

Search Counsel

A Devotional Coaching Guide
for Call Committees

By

John R. Cionca and Fred W. Prinzling

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Acknowledgements and Dedication

This book is dedicated to a team of ministry friends who love Jesus Christ and love the Church. They recognize that healthy congregations require outstanding leadership. Thus, they appreciate and esteem the pastoral calling of servant-leaders.

These colleagues are supporters and encouragers of our work with pastors and churches in transition. Accordingly, acknowledgement and appreciation is given to these friends who are truly partners in the production of this resource.

You guys are the best!

Preface and Authors

One of the greatest decisions one makes in life is the selection of a mate. Who a person chooses to marry will influence who they become, where they are going, and how life will be lived on a daily basis.

Selecting a ministry mate is similar. Members of a call committee make a pastoral selection that will impact the next decade or more of a congregation's life. Your spiritual formation, your ministry direction, and what your life will look like together in community are all influenced by the leader you call to pastor the church.

Most members of a search team have little or no experience with the selection of a minister. And, while some churches may receive judicatory assistance, having a search coach at your side throughout the process is assuring. With this resource in hand, John Cionca and Fred Prinzing join your search team as ministry advisors.

This valuable guidebook brings together biblical meditations and consulting wisdom. At the beginning of each of your meetings, your team can read a Bible passage, consider a search process insight, and offer a prayer for your time together. Themes covered in this book include: Timeline, Church Survey, Expectations, Questions, References, Compensation, Due Diligence and Preparing the Congregation, to name a few.

John R. Cionca

John R. Cionca is the executive director of Ministry Transitions, Inc. He also holds the position of professor emeritus of ministry leadership at Bethel Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. Dr. Cionca has served in full-time capacities as a youth pastor, discipleship pastor and senior pastor. He has ministered in many churches as an interim pastor, seminar leader and ministry advisor. He has authored and co-authored ten books, including *Before You Move: A Guide to Making Transitions in Ministry* (Revised Edition), and *Your Church at Its Best: Partnering with the Spirit in Ministry*. John and Barbara Cionca live in Shoreview, Minnesota. Their two adult children Ben and Betsy live in Moundsvew, Minnesota and Phoenix, Arizona, respectively.

Fred W. Prinzing

Fred W. Prinzing was a native of the Northwest where he was involved in a ministry of teaching, preaching and writing. He had pastored both rural and urban churches, and had served as interim pastor for over twenty-five congregations. Dr. Prinzing also served in the academy as seminary dean and professor, and in his

denomination as district minister. His writings include *Handling Church Tensions Creatively* and *Mixed Messages*, a book on interracial marriage, co-authored with his wife, Anita. Fred recently went to be with the Lord, the Person he served faithfully for over eight decades.

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The Interim Period

After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you—for I will be going through Macedonia. Perhaps I will stay with you for a while, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me. When Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. No one, then, should treat him with contempt. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers. Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity. Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love. You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people. I urge you, brothers and sisters, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it. I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition.

1 Corinthians 16:5-18.

Did you notice from the above devotional passage how much transition happened in the early church? Not only did they move from their Judaist roots to a new identity of being Christ followers, but their leadership base was continually expanding. From church planter, Paul, to the teachers like Apollos and Timothy, to the leaders like Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, a growing Church required changing leadership.

Transitions are a reality of life. Physically we change. Our families change. Our jobs change. It's not surprising, therefore, that a living organism like the Church will also undergo change. Some congregations face pastoral change on a regular basis. Other congregations with longer tenures experience it less frequently. The period between pastors is usually referred to as *the interim period*. Depending upon the form of church government, this period could last from nine months to two years.

Most people do not understand the uniqueness and value of this interim period. Some view the approaching months with sadness, and perhaps even pessimism, especially when a beloved pastor moves. But others recognize it for its potential—a time

for both pastor and people to assess, to dream of new possibilities, and to undertake new directions. Most congregations develop hope and renewed energy for the season of ministry ahead.

A great analogy for the interim period is that of train station and locomotive. There are two basic ways of viewing the scene. Some view the train as parked at the station waiting for the engineer to arrive. According to this perspective, it is not wise to initiate any new programs or ideas until the new leader arrives. The new leader may not approve or support the direction the church is heading. So while the train is at the station, effort is focused on painting, cleaning, polishing and greasing the train. Momentum declines and, in many cases, ceases.

A second view observes the train heading in the direction of the church's vision. When the new pastor arrives, the train is slowly moving forward and gathering steam. The new leader arrives at the station and begins to run after the caboose. He reaches out, grabs the railing and jumps on board. Gradually the new pastor proceeds to the front of the train.

Rather than the interim period being a *downtime*, view it as a gift from God. It is a unique opportunity to accomplish his purpose for the church. The interim is not best viewed as a *period*, but rather an open space of time. What is written in that space will be determined by whether your leadership chooses to wait at the station or begin gathering momentum.

DEAR LORD, as leaders help us not to waste or mark time. Thank you for giving us the gift of this unique period in our Church. We look forward to what you are going to accomplish through us. We take comfort in, and are glad that you are in control of this transition process. Amen!

Final Thought:

It is much easier to steer a moving vehicle than a stationary one.

Covenant

God redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. Galatians 3:14-16.

From this biblical text it can be observed that the Christian's salvation is not a late development in God's chronology. Over four thousand years ago God made a covenant with Abraham, that through his lineage, particularly through Jesus, the son of Mary, people could become children of God. His word cannot be broken, and his promise is sure. God will act in agreement with his compact. He has made a commitment; he can be trusted!

At the beginning of your journey together as a search team, it is also beneficial to your process to establish a covenant. This solemn agreement delineates the practices that you will maintain together. Typically, the names of committee members are then affixed to the bottom of the document. A sample covenant may look like the following:

Since we, the members of the search team, have been entrusted with the responsibility of selecting and recommending a pastor to lead this congregation; and

Since we, the members of the search team, recognize the importance of our deliberations on the future presence and impact of Christ in this community; and

Since we, the members of the search team, recognize that the selection of a pastor is complicated by human and supernatural factors that are complex;

We solemnly enter the following covenant together before the Lord:

A covenant of trust. We will trust in the Lord with all our hearts and not unto our own understanding. In all our ways we will acknowledge him and he will direct our paths (Prov. 3:5-6). In addition, we will trust each other and expect the best out of each other.

