3. Will you do exactly what this scripture says? Will you agree wholeheartedly? Will you keep loving each other and keep working together with one mind and purpose? Whether I'm here or not! It is this response that will make me truly happy.
4. I realize that this is difficult for some of you and some of you don't like the fact that I will be gone this long. BUT, this church is NOT about me. God is asking us to grow out of our immature perspective of Foothills.
5. The most discouraging thing you can possibly do is to quit coming while I'm gone.

If you want to wound your pastor, just do that. WHY? Because it reveals you don't trust me / reveals you haven't bought into the vision of Foothills / it reveals you refuse to grow.

6. What I would love to see is that the church can actually grow while I'm gone! Where Foothills decides to actually follow Jesus more than Pastor Dale! This would bless my socks off!

- So there is a view through the window into your pastor's heart. Let me close by asking you for a response.

1. Will you pray for Lisa and I?
2. Will you pray for Foothills?
3. Will you choose to grow during this time? (I will define this next week.)