

# Bloggging 101:

## For Busy Ministry Leaders

Tips, Tricks, and Tools For Getting Started  
– And Staying Motivated

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GETTING STARTED

# GETTING STARTED

So you want to start a blog? Or maybe you want to start a blog... again.

Or maybe you're reading this with the intent of trying to discern whether or not you (and your ministry) truly need a blog.

Whatever your reason for reading, I hope you'll find at least some of the answers you're looking for... as well as some helpful advice on how to get started (or re-started) and stay motivated.

I think blogging has the potential to be a powerful tool for ministries and

ministry leaders – not the be all and end all of tools, methods or mediums – but a powerful tool for sure!

Whether you're a potential blogger, a beginner, or a veteran in need of some inspiration... what follows is my attempt to create a resource for busy ministry leaders who want to leverage the power of blogging to make a difference in the world.

You don't have to have hundreds (or thousands) of readers a day for blogging to be worthwhile.

What is essential is a desire to share

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the message you've been given – or that is unfolding within you – while inviting others to join in a conversation.

A conversation that you hope... in the end... serves to benefit all who engage.

So let's get to it!

The blogosphere (or more appropriately, the community of faith that God has entrusted you with) awaits.

But before you crank out that first post... let us consider a few questions...

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Does your ministry need a  
blog?

The short answer to this question (I believe) is YES.

I think there are ways that *almost* ALL ministries can benefit from having a blog – some, of course, more than others.

But if you've got a message to share... then a blog can provide a location for that message to be shared – with regularity, increasing clarity, and in a medium that has great potential for spreading both far and wide.

YES, your ministry can benefit from having a blog!

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Are you the right person  
to curate your blog?

This is an important question... because  
YOU might NOT be the best person to  
write or curate (care for) your blog.

Why?

Well, there are number of reasons to be  
considered:

- Your interest level in writing or  
blogging
- Your ability to commit to the  
process in ways that will nurture  
your own soul while speaking  
into the lives of others
- Your connection with the  
intended audience

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- Your level of “expertise” in what you’re sharing

So, while your ministry may very well need a blog... *you* may not be the best person to lead this charge.

So now it’s time to do some quick assessing:

- Is there someone more qualified and/or capable for this task?
- Is there someone more interested in writing and regularly communicating through this medium?

- Is there someone who can give the time it will require?
- Would your ministry benefit from a “team approach” to blogging with shared responsibility and ownership?

Don’t be discouraged if your answer(s) to some (or all) of these questions pointed to someone else on your ministry team – this doesn’t have to disqualify you from being a part of this newly developing extension of your ministry...

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It may just mean that you need to thoughtfully consider (hopefully with your team) what way(s) you might be able to uniquely contribute to this new venture.

Just because you're not the primary author of your blog (now) doesn't mean that the idea of a blog for your ministry should be thrown out.

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Who is your target audience?

This is another critical question!

One of the dangers of blogging is coming to believe that the “blogosphere” – and all who travel the interwebs – are your online congregation or community to influence...

And instead of customizing and contextualizing your message to a specific audience, you being to “preach to the masses.”

Now, it could very well be that your blog takes off and you eventually find yourself with hundreds (or even thousands) of readers – all around

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the world... but the reality is that probably won't happen.

And besides... that's not the community of faith God has called you to lead (is it?).

You've been called to a community of faith that is local and specific.

So target your message(s) appropriately.

Once you've defined your audience, you'll need to make sure that you communicate at an appropriate level.

Understanding the reading and comprehension level of your audience is incredibly important – and should shape how you write.

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What message do you  
want to communicate?

Honing your message, identifying some specific target areas, and staying on point are all characteristics of good blogs.

The broader your range of topics, the more likely it will be that your readers will wander away, or cease to pay attention, feeling like what originally drew their attention to your blog is only a topic you give minimal time and attention to.

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Sure, there may be reason(s) to occasionally break from your normal routine and focus on something unique and of common interest...

But be careful...

Blog readers can be fickle and quick to look for something more to their liking.

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Is blogging the right medium for your message?

After doing a little assessing of your context, audience, and general interest in blogging...

It's probably important that you consider (again) whether blogging is the right medium for your message.

Is blogging the BEST place (or even one of the best places) for you to attempt to communicate the message you have?

As a busy ministry leader, your time is precious...

So you'll want to maximize your efforts by investing your time in the right

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places.

