



## Wisdom for Pastors in the Third Third of Their Ministry Careers

These ten insights summarize learnings gained by Thrive through conversations with pastors in the third third of their careers, as they were thinking about their eventual retirements and the journey that would take them there. We hope they are helpful to you.

- 1. DON'T GO IT ALONE!**  
Virtually everything we have learned about pastors' emotional health has this at its center: The value of community, conversation, and collaboration with peers. We are better together.
- 2. DEEPEN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF YOURSELF APART FROM MINISTRY.**  
You have enough experience in ministry by now to know that self-awareness is immensely important. Keep refining it! We can help you. If you are married then your family life may be less busy these days, leaving you with new opportunities to deepen your sense of personal identity (apart from ministry) and your commitment to your spouse. Take them. And let your new wisdom help you to take care of yourself.
- 3. REMEMBER: WHO YOU ARE IN MINISTRY IS ALWAYS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT YOU DO IN MINISTRY.**  
This truth is as important today as it was the day you left seminary. However, it is easier to forget now since many of you have developed habits of workaholism, role- overidentification, and people-pleasing.
- 4. FOCUS ON THE PLACES IN MINISTRY THAT MAKE YOUR HEART SING.**  
They reveal what God planted within you long ago. Making sure that you are able to do more of the things you love to do than the things you have to do will help you to remain vibrant in ministry.



**5. LISTEN TO GOD'S VOICE OF LOVE AND GRACE.**  
Regrets will pile up if you don't. Honestly acknowledge the reality of the mistakes made over the course of your career, but do so with your heart wide open to receiving God's affection for and acceptance of you through Christ. Be as gentle with yourself as God is.

**6. ATTEND TO THE ACCUMULATION OF TRAUMAS.**  
By now you have quite a collection of ministry wins and losses. Have you understood, named, and worked through the emotions that came specifically with your traumatic experiences? Have you acknowledged your role in some of those experiences? Take care of that—through therapy or spiritual direction or peer groups. You don't want to spend the remainder of your career in bitterness, resentment, or cynicism.

**7. WHAT YOU LACK IN ENERGY YOU MAKE UP FOR IN EXPERIENCE.**  
Accept it—you can't keep up the pace you once did. But you can work smarter, based on your refined understanding of yourself and of the demands of ministry. Experience is your friend! Let it speak into decisions about what you should be doing rather than simply helping you to try and accomplish more.

**8. IT'S NEVER TOO LATE FOR LEARNING.**  
There is deep value in continuing to grow in knowledge and wisdom. There is no set pattern or tool for this, but some intentionality is important.

**9. ACTIVE, NOT PASSIVE: IF YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT ANOTHER CALL THEN BE AWARE THAT THE "MARKET" FOR PASTORS HAS CHANGED ON YOU.**  
Churches typically prefer to call younger pastors. And the call process itself has become more of a conversation about your personal style and ministry gifts rather than merely your availability. You may need to play a more active role in finding a church that fits you and vice versa. Pastors who feel that this work is unnecessary (or even unspiritual) are at a disadvantage.

**10. PLAN AHEAD FINANCIALLY AND TRUST THAT GOD WILL PROVIDE.**  
That which you have been preaching all these years is true for you too: You can trust God and you have responsibility to plan for your life.

