

# Thoughts On Selecting A Pastor

Hopefully the selection and call of a new pastor for a church does not occur often. But when lay leaders are required to search and select a new pastor, they are often inexperienced with the biblical guidelines and some key aspects of the process. This document provides an overview of suggested organizational activities involved in the process of selecting a pastor. The details must be adapted to each unique church. The primary focus of this document is to provide some spiritual guidance that might be missed or ignored resulting in tragedy in the months and years following the selection of a new pastor. Lord willing, this document will prove to be an encouragement and blessing to those who have the wonderful task of searching for a new shepherd of the sheep. The following thoughts are the result of someone asking whether if voting for a pastor was like casting lots. The answer to their question was, “Yes, if biblical principles are not followed.”

**Throwing The Lots.** When a pastor leaves a church either of his own choice or because he was asked to leave, church leaders start looking for another pastor. The search for a pastor begins by selecting a Call Committee or a group of people who have the responsibility to find a new pastor. The first mistake the Call Committees often make is that they decide to look for someone who does not have the weaknesses of the last pastor. They usually want someone who has strengths that the other pastor did not have. They want an “improved model.” This is especially true if there were problems with the last pastor. For example, if the last pastor was not a “people person” or was not very charismatic, the Call Committee often decides that they want a pastor who is more loving and charismatic. Or, if the last pastor had few organizational skills, the Call Committee often decides that they want a pastor who is more of an administrator. Most Call Committees look for

a pastor who is thirty to fifty years of age. They often want someone who is married and has at least one child. They may seek someone who was a pastor of a larger church and is an eloquent preacher. The Call Committee often wants someone who has a “sense of humor” and preaches about 25-30 minutes. They typically look for someone who is a graduate of an approved seminary or was on the staff of a well-known church. If the church is young, they might look for a young pastor with a vision for reaching the younger generation. The goal might be to increase church attendance.

The initial search for such a pastor begins by asking friends, contacting seminaries, leaders within the denomination, or maybe a man who is currently serving as a pastor. Men are contacted, seminaries post potential vacancies on bulletin boards, and resumes are submitted. The Call Committee sorts through the resumes, interviews the men, or maybe visits the church that the potential



Baby Baptism By A Pastor

candidate is currently serving in order to hear him speak and to determine what others think about him. The typical response of most people is positive. If he sounds good, seems like a great speaker, and the Call Committee is interested in the man, he will eventually be asked to visit the church.

When he comes, he meets with the Call Committee, the leadership team, and maybe others in the church. On Sunday, he usually preaches the morning sermon and meets other leaders and/or people in the afternoon. Most of the church members are not aware that the prospective pastor will probably preach an old and familiar sermon that has proven to be a “great one.” So he dusts it off, reviews it, and practices it over and over again. He does his best. The interviews usually go well because everyone is on their best behavior. Somewhere along the way, other leaders and seminary professors are contacted to obtain their opinions about the man. The references are usually positive because the

potential  
pastor  
supplied  
names of  
friends and  
others who  
think highly


of him. Even those who have concerns about the man might think that a different environment, or a different setting may be the very thing the man needs in order to grow. Rarely does anyone want to give a negative evaluation of an individual looking for a job. Eventually, the church might ask him to be their pastor if he outperforms the other candidates. The process can potentially become a competition, rather than a search for the Lord’s will in the life of the pastor and the church.

**The Result.** After the new man has been serving as pastor for six months to maybe two years, the church leadership, the Call Committee, and church members may begin to realize that the pastor is not what they expected. They discover that the man has weaknesses that they never anticipated. The weaknesses usually surface in meetings at the leadership level. The church may discover that his preaching is different than the sermon he gave when he was candidating for the position. Sometimes they discover that the pastor’s doctrine is different. A number of years ago one church discovered that their new pastor believed differently than they did. They were Arminian in theology and he was Reformed. They were surprised. What he believed was

different than what the last pastor believed. These situations are very common. Another church discovered that their new assistant pastor was into homosexual pornography. In another church, it came to light that the pastor did not want to minister to the “old people.” Another church discovered that the pastor did not want to teach the Bible verse-by-verse. He liked only topical studies. Some churches discover that their pastor is a dictator and wants to control everything. Churches can make a great mistake when they violate biblical principles in the selection of their pastor. It is easy to violate the following verse,

[Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin. \(NASB\) 1 Timothy 5:22](#)

Many church leaders and Call Committees fail at the very

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beginning of the search process - the first meeting. The failure occurs when they first decide what type of pastor they want. The greatest and most common mistake is that they ignore the guidelines that God has given in the scriptures. When we ignore the Word of God, we are “throwing lots” or dice. What a church gets is the “luck of the dice.”