If the community you serve isn't into reading blogs (or if this won't get them to start reading blogs)... then this might not be the right medium for you.

If there are more proven ways of communicating with your community (ie. newsletters, weekly email updates, Facebook page updates and/or notes, lunch gatherings, coffee conversations, or something else) then be sensitive to that.

Your ultimate desire should be to communicate the message you have, to the community you've been entrusted to lead, for the sake of growing the Kingdom and glorifying God.

If blogging can help you to accomplish these desires, great!

If not, be honest with yourself now... and you'll save yourself a lot of time, energy, and effort – that could be better used in a different place.

# GETTING STARTED

OK, if you've assessed and believe that blogging is a worthy investment of some of your focused time and energy... then it's time to turn our attention to some important tips, tricks, and tools that can help get you started (or re-started) on your blogging adventure!

8 TIPS

## TIPS

### #1 | Choose a platform that seems intuitive to you

Two of the more common blogging platforms are Wordpress and Blogger. Personally, I started out blogging on Blogger (a Google-based blogging platform) simply because I was a fan of Google and had a gmail account... so for me, it made sense to start there.

The more I got into blogging, and the more I wanted to “customize” my blog in order to highlight some different things, the more I realized some of Blogger’s limitations.

When I decided I was ready to “upgrade”

## TIPS

to a self-hosted site (primarily because it would give me a lot more options for personal customization), I went with Wordpress... and have been very satisfied.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** I would strongly suggest new bloggers start with the free sites, with simply themes, because you could easily get side-tracked and even lost in all of the code and “back end” upkeep that is required on a self-hosted site.

So, if you are just getting started, I would suggest taking 30-40 minutes to

explore each of these options (and you may want to include Typepad and Tumblr as you research different blogging platforms).

You may even want to ask some of your blogging friends (if you have any – if you don’t, you will soon 😊) which platform they chose – and why.

In the end, you want something that “feels” right to you... because this is your blog – and you’ll be the one spending the most time here.

## TIPS

### #2 | Choose the *right* blog (and domain) name

Choosing the right blog name – and corresponding domain name – is crucial.

You want it to be simple, memorable, and communicate something about you (and what you're writing about).

You don't need to over think this... but you definitely don't want to under think it either.

As you begin to brainstorm possible options, do a couple of things:

1. Do a quick web search on your possible blog/domain name and

## TIPS

see what comes up – you don't want people searching for you (or your site) and being sent someplace questionable.

2. Identify any possible words that would be hard (or easily confused) when spelling.
3. Consider if there are any other people, or ministries, that have the same (or similar) names and whether or not that would be confusing or misleading.

Once you identify your blog/domain name, decide whether a “tag line” or sub-title might be appropriate to help further distinguish what you (and your blog) are all about.

After you've secured a blog and domain name, it's time to start creating!

## TIPS

### #3 | Start writing

Once you've chosen a blogging interface, it's time to start writing.

Greet the world (or at least your mom – who may be the only person who reads your early posts).

It may take some time, but hopefully over the course of your first several posts, you'll find:

1. Your voice as a writer,
2. A rhythm that works for you, and
3. A small following that may help to shape what your blog is becoming.

## TIPS

### #4 | Create good content

This probably sounds like a no-brainer... but its importance cannot be understated or underestimated!

Without good content, readers will have no reason to continue to visit your blog.

Good content will bring readers back... and get people talking (which is what you really want – right?).

It will challenge them to think about the message you feel compelled to share.

It may even challenge them to make important life changes.

Good content should invite readers into a

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conversation.

Readers know (and like to know that you know – as the author) that they have something to add to the conversation... so do your best to avoid one-sided rants that don't leave room for alternative positions.

The best blogs (I've found) look to create space for a growing and collective wisdom to shape the community – this is facilitated by you (the writer), but definitely leaves space for the community to comment, discuss, disagree and otherwise engage the

issue or idea that has been presented.

As a facilitator, you'll have to be good about monitoring comments – and shaping the expectation of that space – such that those who comment are also expected to be charitable when responding to you or others in the comment section of your blog.

The last thing you want is your blog being derailed by someone else – with their own agenda.

Don't rule with an "iron fist," but don't be loosey-goosey either.

## TIPS

### #5 | Don't worry about how many people are reading your posts...

One of the quickest ways to get discouraged as a blogger is to put too much stock in blog statistics.

More than likely, your reader base will grow slowly... over the course of many months, or even years.