A covenant commitment. We will be devoted to one another (Rom 12:10). We will believe in each other, seek the best for each other, and uphold each other in prayer.

A covenant of communication. We will speak the truth in love. (Eph. 4:15). In our committee discussions and in our private conversations we will speak openly and honestly, always with a graciousness that builds up. The freedom for all to think out loud and express feelings is essential for our evaluative process.

A covenant of confidentiality. *Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove to be faithful* (1 Cor. 4:2). The names of potential candidates, and committee discussions, will be kept confidential. We will give the congregation progress reports, but specific discussions and decisions of the committee will stay with the committee.

A covenant of diligence. *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another ...* (Heb. 10:25). We will proceed with thoroughness with each potential candidate. We will work hard at keeping prospects informed as to their status, and the congregation informed as to our progress.

A covenant of unity. *Make every effort keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.* (Eph 4:3). We will come to closure on our differences to present to the congregation a unified recommendation.

DEAR LORD, we are amazed by the fact that you have chosen us before the foundation of the world. You made a covenant to Abraham to provide a means of salvation, and you fulfilled it through the incarnation of Jesus. And when you brought us into your family, you united us as brothers and sisters. At this critical juncture in the life of our church, we pause to ask your blessing on this covenant that we make with one another. Give us a joy together as friends in Christ. Amen!

A Final Thought:

Just as a marriage covenant is sealed with the words *I do*, likewise, the search team draws together when they say *I do* to their covenant.

Timeline

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So, you are no longer slaves, but God's children; and since you are his children, he has made you also heirs. Galatians 4:4-7.

Did you ever wonder why Jesus came to earth when he did? For 2000 years Israel had looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. Today, we look back 2000 years and celebrate him. Why did the incarnation take place at that time?

The bottom line is, we really don't know. In this devotional passage we simply read: *But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son...* (v. 4). Some commentators assert that the reason for the incarnation at that particular time was because of the high expectations for a world ruler (Messiah), relative peace and stability, and the Roman road system which made travel accessible. But even these explanations are so limited.

For some reason, in God's divine plan, set before the foundation of the world, at this particular moment in history, at this particular place on earth, God's eternal Son took on humanity. Also, in God's eternal plans it was determined when and how the Son would give his life to pay the penalty for our sin (Acts 2:23, 24). The prophets were told what God would do and why he would do it. Only later was it discovered when he would accomplish his purpose.

In a similar fashion, you know the *what* and *why* of your charge as a search committee. And although you do not know *when* your new pastor will arrive, the steps leading up to that event are clear. The critical events of your process are delineated below:

Committee Composition and Covenant

Committee Organization and Search Expectations

Working Timeline Developed

Congregational Survey, Assessment and Creation of Church Profile

Community Assessment [Demographics and Values]

Establish Candidate Profile, Position Description and Compensation Package

Create Pastoral Search Website, Linking as Menu Items:

Church Profile

Position Responsibilities and Expectations

Community Demographics

Links to Schools, Housing, Recreation, etc.

Application – Including Initial Requested Materials

Build Prospect Pool

Contact People Who Know Potential Prospects

Solicit Names from Own Congregation

Utilize Networks, Search/Employment Websites, and Consultant(s)

Contact Prospects via Personal Calls

Assure Pertinent Position and Process Information is on the Website

View Sermons [Do Not Accept Audio Files only]

Evaluate Applications

Conduct Primary Reference Checks

Conduct Video Interviews [Always Including the Spouse]

Conduct Leadership Profiles/Assessments

Site Visits to the Churches of Potential Candidates

Invite Two or Three Finalists and Spouses to Church for In-person Interview

Conduct Second Level Reference Checks, and Third Level if Necessary

Establish with Preferred Candidate Final Terms of Employment

Schedule Candidating Event and Congregational Vote

Inform Candidate of Results and Email *Letter of Call*

E-mail or Text Announcement to Everyone Participating in the Search

Assist the Clergy Family with Transition Issues

Welcome Clergy Family to the Community

Schedule Installation Service

Many churches have found it helpful to target a start date for the new pastor. The process may happen more quickly, or it can take longer than anticipated. But by starting with the end in mind, a timeline can be established working backwards. For example, many churches anticipate a new pastor will begin in the summer, since clergy with family are more likely to move at that time of year. A start date of August 1 would require a Candidating weekend in early June. This date allows for a church meeting before people start disappearing over the summer, it would also allow a newly called pastor about 45 days to prepare his/her congregation for their transition, to sell a home, and to bring closure to former responsibilities. This typically requires that your candidate must be selected from among the finalists somewhere around May 1. Therefore, the backward timeline is established.

Obviously, if your committee began in early summer, and you move quickly, you can target January 1 for a start date. Other churches target Easter Sunday for a start date. Remember, however, that the average search process takes 18 months. So, while you establish your timeline, and conduct your due diligence, remember that God is also mysteriously working in the process.

DEAR FATHER, as we look at this list of activities, we sense how challenging a job is before us. We commit ourselves to do our part, as leaders, to search diligently for a new pastor. At the same time, we take great comfort in knowing that you will be guiding our steps and working in the hearts of those we contact. Early in this process, we commit ourselves to you to accomplish your work in our lives, in our church, and in this community. Amen!

Final Thought:

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity.
Ecclesiastes 3:1

Confidentiality

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." Instead, he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere. Mark 1:40-45.

The miracle described in today's passage is found in all three of the synoptic gospels. It is the story of Jesus healing the leper, a wonderful picture of the Savior's compassion. One part of the story, however, raises several perplexing questions. After he healed the leper, Jesus warned him not to tell anyone about the miracle. Imagine how difficult it must have been for the leper to keep his good news a secret.