**Some Guidance.** But God has given church leadership teams some guidelines which will help them avoid some drastic errors. The guidance is found in the spiritual character of the prospective pastor, his ministry qualifications, and his heart. The procedures and processes are secondary.

**Marks of Maturity.** God has outlined the marks of spiritual maturity that a church should look for in a pastor in 1 Timothy 3:1-8 and Titus 1:5-9. We would encourage you to read an article that discusses these marks of maturity about an elder. Since a pastor is one of the elders, the article explains what church leaders and Call Committees should be looking for in a future pastor. The article is called [“Recovering the Pattern of Biblical Leadership.”](#) You might also be interested in two presentations titled, [“God’s Design For The Church”](#) and

[“Marks of Spiritual Maturity.”](#) We shall look here at only four of the marks of spiritual maturity.

The first mark to look for in selecting a pastor is that the candidate must be a male according to 1 Tim. 3:2. While being a male is not a mark of maturity, it is a requirement that God has for those who serve as elders or pastors.

[An overseer, then, must be . . . the husband of one wife . . . \(NASB\) 1 Tim. 3:2](#)

The Greek word for “husband” in this verse is “male.” The literal Greek says that the overseer or elder must be a “one woman male.” Since it is impossible for a woman to be a the “male of a woman” - a husband - we understand that a pastor must be a male. [1 Timothy 2:12 also tells us that a woman cannot teach adult males.](#) That is, a pastor or elder must be a male in order to minister to the entire congregation.

Second, the pastor must not be a novice in the faith.

[. . . not a new convert . . . \(NASB\) 1 Tim. 3:6](#)

It is unfortunate how many times men are asked to be pastors who have been following Jesus for only 5-7 years. Seminary can educate a man, but it cannot make a man spiritually mature. There is no substitute for length of life in the faith. On occasions it works out well, but only because the Holy Spirit has performed a remarkable work in the life of the individual. Men who became Christians in childhood or in their teenage years have an advantage over those who become Christians in their twenties because the Holy Spirit has been working in their life for a longer period of time.

Third, most young men are idealistic in their thinking, and the tempering of time has not yet occurred. Some men, young and old, like a good fight. Once they are convinced how things should be done, they are willing to fight with others in order to win. At first they may try to be diplomatic but if necessary some will go to war. That is the reason God gave us the following marks of spiritual maturity.

[. . . temperate, prudent, respectable . . . not pugnacious . . . \(NASB\) 1 Tim. 3:2-3](#)

[. . . not self-willed, not quick-tempered . . . \(NASB\) Titus](#)

[1:7](#)

Is the candidate self-willed,? Does he get angry when his desires are frustrated? Is he basically a fighter, or is he kind, patient, and willing to defer to others? Does he want to be the “king of the mountain” or have the “last word” about most issues?

When you see a man who wants things his way, he is not qualified to be in the ministry. A self-willed man is very difficult to work with. He might be eager to fight every theological battle that comes along. Or, he might minimize the teaching of the Word of God in order to achieve his goal. That is a common pattern. Anyone on the leadership team can be guilty of these sins. Their perspective is often selfish. They have assumed that God does not lead through the entire team of elders. They have concluded that they have a corner on God’s will. For an expanded discussion regarding God’s pattern for making decisions, we would refer the reader to [“Recovering the Pattern of Biblical Leadership.”](#)

Fourth, the prospective pastor must be a skilled teacher.

[. . . able to teach . . . \(NASB\) 1 Tim. 3:2](#)

The Greek word for “able to teach” actually means that he is a skilled teacher. That is, an elder should be a skilled teacher. This is usually the primary characteristic that most churches look for in a pastor. But there is more according to Titus 1:9.

[. . . holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. \(NASB\) Titus 1:9](#)

Titus 1:9 says that a pastor must hold to the “faithful word” - the Word of God. It is not enough for the Call Committee to read the doctrinal statement that he submitted when he applied for the position. How much of the Bible does he really know? If he is a recent seminary graduate, he should have a good grasp of scripture; but if he has been out of seminary for some time his grasp of scripture might be poor if he does not spend very much time studying it. Can he answer questions about what he believes? It is not uncommon for churches to ignore the doctrinal statement that a prospective candidate submits. A quick look is often what it receives, especially if he is already

a friend of someone in the church. Rarely is a pastor seriously quizzed about what he believes when he visits the prospective church.