While you can't totally ignore blog stats (because they can tell us some meaningful information – like what content your readers seem to be most interested in), it can be all too easy to become obsessed with how many people are reading (or not reading) your writing.

# TIPS

If you're writing for numbers alone...  
then you're writing for the wrong  
reason.

You need to decide early on that  
regardless of how many views any  
one post gets – or how many visits  
your site gets per day or week – that  
your message is important enough to  
get out there that you'd do it even if  
it was just viewed by one other  
person.

Over time, your reading community will  
grow... so give it time and commit to  
your call to write.

## TIPS

### #6 | Find a rhythm that feels right for you.

An important part of blogging is finding a pace – or rhythm – that feels right to you.

And your unique rhythm may be dictated by how you approach blogging...

If your blog takes on the form of an “online journal,” then it may be easier to post something every day.

But if you plan to post lengthy, researched articles on your blog (and this isn't your new full-time job), it might be more feasible to post once or twice a week.

It might take you a couple of months to

## TIPS

find your way into this rhythm, but the important thing is to know that it's something you want to establish.

Be flexible enough to allow room for change, as your affinity for blogging may wax and wane as you get into it.

Finding a rhythm as a blogger is important to your longevity.

In many ways it's like running a race...

If we sprint out of the gate and burn up all of our energy in the first 100 yards – but the race is a marathon – it doesn't matter how quickly we got there...

we won't make it to the finish line.

Just like a marathoner has learned how to pace themselves, we'll need to feel our way into a rhythm that feels good, and works, given our other life commitments, if we plan to go the distance.

## TIPS

### #7 | Be consistent

Your readers will definitely give you some grace as you're establishing yourself as a writer...

But before long they'll want you to be consistent.

Whether you're a weekend blogger, or a work-week blogger...

A 1-day a week, 3-days a week, 5-days a week, or 7-days a week blogger...

You'll want to establish a pattern that both you and your reader(s) can come to depend on.

## TIPS

### #8 | Be conscious of your voice

I touched on this in Tip #4 on creating good content, but it's worth highlighting...

Most readers don't want to hear from a "know it all," but instead, an informed writer who cares about the content and the reader – and desires to create a space for the two to interface.

When writing, we don't get the opportunity to clarify how things come across (although in blogging, that is made more possible through the comment section).

# TIPS

You don't want to spend too much of your valuable time clarifying the way something came across... but instead, engaging in generative dialog about the content you posted on.

You can't expect your readers to "know what you're thinking" or "what you meant to say," but instead, you need to be intentional with the tone of your "voice" when you write.

Finding the appropriate level of authority (otherwise, why would others want to read what you have to say) and humility (which communicates that

you know you DON'T know it all).

Oh, and humility can't be faked... at least, not for very long. So if this isn't a strong suit for you, it may be worth having a trusted friend or colleague who would be willing to read your posts BEFORE you post them.

4 TRICKS

# TRICKS

## #1 | Keep a running list of topics or ideas

One of the challenges to blogging with consistency is coming up with new and different topics on which to write about.

But I've found that by keeping a running list of ideas or issues that I'd like to write about, when I hit those days when nothing is "bubbling up within," I can turn to my list and find inspiration (and trust – those days will come).

There are a lot of ways to go about this... You might consider keeping scratch paper, or a little notebook, on hand.

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Then whenever something comes to mind you make a note of it.

You might also opt for an online tool to keep track of your ideas.

I started with the “notes” app that’s build into MAC products. I later moved over to Springpad, and eventually Evernote, as I began to store other items there as well.

One of the things I like most about Evernote is that it allows you to “clip” articles from the web.

So now, more than just a list or an idea, I’ve got a corresponding resource to

draw inspiration and/or facts from.

Another way to organize your blogging ideas is according to topic or theme.

As you thoughtfully make decisions about your blog’s target audience, and central message, you may begin to think of specific themes or topics that you want to focus your message around.

I’ve currently got nine different categories within my blog – all focused on different elements of college ministry – that help to bring shape to my writing.

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There might be ways that I could condense these nine categories down to a smaller number...

But I like being able to distinguish each of my posts according to a meaningful category that makes sense for my field.

If I were to redesign my blog, I might consider moving to just three categories that are found in the subtitle of my blog (which my current theme doesn't prominently display – yes, this is a problem).

My subtitle is “The Convergence of

Christ, Culture, and the College Experience.

So my three categories would likely be: Christ, Culture, and College Experience.