Some have suggested this was simply a psychological ploy. In other words, if you instruct someone not to say something, they will probably tell everyone. Jesus did not need to resort to that kind of antic. So, the question remains, why would Jesus ask the leper to keep his healing a secret. Why would Jesus not want people to know of his miraculous powers?

First, because the leper first needed to see the priest, as the law required. This would assure proof of his healing.

Second, it appears that Jesus did not want the crowds to follow him for the wrong purpose—healing rather than the message of the gospel. Jesus would not compromise his mission; nor would he jeopardize its outcome.

Sometimes it is important to keep good news a secret until the timing is right. Maintaining confidentiality is essential to the effectiveness of the search process.

I received a phone call from a friend who was on the staff of a large church. In the course of our conversation, my friend indicated there would be some news forthcoming. Although he changed the conversation abruptly, I was eager to learn the information he had withheld. I kept coming back to the subject, but my friend would not give me a hint. Finally, after continual probing, he asked the question I had been waiting for. *Can you keep a secret?* He whispered. *Yes, I can,* I eagerly responded. *So can I!* He replied.

There was an awkward silence. When I realized what had happened, I commented sheepishly, *well you got me this time.*

In the search process, it is essential that everyone who is part of the decision-making process understands the difference between information that can be shared, and that which must remain confidential.

Confidential information (verbal or written) is to be kept secret. Everyone must be in agreement with that decision. This means these matters should not be shared with spouses or colleagues, staff members or friends. Once the trust level of the team is compromised, it does not take long for the search process to begin to erode.

Can you keep a secret?

DEAR LORD, we need your help. When we hear good news, we want to share it. Keeping secrets is hard. You know how prone we are to share confidential information beyond the boundaries of our group. We acknowledge our daily need of guidance in this area. Help us to seal our lips until it is the right time to share. Amen!

Final Thought:

If you reveal your secrets to the wind, you should not blame the wind for revealing them to the trees. Kahlil Gibran

Accomplishments

For we are God's co-workers; you are God's field, God's building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through flames. 1 Corinthians 3:9-15.

Most of us living in our success-oriented culture have the idea that the harder and longer we work, the more we can accomplish. For many years, I prided myself in how many hours I worked. With a sense of accomplishment, my peers and I would compare our busyness with one another. *It's been fourteen days since I have had a night at home. I haven't had a day off in a month. I haven't taken a vacation in over three years.*

Sometimes Search Committees feel like they should receive a reward for the number of meetings they attend and the hours they spend. The bottom line, however, is that no one will be rewarded for the number of hours they have worked, but for what they have accomplished. No one will erect a monument to those who spent the most nights away from home, at the office, or at the church.

In today's passage in 1 Corinthians 3, the Apostle Paul describes his role as an expert builder with the primary responsibility of laying foundations. Even though the Apostle Paul was a pioneer, he acknowledged his obligation *both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish* (Romans 1:14). Paul benefited from the ministry of the prophets, apostles, deacons, martyrs, and lay people, such as Barnabas, Priscilla and Aquila. The accomplishments of his legacy were due to the work of others before him.

Few people are original thinkers. Most of us will not leave anything completely original behind. I have stood on someone else's shoulders to accomplish everything I have done. We all do.

A leader in one of my churches would often remind us, *we don't have to reinvent the wheel*. This definitely applies to a search process. Much of what needs to be done procedurally in calling a new pastor, has already been accomplished many times before.

There is no doubt that you'll work hard as members of the search team. But learn to work smarter, not just much harder. Churches, schools, placement agencies and denominational leaders have accumulated a wealth of knowledge and experience that can assist your team in accomplishing their objectives.

As we acknowledge our indebtedness to those who have assisted us, let's remember our responsibility to assist those who will come after us. It won't be far down the road that your church will again find itself forming a search team. Hopefully, if it is relatively soon, it won't be for the same ministry position. More likely, another staff opening will necessitate the search. Therefore, keeping good records is important. Here is a list of items worth keeping in a file:

- ◆ Timeline of Events
- ◆ Policies Adopted
- ◆ Web Sites Listing Positions and Prospects
- ◆ Nominators and agencies Contacted
- ◆ Motions Made
- ◆ Communications to Congregation
- ◆ Sample Letters
- ◆ Lessons Learned

Therefore, in your early work as a search team, talk with former search chairs from your congregation. Invite team leaders from other churches to share their procedural insights with you. Consider what benefits a search coach, consultant, can offer. Benefiting from the knowledge of others can save you hours of work.

And in your concluding work as a search team, when you are ready to get back to a normal life, take the few hours necessary to leave a record of your accomplishment. Not only will your new pastor be your gift to the congregation, but so will the procedural insights you leave for search teams that follow.

DEAR LORD, we acknowledge our indebtedness to the great cloud of witnesses who have gone on before us. Help us to be master builders who build well and accomplish our goals. We recognize both the wonderful privilege and the great opportunity you have given us. Amen!

Final Thought:

*The world is not interested in the storms you encountered,
but whether you brought in the ship.*

Journal of True Education

Due Diligence

Part 1

'Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.' "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:28-33.

In this passage, Jesus illustrates the cost of discipleship. While multitudes were interested in Christ just because of his miracles, true followers surrender their lives to him. Calculated commitment to Jesus is at the heart of discipleship. Jesus compares this intentionality to an owner engaged in a building program and a king preparing for battle. Their due diligence is respected by Christ.

In a similar way, as members of a search team, due diligence is also essential to your undertaking. Frankly, more is at stake here than whether a tower is completed, or a particular battle won. The eternal state of people's lives will be impacted by your committee's decisions. Therefore, due diligence is needed for several tasks in the search process:

Due diligence in establishing the search timeline. As mentioned earlier (see *Timeline*), your team needs to work back from the anticipated start date to allow time for gathering congregational and community demographics, creating a profile, building a candidate pool, assessing resumes, conducting conference calls, having on site interviews, making visits to prospects' churches, and conducting the candidate event. A realistic timeline keeps your team directionally focused.