Most laymen assume that if he went to a good seminary, his doctrine must be okay; and if he is the son of a famous preacher, his theology must be correct. But seminary does not guarantee that any student will agree with what he was taught in school. A graduate from a nationally recognized conservative seminary once stated that he did not believe the Old Testament contained any prophecies. He believed that the “prophecies” were written after the events occurred. They were merely recorded history. He also believed that there are no prophecies about Jesus. When the prospective pastor visits, a formal meeting should be held in which he is asked a series of doctrinal questions. Some leaders might be intimidated to ask questions of a prospective pastor since they themselves do not know the scriptures very well. If this is true, the Call Committee should invite some teacher(s) or elders in the church who might be able to provide the leadership

doctrinal statement carefully and determine what doctrines he did not discuss. Why did he word his doctrinal statement the way that he did? This is a greatly neglected part of the selection process.

Laymen are allowing false teachers - wolves - to come into the flock because they feel inadequate to ask the questions. They feel that asking questions is too academic, or might offend the man. The truth is if it offends the man, then you do not want him. The primary responsibility of the pastor is the teaching of scripture. The priority issue in the interview is what does he believe about the book that you want him to teach and preach! It is amazing how many churches discover that their pastor believes a false doctrine after he has arrived.

**His Responsibilities.** At the end of this document is a questionnaire which is entitled, “What Should The Pastor Do?” A number of responsibilities that pastors are sometimes expected to perform are listed. Some church leadership teams expect a pastor to perform only some of them, and some



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in asking the questions and in providing an evaluation.

Here are some questions that could be asked of the prospective pastor. For example, what does he believe about the Bible and about Jesus Christ? Does he believe that the original manuscripts in which the Bible was written were written without error? Does he believe that Jesus Christ existed before He was virgin born? Does he believe that Jesus was born of a virgin? How is a person saved? Does he believe that we are born as sinners? What does he believe about women elders and pastors? What are his views about homosexuals, abortion, eternal judgment, spiritual gifts, the seeker movement, and the ministry to younger and older people? What does he believe about inerrancy of the scriptures and why? What does he believe about discipleship? Does he believe in evangelism? Has he ever shared his faith with his neighbors or someone at work? If he has, when was the last time that he did that? What does he believe about God's plan for the future? What does he believe about the Holy Spirit's activities today in the life of a Christian? Does he believe in Satan, demons, and holy angels? Read his

churches might expect a pastor to perform all of them. Ask the leadership team to rank each responsibility on a scale from 1 to 24, 1 being the most important pastoral responsibility and 24 being the least important. Then ask the leadership team to indicate how many hours the pastor should devote to each task per week. When they are finished, ask them to total the hours.

When this questionnaire has been used in the past, most leadership teams ranked sermon preparation and teaching and preaching near the top, but assigned a small number of hours to the responsibility - typically, less than ten hours per week. Administration, organization, counseling, time with people, and time with the staff received the greatest number of hours and a lower ranking. The number of hours they assigned to each responsibility revealed what the leadership team really believed about the priority of teaching and preaching. On one occasion the leadership team of a church in Pennsylvania had the pastor working eighty hours per week. That is an interesting discussion all by itself.

The questionnaire could also be given to the prospective



pastor to determine his priorities and to compare his results to that of the leadership team. The questionnaire is provided as a resource.

What does God say are the pastor’s priorities? The answer is given in John 21:16-17, Acts 6:1-2, 1 Peter 5:2, and is summarized in 1 Timothy 5:17. In Acts 6:1-2 the apostles make it clear that they do not want to have very much to do with administration. 1 Timothy 5:17 helps us understand that the priority for the elders, including the pastor, is the teaching and preaching of the Word of God. Administration and organization are secondary. The vast majority of the elder’s time should be given to preaching and teaching, including study of the Word of Life. This is true for both the elders and the pastor of a church. God intended for the deacons to do the administrative and organizational functions with some oversight from the elders (which includes the pastor). That is the strong message of Acts 6:1-2 and 1 Timothy 5:17.

In most churches the lay elders are viewed as the organizational men and not as spiritual shepherds

of the flock. This is a failing of the church today. What does the prospective pastor believe? Are the leadership team and the prospective pastor in agreement? Again, the articles called “[Recovering the Pattern of Biblical Leadership](#)” and “[God’s Design For The Church](#)” discuss the priorities in detail.