Think through your field and/or your interest and it should help to generate some specific fields (or categories) that you can use to help organize your blogging ideas.

# TRICKS

## # 2 | Use social media

The best way to get your posts in front of the largest pool of readers is through social media.

More than likely, your readers will spend a lot more time on things like Facebook and Twitter than they will your blog.

And if they're not subscribed to your blog – meaning it's being delivered to them via email every time you post a new post, or it's showing up in their eReader feed (and they actually check that with any regularity), then you'll need to use some of the

# TRICKS

different social media avenues to get your posts out there.

If you're not currently on Facebook or Twitter (among some of the other social media outlets), then you might want to ask a middle schooler, high schooler or college student to catch you up to speed. ;)

You'll also want to enable some of the "share" features within your blog.

Depending on the platform you choose (WordPress, Blogger, etc.), and the specific theme within the platform you choose, "share" features might

be a normal element included in the design.

If it's not, you'll want to find a "plug-in" that will allow your readers to "share" your post – if they like it.

It's one thing for you to like what you've written – and push it through social media – but it's totally different when it comes from an "unbiased" source.

When your readers start to tweet or re-tweet your posts, or share it with their Facebook friends, then your message will begin to spread beyond your personal reach.

# TRICKS

## #3 | Use guest posts

Inviting guests to contribute posts to your blog can do a lot.

Blogging can be time-consuming and mentally taxing... which can mean that a break from the normal pace or rhythm of your writing may be necessary from time-to-time.

A guest post (or several guest posts) can allow you to step away from writing in order to be refreshed and re-energized.

Guest posts can also bring new traffic to your blog – creating a lot of potential – as your guest tweets and shares

# TRICKS

with his or her own community of readers.

One of the “fears” that some bloggers (especially new bloggers) might have with offering valuable space to guest post contributors is that “their” readers might like the content, style, or voice of the guest more than they do the host – and potentially “jump ship.”

While this is a possibility, I think the potential reward far outweighs the risk.

If your readers follow blogs, then it is

likely that they will have been (or soon will be) exposed to this other author anyway...

But by inviting them in, and asking them to speak to “your” community, you’re actually expressing how important you believe your community to be.

You want to expose your reading community to more thoughts than just your own – possibly some of the “best” voices out there on the topic at hand.

# TRICKS

## #4 | Recycle Posts

Once you've posted a post, it doesn't mean that it has to get lost in your archives for all eternity.

In fact, I think it makes good sense to continue to put old posts – especially those posts that we find to be relevant, implicating, or compelling – in front of your readers.

You don't want to put the same post(s) back in front of them week after week after week...

But maybe every few months, or even yearly (depending on how much you post).

# TRICKS

This is a great way to keep conversations going, not to mention get it in front of new readers who may not have seen it the last time you posted it.

If you post new posts three times a week, sharing two or three “posts from the archives” could be a great way of engaging your community on a more consistent basis.

TOOLS

# TOOLS

## #1 | Find a great theme

As someone who is just getting started, let me encourage you to go with one of the free themes that is offered by your free host site.

You don't want to pay a lot of money to purchase your personalized domain, theme, and host site if you're brand new – because you might get a couple of weeks in and decide it's not for you.

I highly recommend the free themes, which may not have all of the bells and whistles that some of your favorite sites have – but they'll have enough to get you started.

# TOOLS

You can always upgrade (and import all of your previously-written posts) at a later date.

Themes are important.

The design of your blog says something about you – so it's ok to give it some personal flare.

But your theme will also factor into how likely some of your readers will be to return and/or spend time exploring your site.

Lighter themes, with lots of “white space” and intuitive navigation tends to keep readers around more than

darker themes that feel crowded and are harder to intuitively find your way around.

Themes, while adding a personal touch to a digital forum, should help (and not hinder) the effort of communicating your message.

# TOOLS

## #2 | Utilize your sidebar wisely

The sidebar may very well be the most significant element on your blog – behind the actual post content.

The sidebar is where you will host content that appears on every page your readers land on.

This is where they learn from you what is important to you and your ministry.

This is a great place to provide:

- Contact or social media information – You want your readers to easily and readily be able to connect with you... and even if they don't, they'll want to

# TOOLS

be able to connect with you. So social media touch points are a must.