Due diligence in developing a congregational profile. Each church's context is unique. While biblical purposes of worship, teaching, fellowship, and outreach are transcultural, how those functions are practiced by a particular congregation depends on its culture and community. History, demographics, and values are important. By reflecting on the church's history, purpose, and values, and by compiling

member survey results and community demographics, your team can create an up-to-date congregational profile.

Due diligence in setting the candidate profile. While pastoral functions remain fairly similar across congregations, ministerial personalities, strengths, values, passions, and leadership styles vary greatly. The congregational and community factors mentioned above should inform the candidate profile. In addition, a job description with weighted tasks also influences the profile. Finally, instruments such as the *Job Dynamic Analyses* will enable a search team to identify preferred leadership styles. Knowing whether you prefer a gregarious, fast-paced entrepreneur, or a reflective, thorough, team facilitator, is also critical to the search process.

Due diligence on cultivating a solid candidate pool. Quality pastoral leads will come from *nominators* who you personally contact to solicit their help in identifying prospects. Be gracious to these leaders whose time is valuable, yet who are willing to recommend some potential ministers. Your church may also choose to place your position in magazine ads or on employment websites. If you choose this exposure option, be as detailed as possible in your posting to reduce unqualified applicants. Furthermore, ask interested pastors to first check out your church's website before applying. The website can delineate purpose, values, demographics, doctrinal distinctions, and non-negotiables.

FATHER, please give us a solid understanding of our congregation, and a clear picture of what type of pastor could best lead this flock. Enable us to reflect well to prospective candidates who we are as a congregation. And help us to make the best contacts possible for developing a solid candidate pool. When we are tired, remind us of the importance of our charge, and keep us diligent to see this work completed to its joyous finish. Amen!

Final Thought:

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. Colossians 3: 23-24

Sovereignty

The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, awakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away. Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore, have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who are my accusers? Let them confront me! It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who will condemn me?
Isaiah 50:4-9.

Much of the time, and rightly so, members of the call team are focused on their specific search responsibilities. After all, this is your critical charge. However, throughout the search, it is important to remember that you are not alone in this process. The selection of the pastor is a divine-human activity. Just as the Scriptures were penned by people yet inspired by God (2 Peter 1:20-21), so too your final candidate will be selected by people, but in reality, chosen by God.

In this study passage, the prophet addresses God as *the Sovereign Lord*. The Hebrew words *Adonai* and *Jehovah*, often translated Lord, emphasize that he alone is self-existent and is the ultimate authority. These words are used hundreds of times throughout the Bible. For example, in Proverbs we read, "*In their hearts human beings plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps*" (Proverbs 16:9); and "*Many are the plans of the human heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails*" (Proverbs 19:21).

God's sovereignty is recognized by his purposes: The Lord almighty has sworn 'surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will happen' (Isaiah 14:24); and For the Lord almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back? (v. 27). From these and other passages, it's clear that the Old Testament affirms that God is overseeing life purposes and direction.

Similarly, in the New Testament, we read verses like these: And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28); and ...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you, will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6). Furthermore, Jesus said that he has chosen us (John 13:18; 15:19), and Paul refers to Christians as God's chosen people (Col 3:12).

So let these verses serve as a reminder that you are not alone in this search process. God is at work behind the scenes. He is opening doors and drawing hearts of prospects toward you. And he is also guiding you by comforting or disquieting your spirits.

When the weight of responsibility in this charge seems particularly heavy, let God's sovereignty comfort you. And at all times, especially remember the words of Jesus: *and surely, I am with you always, even to the end of your search* (Matthew 28:20, adapted).

OH FATHER, thank you for the reminder that this is your search process. We know you have invited us into partnership with you in the selection of a pastor, but we take so much consolation in knowing that you are moving, leading, and directing. Help us to maintain a balanced perspective of being your instruments in the calling of your pastor. Amen!

Final Thought:

*Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths,
you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the
far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me; your right
hand will hold me fast. Psalm 139:7-10*

Together

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:12-17.

Much of the work of the church depends on cooperation and teamwork. We have a responsibility to ourselves (*let the message of Christ dwelling in you richly*); to the Lord (*singing with gratitude in your hearts to God*); and to one another (*teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom*).

Your search team's primary responsibility is to recommend a suitable candidate to the congregation. But you also have a responsibility to one another as members of the same team. In verse thirteen, you are exhorted to *bear with one another and forgive whatever grievances you have with one another*. Bearing with one another means holding back, it's resisting the temptation to act negatively toward another member of your team. In verse sixteen believers are instructed to teach and admonish one another, and in humility to receive instruction from others.

The Bible's "one anothers" are best not viewed as *oughts* or *shoulds*. Rather they are practical ways to let the love of Christ flow from you to one another. You can give teammates the gift of listening. You can bless them by praying for them. You can grace them by bearing and forgiving when the occasion arises.

Many additional *one another's* can guide your life together as a team. Over the next several months, you will have opportunity to apply many of these blessings:

Be devoted to one another	Romans 12:10
Live harmoniously with one another	Romans 12:16
Admonish one another	Col. 3:16
Wait for one another	1 Cor. 11:33

Demonstrate equal care for one another	1 Cor. 12:25
Serve one another	Gal. 5:13
Bear the burdens of each other	Gal. 6:2
Give comfort to one another	2 Cor. 1:4
Build up each other	1 Thess. 5:11
Maintain peace with each other	1 Thess. 5:13
Do good to one another	1 Thess. 5:15
Lovingly bear with one another	Eph. 4:2
Be subject to each other	Eph. 5:21
Forgive one another	Col 3:13
Confess to and pray for each other	James 5:16
Exhibit hospitality to each other	1 Peter 4:9

The challenge before your search committee is tremendous. The weight of responsibility is too heavy for one person to carry it alone. But together you have all the resources you need to accomplish your charge. The Holy Spirit is in you and will guide you. By working together, and applying the “*one anothers*”, you will not only find the right pastor for your congregation but will experience the community of Christ in your midst.

HEAVENLY FATHER, we thank you for calling us to work together in this important ministry. Might we exhibit a love and concern for one another so that at the end of our task we will know the joy of our oneness in Christ. Amen!