**His Sermons.** Another area to explore is “How does he prepare for his sermons?” It might surprise many, but there are some pastors who do not like to study and prepare for a Sunday message. It is common for many pastors to spend the bulk of their week in organizational and people related activities and give only a small portion of their week to study and sermon preparation. They love being busy but not with the Word of God. What does he want to do and what does he do? A pastor once bragged that he only needed an afternoon to prepare six messages, and frequently he would speak without any or with

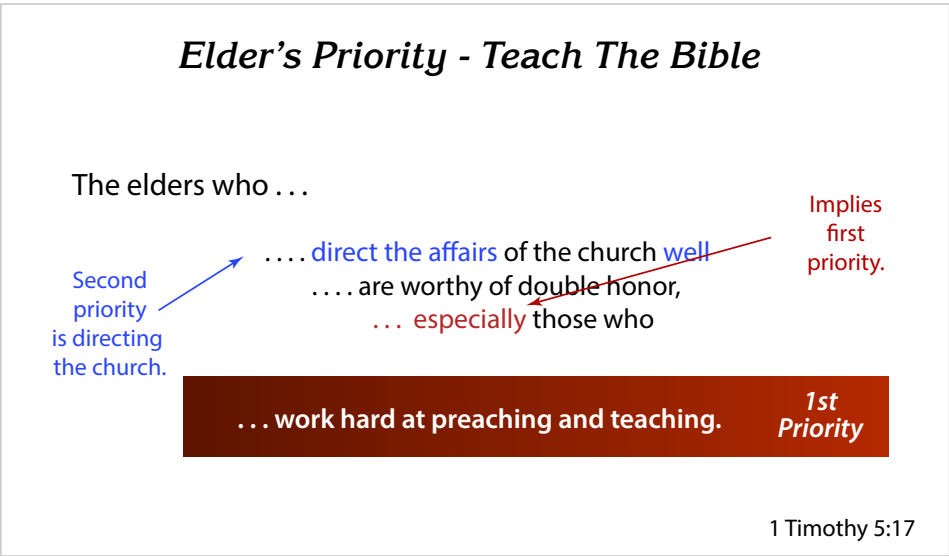
little preparation. He had a gift for public speaking and years of practice. His sermons were positive and many loved his enthusiasm. The apostle Paul has these words for us,

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. (NASB) 2 Tim. 4:3-4

His conduct is a reminder of God’s warning in Hosea 4.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge I also will reject you from being My priest. (NASB) Hosea 4:6

The heart of any teacher or pastor should be to study the Word of God. There they meet the Lord. When



one plunges into the Word of God, the Holy Spirit can then minister to that person. When a teacher’s or pastor’s heart is on fire as a result of bathing himself in the Word of God, then the Holy Spirit can use him to light the church on fire! Years ago a pastor admitted that he had not opened the Word of God for almost one year before he stepped into the pulpit to preach. It is possible that his people enjoyed his messages, but it is clear that he must have been as spiritually dry as a dead blade of grass. When a preacher or teacher is not constantly sharing new things from scripture, it is clear that he is not spiritually growing himself. If he is spending large amounts of time in scripture, will it not be obvious?

Another area to explore is the type of sermons he likes. Does he like to do topical preaching or book-by-book, verse-by-verse in-depth teaching of scripture? How long are his sermons?

Short messages require very little preparation. A pastor can read the passage, provide a high overview of the passage, and proceed to an application. After about 20-30 minutes the sermon is over. A pastor who is committed to really teaching the Bible will explain what each verse is about and will explain what God is saying and provide an application. He will even explain the difficult passages. This may require about 45 minutes, since it is difficult to explain the passage in depth and provide great application in only 30 minutes.

By the manner in which he teaches, he will help his people learn how to study the Bible too! Down through history the famous Bible teachers did this. It is their commentaries that are sold in the Christian book stores today. They have impacted the world because they were committed to making sure that the people were not destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). They were also committed to teaching through the entire Bible. This might require that the congregation be re-educated about the priority of the pastor's ministry, since some Christians want the short messages - sermonettes. Many do not understand the life transforming role of the Word of God in their lives. The pastor should be committed to teach the entire Bible just as Paul did. Listen to Paul,

[For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. \(NASB\) Acts 20:27](#)

**The Holy Spirit.** 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 reminds us that God gives the increase in the spiritual realm.

[I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. \(NASB\) 1 Cor. 3:6-7](#)

Programs, techniques, and gimmicks may cause church attendance to increase, but only God adds souls to the kingdom of God. Only new spiritual life by [faith in Jesus Christ](#) and spiritually maturing saints are important. Attendance is secondary. No church leader or pastor should rob God of His work by taking credit for what God has accomplished. 1 Cor. 2:14 reminds us that only the Holy Spirit can help someone understand spiritual truth. Neither the teacher nor preacher should ever assume that he has caused the spiritual growth. He is only

one of many who plant or water.

