

Nine Steps for a Pastor's First 90 Days

By Thom Rainer

I remember well receiving a call from one of my sons. It was his first day on the job as a new pastor. It was also his first full-time ministry position. His words were amusing: "Okay, Dad. I'm here. What do I do next?"

A new pastor has a great opportunity to begin a ministry positively. Conversely, the first 90 days can also be the eventual downfall of a pastor. I've spoken with hundreds of pastors around the country; many of them have shared with me their keys to early successes. I distilled them to nine steps that should help most any new pastor.

By the way, these nine steps require much upfront investment of time. You can slow down after the first 90 days, but this time is too critical to short change any one step.



1. **Spend significant time in the Word for your sermons.** All preaching is important, but your first few sermons are critical. That's where most members will hear and see you. And that's where many first impressions are formed.
2. **Listen.** Take time to listen to the stories and concerns of your members. Unless you must speak, allow them uninterrupted time to share with you. As a consequence, you will learn much about the church, and you will win the trust of those to whom you listened.
3. **Be visible.** I know. I just said to spend significant time in the Word. It's hard to do that if you are constantly visible. As I indicated, you should be prepared for some long workweeks your first 90 days.
4. **Be accessible.** Again, you can overdo it here. You need time to carry out the other steps. But early in your ministry you should not be hidden away in a secret study at the church.
5. **Find low-hanging fruit.** In almost every church there are some actions you can take that will cost little and please most members. One pastor knew that the members really wanted to paint the worship center, but the church didn't have the funds. So he challenged them to an all-day paint day. Some members committed to buy paint. Several agreed to do the painting. And others cooked meals and served the workers. The young pastor became an instant hero.

6. **Learn the powerbrokers.** No one is asking you to compromise your principles or play dirty politics. It's just a good idea to know who the true decision makers are in the church. You need to get to know them and befriend them if possible.
7. **Go into the community.** Make a statement to the church members and the community that you are determined to serve and love the community where your church is located. Eat in local restaurants. Join a civic organization. Go meet some of the community leaders.
8. **Express your enthusiasm about being their pastor.** If you don't have enthusiasm for the church when you first arrive, you are in trouble. Let the members know how excited and honored you are to serve them as pastor.
9. **Don't speak badly about your previous church.** I have eight "thou shalts," so I'll add just one "thou shalt not." If you start speaking negatively about your former church, many members will assume you'll do the same for your present church. There is nothing to gain in such negative talk.