A Final Thought:

In necessary things, unity; *In doubtful things, liberty*; In all things, charity.

Congregational Participation

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.' This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.
Acts 6:1-6.

Leaders of churches in the Western world, particularly in America, face some interesting governance challenges. A *town meeting* mentality where everyone has a right to speak and vote on issues has worked its way seamlessly from civil life to congregational life. The view that every member should set the church's direction appears reinforced by the doctrine of *the priesthood of all believers* (believers only have one mediator, and that is Jesus Christ alone).

However, when one looks at biblical governance more comprehensively, God always seems to work through leaders to accomplish his purposes. In the Old Testament, there were priests and prophets. Individuals like Moses, Joshua, Deborah and Elijah guided the spiritual direction of the nation. Likewise, in the New Testament we observe Paul charging Titus to appoint elders in every city (Titus 1:5). And he admonished people to respect those who labor hard on their behalf (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13).

Nevertheless, each congregation exists in a cultural context. And in many American contexts, church members feel disenfranchised, and even angry, if they cannot have input into church processes (especially true for smaller congregations).

So how can your team maintain responsibility for the search process, yet invite congregational input and deepen congregational ownership? Let me suggest four ways.

Congregational input invited on the selection/appointment of the search committee. Church bylaws usually prescribe the process for calling a new minister. Some procedures allow members to select the committee from a list of qualified nominees. Other bylaws require the appointment of the search team by a board, with no congregational action. But even in this latter case, it is wise to print a

brief bio on these individuals, provide contact information for them, and have a service of dedication for their commissioning.

Congregational input sought for the development of the candidate profile. While it is true that biblical purposes and community needs will weigh heavily in the selection criteria, an understanding of stakeholder perspective is also valuable. The next meditation, *Church Survey*, addresses how to invite this type of input.

Congregational input requested for pastoral recommendations. To maintain the integrity of the nomination process, minister recommendations are submitted in writing. Furthermore, accurate contact information must be provided, along with reasons why the nominator believes the minister would be a good fit for the church.

Congregational input finalized when the candidate is presented to the people for a vote or ratification. Since most members haven't had the opportunity to examine all of the prospects or analyze the finalists, their vote is primarily a vote on the search committee. If the people have high regard for the search team, they usually accept the candidate as the best prospect for their congregation. Contrariwise, if the people do not believe the committee represents their interests, it is difficult even for a good candidate to get a high percentage of call.

Getting the congregation on board early, by deepening trust in the search team, is critical to a healthy process and healthy outcome. As a search team, let the congregation know early that you want their input. And as your process continues, inform them regularly of your progress.

JESUS, we need to remember that this is your Church, and these members are individuals that you have drawn to yourself. Help us to respect their viewpoints. Help us to do a good job of communicating the process and progress of this search. And help us to represent them well to prospective pastors. Amen!

A Final Thought:

Approval of the search committee's pastoral recommendation will be proportionate to the congregation's approval of the search committee's process.

Church Survey

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. 1 Peter 5:2-4.

The audience addressed in this passage is specifically the elders of a congregation, yet in general, it applies to all who serve in leadership positions. Notice that the text says that leaders are not to be *domineering* (RSV) or *bossy* (CEV). While the search team and church board are responsible to develop a new pastoral profile, wise leaders invite congregational input into the process. Usually, this input is solicited through a church survey.

Too often candidate surveys ask members to rank pastoral qualities and functions. The people might be requested to indicate on a scale of 1-5 the importance of preaching, teaching, visitation, counseling, etc. In my opinion, this practice is not wise. While you want to invite congregational input, you do not want the candidate profile shaped at the congregational level. When this procedure is followed, people assume that their preferences become a criterion mandate for the call committee.

In one church, for example, the people ranked care giving and visitation as the most important pastoral priorities. But the leaders believed that the church mission could best be accomplished through strong preaching, staff development, missional strategizing and team building. Obviously, they had a dilemma on their hands.

In another situation, a member commented to me: I'm glad Dr. Jones is coming to be our next pastor, but frankly I was rather surprised—he doesn't seem to match the five top qualities that we as a congregation determined for our next pastor. While verbally I moved the conversation in another direction, mentally I was thinking that this situation shouldn't have happened in the first place. The pastoral profile should have been developed at the leadership level based on general congregational feedback, not derived from a detailed congregational survey.

A better way to invite congregational input into the pastoral profile is simply to ask four questions. Some churches have used focus groups to receive this input. Others have printed the questions on a half sheet of paper and inserted them into the worship bulletin. Then during an extended offertory, on two successive weekends, the congregation is given time to write their responses. For those who miss this opportunity, these open-ended surveys are available on-line or through the church office.

The first question is: *In your opinion, what are our church's major areas of strength?* This invites the congregation to identify what they hope will transfer into the next season of ministry. Typically, the feedback is broad and even somewhat predictable by interest groups. Nevertheless, even diverse groups will tend to emphasize common themes of ministry strengths.

The next question asks: Granted there are many ways to strengthen a church's ministry and develop its programs, but what are a few areas where we could strengthen our ministry? Notice that this question does not ask for what they do not like about the present ministry. Things that are not identified as strengths are conversely probably weaknesses. But this question will help the congregation think about possibilities. It can whet their appetite for new ministries. It can keep them focused beyond their own pet programs.

The third question is: *Are there any unresolved issues or concerns that our leadership should address during this time of transition?* Handling the feedback on this item is not the responsibility of the search committee. The governing board will want to resolve these concerns during the transition period.

The final question informs the heart of the search: *Describe the type of pastor you believe we need to lead us in effective ministry over the next ten years.* Again, while individuals will respond with their personal preferences, the committee need only report the most common themes. Thus, the congregation has had input into the process, but has not micromanaged the profile.

FATHER, throughout this process keep us sensitive to the needs of the congregation. Keep us humble, approachable, and receptive to valuable input. At the same time, give us the discernment to make decisions based on your values, and what you want to accomplish in and through our church. Amen!