- Subscription information – Likewise, you'll want your readers to easily and readily be able to read your posts. So whether it's getting your latest posts delivered to them by email (via tools like Feedburner), or receiving a weekly or monthly email that includes important updates from your blog (via a tool like Mailchimp), you'll want to give your readers the chance to have your content delivered

right to their inbox.

SPECIAL NOTE: Signing up for a tool like Feedburner at the genesis of your blog can help to track "subscribers" for justification or reporting purposes.

- Information about upcoming events – This is the big 2 for 1 of blogs! Readers will come to your blog to read your latest post, but while they're there, they find out about the next "in person" event scheduled to take place. Online ministry should *always* try to point people to "live interaction."

# TOOLS

- Biographical information – This is a chance for people to begin to get to know you. Some blogs have a built in “About” page... but a couple of biographical sentences with a nice picture (of you) can go a long way to help personalize your blog. And whether it’s on your “About” page, or one of your first posts (that you can link to in your sidebar profile), you’ll want to give your readers the chance to learn more about you, your educational and ministerial background, and what your blog is really all about.
- Recent posts and archive information – Once you have a reader on your site, one of your goals is to keep them there... in the sense that if they like what they’ve read so far (likely, the post that brought them to the site in the first place), they’ll want to stick around and explore some more of your great content. Your sidebar can be a

great place to list recent posts, as well as a generated archive – and you should be able to find widgets within your blogging platform for both.

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## #3 | Give your readers multiple ways to connect

I said it before, but it's worth repeating...

Whether it's through social media, weekly updates, or daily emails delivered right to their inbox... you'll want to give your readers a wide variety of ways to keep up with you.

It would be a mistake to rely too heavily upon one specific way of connecting – because different people will want to be able to access your content in different ways, at different times, for different reasons.

You want to make life as easy as possible for your readers... because then

# TOOLS

they'll know that coming back to your blog isn't going to be a whole lot of extra "work."

You can use widgets in your sidebar to create opportunities for your readers to connect, or (and) you can add contact info to your "About" page, or (and) you could even create an "Update" page – which has a list of ways that your readers can stay up-to-date with you.

# TOOLS

## #4 | Utilize analytics

Your free blogging platform should have a way of tracking your “stats.”

I mentioned earlier in this brief tutorial that you don't want to become obsessed with how many people are reading your posts or visiting your blog from day to day...

And I stand behind that.

But it would be a mistake to totally ignore them as well...

Blog stats can tell you some important information about your readers and what they like, that can help to shape your future content.

# TOOLS

Blog stats can tell you things like:

- What topics your readers like... and don't like.
- Which days of the week they tend to read your blog... and which they don't.
- What time of day they tend to read your blog.
- What social media outlets are driving them to your blog.
- What kinds of web searches are taking them to your site.
- And more...

STAYING MOTIVATED

# STAYING MOTIVATED

I wish I could say that there's a silver bullet to staying motivated...

But there's not.

At least none that I've found yet...

Like most good things that are worth doing, this is going to require something of you.

Commitment.

Persistence.

Consistency.

Creativity.

Rarely will you find quick or booming success here.

It will be a slow growth... that eventually begins to build on your levels of commitment, persistence, consistency, and creativity.

You need to think of your blog much like you would a good marriage, post-graduate work, or even a workout regimen.

It may be hard work at times, and require more effort than you think that it should, but because you believe in it you resolve to give it whatever it takes!

In reality, if it were easy, (to stay

# STAYING MOTIVATED

motivated), then everyone would be blogging.

But they're not.

Because it's not easy.

You, however, are blogging (or are strongly considering it)...

And I hope that you will find enough encouragement along the way to stick with it.

You have been called to lead a community.

You have been given a message that matters.

Your (ministry's) blog is an important medium for communicating your message to your community in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

So get to it.

A FINAL WORD

## A FINAL WORD

Well, there's a lot more that could be said about blogging... for sure.

But hopefully you've got a few tips, tricks, and tools to help you get started on your blogging adventure.

There's no telling where it will lead.

You're a busy ministry leader... and finding ways to maximize your time are essential.

Blogging is a great way to expand the reach of your ministry beyond the traditional boundaries of your ministry context.

I hope you will take what you have

learned here at use it as a launching pad to great things!

I hope that you'll find the blogosphere a great place to continue conversations with your community, explore new ideas and big questions, as well as connect with new people.

I also hope that what begins in the blogosphere will eventually lead to new, and more in depth, face-to-face interaction.

Because I don't think what happens online should ever replace what can happen offline... it should only enhance it.

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