Therefore, the leadership team and Call Committee should seek to determine upon whom does the pastor depend for the ministry. He can do a poor job of planting and watering by not preparing properly. Is he taking credit for the good things that God is doing?

Does he talk about being filled with the Holy Spirit according to Ephesians 5:17-18? Does he want to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-23)? Or, is he a car that wants to go somewhere but has no fuel? Another article that may be of interest is called "[Filled With The Spirit.](#)"

**The Unknown.** The major unknown with any pastor or leader is how does he work with other people in a leadership team? Some in ministry view their elders or church leaders as spiritually inferior due to a lack of education or ministry inexperience. Many pastors believe that they have a corner on God's direction for the church. We must not forget that some lay leaders have the same problem. As a result anyone who is opposed to their views becomes a "problem person." This is human nature, unfortunately. But it should not exist in the church of God.

One pastor told his leadership team that if they would just let him make all of the decisions, they would have a large church attendance. His definition of success was numbers. He missed the point that the teaching of scripture results in changed lives when the Holy Spirit is able to ignite the heart of the teacher or preacher through the Word of God. Does he want to be in control? Unfortunately, the Call Committee will only discover this by asking the leaders of a church that he once pastored.

How does the pastor work with the other leaders? The ideal model is one in which the pastor sees himself as just one of the team. He should believe that God sets the direction and vision of the church when unanimity is reached among all of the elders. He is simply one of the elders who preaches Sunday morning. He is one member of the team. He may be a spiritual coach, but the Holy Spirit brings vision and direction when everyone agrees.

What will the new pastor be like? One prospective pastor openly admitted that he viewed himself as the lead person to whom everyone should yield. No interviews, meetings, sermons, or questions will ultimately reveal how any pastor will conduct himself in the future when someone disagrees with him. Only time will reveal his real spiritual maturity when things are not

done as he would like them to be done and others disagree. This is the unknown territory. We should quickly add that the same is true for the other elders within the leadership team. The true character of the prospective pastor will come to light about 6 months to 2 years after he is hired. A Call Committee must depend on prayer and the Lord's guidance.

**Conclusion.** The above points are important, but the priority characteristics of the pastor should be that his life is constantly filled with the Holy Spirit and that he really loves Jesus. Here is a great quote from the The Door that makes the point.

I wonder what would happen if the only qualification for ministry was a love for Jesus, a passion for God, a longing for intimacy with the Savior. I wonder what would happen if the job description for a minister was that he or she spend all of their time developing the skills (disciplines) for loving God . . . Dr. Richard Halverson is right We don't want ministers anymore, we want CEOs.

We don't want prophets, we want politicians. We don't want godliness, we want experience. We don't want spirituality, we want efficiency. We don't want humility, we want charisma. We don't want godly authority, we want relational skill. As a result, we have thousands and thousands of churches in this country whose ministers are very qualified to do what the Church has asked of them, but the one thing that hasn't been asked of them is to love Jesus. So they don't. And neither do their people. As a result, it is not just God who is dead . . . the Church is dead. (The Door. Jan/Feb. 1992, back page).

The type of pastor a church gets depends upon the spiritual quality of the leadership team and the type of pastor they are seeking. Pray and ask God for direction. We would encourage you to read "[Recovering the Pattern of Biblical Leadership](#)."

# *Questionnaire:*

## *What Should The Pastor Do?*

A number of responsibilities that pastors are sometimes expected to perform are listed below. Please determine which responsibilities you believe a pastor should perform and then rank each responsibility on a scale from 1 to 24, 1 being the most important pastoral responsibility and 24 being the least important. Then specify the number of hours per week you believe the pastor should give to each responsibility.

Pastor's Potential Responsibility	Rank	Hours/Week
1. Administration/organization	_____	_____
2. Church Discipline	_____	_____
3. Sermon Preparation - study	_____	_____
4. Time with People	_____	_____
5. Visitation of sick	_____	_____
6. Counseling	_____	_____
7. Weddings/Pre-martial counseling	_____	_____
8. Funerals	_____	_____
9. Discipleship of individuals	_____	_____
10. Preaching/Teaching	_____	_____
11. Evangelism	_____	_____
12. Leadership Meetings	_____	_____
13. Time with Church Staff	_____	_____
14. Phone Calls/	_____	_____
15. Social Events	_____	_____
16. Christian Education	_____	_____
17. Youth Ministry	_____	_____
18. Missions	_____	_____
19. Social Action	_____	_____
20. Community Service	_____	_____
21. Planning Sunday Service	_____	_____
22. Ministerial Associations	_____	_____
23. Time With Jesus	_____	_____
24. _____	_____	_____