A Final Thought:

You can't get there from here is a response sometimes given to the motorist. Your job is to help the congregation get there from here, by adding their input to the other critical factors that will shape the pastoral profile.

Qualifications

If others think they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee' as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were my gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3:4b-11.

A pastoral search committee spent a few hours going through profiles. One profile seemed particularly troubling. An unsolicited candidate wrote this letter:

Members of the Search Committee:

I should like to apply for the position of pastor in your church. I have many qualifications. For several years, I have been successful as a preacher and writer. I have lots of experience. Although I am over fifty years of age, I have never preached in one place more than three years. In some places, I have been asked to leave. I must let you know I have been imprisoned on four occasions, but not because of any wrongdoing. My health is not too good, although I am still able to get a great deal done.

The churches I have preached in have been small, though located in large cities. If you think I meet your qualifications, I will do my very best.

As soon as the chairperson finished reading the letter, one committee member spoke up: This individual is totally unqualified as a candidate for our church. Who would call an unhealthy, troublemaking, ex-jailbird? It's too bad there aren't any pastors like the Apostle Paul available.

No one would question that Paul's qualifications were impeccable. In the passage above, the Apostle Paul describes the type of background that search teams would look for. His personal credentials were top-notch: good family background, excellent

education and high morals. This autobiographical account of his early life preceded his conversion.

But after coming to Christ, his personal assessment of these credentials seemed unimportant *compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus. . .* (vs. 8). His focus as a believer was *to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in death* (vs. 10).

When you examine the qualifications of prospects, definitely look at background factors such as education and socio-cultural fit. But also recognize the importance of character-building experiences, some that may have been learned in the school of hard knocks. And most importantly consider closely the values that they embrace. Getting a complete picture of pastoral applicants is important in determining their qualifications for the job.

By the way, the person who sent the letter that was read by the chair of the search committee was none other than the Apostle Paul.

OMNISCIENT HEAVENLY FATHER, we know you have a clear and complete picture of our situation. As we make important decisions regarding the leadership of this church, we admit that our knowledge is incomplete and prejudiced. Give us, we pray, wisdom and discernment that comes from above. Thank you for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Final Thought:

Look for a candidate whose people will appreciate playing “follow the leader”!

Perfect Pastor

In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: "Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them. Acts 14:8-18.

Paul and Barnabas knew they were human. We know they were human. The people in Lystra, however, were anxious to attribute god-like qualities to them.

As we attempt to find leadership for this church, it would be easy to set our sights so high that an individual would need to be perfect or almost perfect, to be considered for the position.

Sometimes it's good to take a step back from the process and have a good laugh about expectations. The following computerized survey provides this opportunity:

The perfect pastor preaches for exactly 20 minutes. He condemns sin, but never upsets anyone. He works from 6:00 a.m. until midnight and is also the janitor. He makes \$60.00 a week, wears good clothes, buys good books, drives a nice car and gives about \$50.00 each week to the poor. He is 28 years-old, is fluent in English, Greek and Hebrew, and has preached for thirty years. He is wonderfully gentle and handsome. He has a burning desire to work with teenagers and spends all his time with senior citizens.

The perfect pastor smiles all the time with a straight face because he has a sense of humor that keeps him dedicated to his work. He makes fifteen calls a

day on church families, shut-ins, and members in the hospital. He spends all his time evangelizing the unchurched and is always in his office when needed.

If your pastor does not measure up, simply send this letter to six other churches that are tired of their pastor... then, bundle up your pastor and send him to the church at the top of the list. Within one year, you will receive 1,643 pastors. One of them should be perfect.

WARNING: Keep this letter going. One congregation broke the chain and in less than three months got its old pastor back. —Anonymous

Shortly after their assessment, the people who had wanted to worship Paul had a change of heart. Their adulation turned into animosity (Acts 14:19). The line between being a hero and an adversary is sometimes very thin. Only one person in history was perfect. He was rejected by his own people and ultimately crucified.

While looking for a highly qualified pastor, remember no perfect pastor exists. Besides, if anyone happened to fit that description, they also would be looking for a perfect church.

HEAVENLY FATHER, we acknowledge that you alone are perfect. Let us never expect to find qualities in other people, which cannot be found in us. At the same time, give us the gifted leader that you believe would be just right for our congregation. Amen!

Final Thought:

*Expect the best of your pastor. Accept the limitations of you pastor.
Respect the service of your pastor.*

Expectations

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number some will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!" Acts 20:28-31a.

Early in your meeting together as a search team, you will develop a candidate profile. No doubt, you will invite congregational input into the process, but the final product will be your creation. Part of that profile will be a delineation of expectations, typically referred to as a job description.

Notice from the above passage that the charge to church leaders hasn't really changed that much over two thousand years. Elders and pastors are to shepherd the flock. But the text doesn't tell us how to accomplish this shepherding. In most situations pastors just roll up their sleeves and try to do everything congregants want them to do.

Unfortunately, this strategy only leads to burnout. There is not enough time in a day to perform every kind of pastoral function. Besides, pastors are not good at everything, and large investments of time into areas in which they are not gifted only leads to frustration and a sense of failure. For example, listen to the heaviness in the words of this pastor:

I am appalled at what is required of me. I am supposed to move from sick-bed to administrative meeting, to planning, to supervising, to counseling, to praying, to troubleshooting, to budgeting, to audio systems, to meditation, to worship preparation, to newsletter, to staff problems, to mission projects, to conflict management, to community leadership, to study, to funerals, to weddings, to preaching. I am supposed to be 'in charge,' but not too in charge, administrative executive, sensitive pastor, skillful counselor, public speaker, spiritual guide, politically savvy, intellectually sophisticated. And I am expected to be superior, or at least first-rate, in all of them. I am not supposed to be depressed, discouraged, cynical, angry or hurt. I am supposed to be upbeat, positive, strong, willing, available. Right now, I am not filling any of those expectations very well. And I am tired.

Wow! If all that's what's expected of pastors, then most are likely set up for failure even before they even arrive at a new church.

As a member of the search team, you can guard against unrealistic expectations. By establishing a prioritized set of job responsibilities, you clarify what's most important

to the church. And by informing the congregation of the requirements, you bring a touch of reality to the expectations that your pastor will face.

Most pastoral activities can be clustered into three spheres of service:

Preaching and Teaching (including preparation time)

Leading and Managing (including leadership development, program oversight and outreach activities)

Congregational Care (including small groups, counseling, and visitation)

At a basic level, your committee must agree on the percentage of time your pastor should typically spend on the above activities. For example, in a larger congregation, the time might be divided 40%, 40% and 20%, respectively. In a smaller church, the ratio might be 30%, 30% and 40%. A candidate might even ask the committee to estimate how many hours should be spent on each responsibility delineated in the position description. As the search team, you must be able to identify the most important pastoral expectations and assign a realistic time weight to them.

Unrealistic expectations will make or break a marriage. Similarly, unrealistic expectations will make or break a ministry marriage between pastor and people. So as a search team, consider your reflections in this area as a kind of premarital counseling. Then, in turn, help your congregation understand the complexity of the pastoral task and the expected priorities woven into the profile.

FATHER, we know that only you are all-knowing and all-present. Help us want to abuse our new pastor by expecting him/her to be omnipresent. Help us to construct the job responsibilities with realistic expectations. And help our congregation to remember we are all ministers of Christ. Give us a pastor who will invest the greatest amount of time on the tasks that will help us impact our community the greatest. Amen!

Final Thoughts:

We are all wired with *strengths*. But no one is wired with all strengths!

Prayer

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'... Matthew 6:5-13.

We have all heard the expression: *When all else fails, pray.* But this wasn't Jesus' attitude. For him prayer was a way of life (see, for example, Luke 3:21; 4:42; 5:16 and 6:12). He enjoyed communion with his Father (John 17:4). He shared personal concerns that were on his heart (Luke 22:42). And he interceded for his friends (John 17:15). You would think that if anyone were already connected to God, and therefore wouldn't need prayer, it would be the eternal Son.

Prayer is not as much a discipline as a dialog. Its communion, communication, and affection in words. It's not trying to squeeze some answer out of God. It's more about enjoying his presence. Healthy families communicate, and in our dialog with the Father, all joys, concerns and hopes are expressed.

We don't change God's mind through prayer. He already has our best interest at heart. Rather in the words of Charles Finney: Prayer produces such an effect in us as renders it consistent for God to do in us that which he wanted to do even before we prayed. Like the Son, we come to the Father saying, not my will, but your will be done (See Luke 22:42b).

We know that Prayer is essential for:

Eternal life (Romans 10:13)

Maintaining fellowship (1 John 1:9)

Effective witness (Matthew 9:38)

Resisting temptation (Mark 14:38)

Daily guidance (Proverbs 3:5&6).

Some people teach a *name it and claim it* view of prayer based on a lopsided understanding of Mark 11:24. They boldly demand God to answer their petitions according to their own expected outcomes. However, even Jesus did not do this. The Apostle Paul, likewise, after repeated requests, only heard, "*My grace is sufficient for you*" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

A more balanced view of intercession encourages us to take our requests to God, but then let him determine the best response. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6&7).

From our limited, finite viewpoint, we really don't know what's best in a given situation. But as we honestly share our concerns, the Lord's peace guards our thoughts and emotions, irrespective of the outcome. And truly, this is our deepest need. Each day we can simply talk with our Father about the things happening in our lives, in the lives of those closest to us and in the life of Christ's church.

As members of the search team, keep prayer a priority in your meetings and in your daily lives. Discussing resumes, viewing candidate videos, and conducting conference calls are all critical to the search process. But in the desire to *get going*, don't default to prayer as a perfunctory meeting opener. Seek the Lord's grace for the congregation during this time of transition. Seek his mind in your deliberations. Seek his leading and peace regarding each applicant. Seek his blessing upon your process. And seek his honor in your final selection.

OH FATHER, thank you for the privilege of calling you Father. Thank you for your deep love and for your open invitation to commune with you often. We praise you for your Son who prays for us and for your Holy Spirit who intercedes for us when we don't even know how to pray. May you receive much glory through our search team as we seek a pastor who will exalt you. Amen!

Final Thought:

It's impossible to walk the talk, unless we continually talk the walk!

Missional Church

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:16-20

If you build it, they will come. While this concept proved true in the fiction movie *Field of Dreams*, and worked for many churches in the last half of the twentieth century, it is no longer true for churches in a post-Christian culture. Today, people are dazzled by rapid change, and feel overwhelmed by the pace and race of life. They are institutionally wary because of the ethical and moral failures of political and religious leaders. And they are barraged by marketers offering meaning through pleasure, amusement, and entertainment.

Is there any wonder that when a church places an ad in the Saturday religious section of the newspaper, few people, if any, come?

In today's text, however, note that Jesus never expected people to flock to an institution. True, he invites them to come to him (Matthew 11:28). But they discover Christ when we go to them. People find Jesus when they see him embodied in us. Matthew 28:19 literally says, *in your going, make disciples*.

Note the differences between an inwardly focused congregation and an outwardly focused congregation—between what is called the institutional church and the missional church.

The Institutional Church

Programs for God's people

Campus and property

Pastor as family chaplain

Pastor as repository

Pastor as sacramentalist

Missions viewed as overseas

The Missional Church

Programs for all people

Activities throughout the community

Pastor as missionary

Pastor as networker

Pastor as strategist

Missions viewed as our communities

Traditions protected

What reaches people embraced

Concern for the saved

Concern for the lost

Staff-run programs

Lay-led teams

Please hear me—none of the items listed above on either side of the list are wrong. All ministry bases must be covered. But the church of the first century emphasized the right column. And churches effective in the twenty-first century should also maintain this missional fervor.

I have been learning, as a consultant, that I am not able to help all churches. One of the questions that I ask board members is: Do you see your purpose as building up Christians so that they can reach the community? Or do you see your purposes in reaching the community through teams of growing Christians? If it is the former, I tell them I cannot help them. For it seems that believers never feel nurtured and mature enough to bridge the gap to unchurched neighbors. If it is the latter, I am eager to provide assistance. For the church that views itself as a bridge drawing people over to Jesus will accomplish that mission.

As you await a new pastor, open the eyes of your congregation to the white harvest fields of their neighborhoods and workplaces. Then seek a new pastor who will nurture the congregation by helping the members become externally focused. After all, what part of *go* don't we understand?

LORD, we acknowledge that much of the energy around our church centers on discipling our people. And while this is not wrong, stir us to spend increasing amounts of time and resources on reaching this community for Christ. Give us a new pastor who has a heart for the lost, and who understands a changing culture. Someone who can help us all to act more like missionaries. Amen!

Final Thought:

When we are in the business of depopulating Hell, and populating Heaven,
more is never enough. Leith Anderson

Seasons and Life Cycles

*There is a time for everything, and a season for everything under the heavens
... whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will
call the past to account. Ecclesiastes 3:1-15.*

Each of us proceeds through seasons of life. We move from childhood, to youth, then through the various stages of adulthood. Each season presents its own challenges and joys. What's important is to live as vibrantly as possible within the givens of our personal situations.

Congregations also progress through predictable seasons of life. Valid ministry can take place during:

- ◆ The wonderment of childhood.
- ◆ The growth spurts of adolescents
- ◆ The building years of young adulthood
- ◆ The stability of middle adulthood
- ◆ And the serenity of later maturity

One of the challenges you face as a member of the search committee is to select a new pastor who understands life cycles—both personal self-awareness as well as institutional system's awareness. And as you screen potential candidates, definitely consider their potential fit in light of the congregation's life season.

Regarding the cleric's life-stage, if you select a candidate who is relatively young, then the congregation can anticipate the need for patience as the young pastor learns leadership in the school of experience. Sufficient time must also be allowed for parenting responsibilities. The number of evenings anticipated for ministry should be realistic, and spouse expectations minimized. On the other hand, if the new pastor and spouse are empty nesters, then couple participation may be welcomed. Greater time investments are possible during later maturity.

Regarding the congregation's life-stage, young churches will benefit from a relational and entrepreneurial leader. Growth at this stage is maximized by the warmth of an outgoing pastor. But in midsize churches, the minister cannot personally connect with every member. Continued growth might best take place through a builder developer. This type of pastor is able to set up systems that network people together in teams. Larger congregations will benefit from specialist pastors whose strength, for

example, is visionary leadership and excellent communication. And declining congregations will enjoy the caregiving of a seasoned shepherd.

Realize, however, that a congregation's life cycle is not cast in stone. Churches can choose to rebirth, typically through revisioning or relocation, thus moving to a younger stage of ministry. But just as we cannot turn back our biological aging process, most churches will find it difficult to reverse their aging process.

Thus, bringing in a *young buck* to reengineer an aging congregation could be counterproductive. Just as hiring a shepherd can kill the church that desires outreach and growth.

Frequently, aging congregations seek a young pastor, hoping the new cleric will draw young families to the church. Unfortunately, many times they get upset with that same pastor if new methods are tried, worship redirected, and people different than them start to affiliate. Therefore, it is imperative that you as the search team keep a realistic picture of the congregation's season, and a realistic preferred life-stage for the coming pastor. Selecting a new minister with seasons and life cycles in mind can save the church a lot of misunderstanding and wasted energy.

LORD, we realize that neighborhoods change, congregants age, economies vacillate, facilities wear, and leadership fluctuates. But through every season of life, help us to be what Christ's Church is meant to be—a community of followers who 'love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul and strength and mind... and love their neighbors as ourselves.' Amen!

Final Thought:

Many people bemoan that they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Look forward to celebrating your new pastor as the right person, in the right place, at the right time.

Emerging Leaders

So the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit of leadership, and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him. He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the Lord. At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in." Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, as the Lord instructed through Moses.

Numbers 27:18-23.

Too often, when churches look for a pastor, they place in their criteria a minister who has already had experience in that particular role. In fact, one consultant urges churches only to hire people who have served twice in the capacity for which you are hiring. However, this practice is shortsighted, for it excludes from consideration many great emerging leaders.

For example, many associate ministers are fine biblical communicators. While they have not had as much time in the pulpit as a senior pastor, they connect the Scriptures to life in an engaging way. Many associates are also outstanding leaders. To be effective in their roles, they have had to build teams of volunteers for focused ministries.

In this passage of study, Joshua is one such emerging leader. The text records his call to executive leadership. To understand the full story, however, we need to look back in time at his life as an apprentice with Moses. Note the discoveries Joshua made as an associate:

Joshua experienced the power of God. During battles, he observed firsthand God's deliverance (Exodus 17:8-16).

Joshua experienced the holiness of God. At Mt. Sinai he accompanied Moses to the cloud-covered mountain top to receive God's Commandments (Exodus 24:13-18).

Joshua experienced the communion of God. Joshua was present with Moses when he met with God at the tent of meeting. And when Moses

returned to the camp, Joshua remained at the tent desiring to be near God's glory (Exodus 33:7-11).

Joshua observed the significance of obedience to God. Following the Canaan reconnaissance mission, the majority brought a report that said the Israelites could not take the land. But Joshua and Caleb affirmed that God would give them the land as he had promised. Those who rejected God's promise died in the wilderness. Joshua, believing in the Lord's provision, received the promised inheritance (Numbers 13).

As you look for a new pastor, especially if your search is for a senior minister, don't overlook younger, emerging leaders. Many have been mentored by fine lead pastors. They personally know God's presence and have experienced his guidance in ministry situations. And because they are young, they have an enthusiasm and energy to accomplish great things for Christ.

Furthermore, if your church has multiple staff members, it is particularly wise to consider a pastor who has had experience on a staff team. These ministers understand the complexity of larger congregations and the dynamics of team leadership.

Finally, many emerging leaders are in a great stage of life to meet the needs of families in your community. Because of the ages of their children, they have natural bridges to people through school, sport and club activities.

Therefore, in your profile development and in your selection process, give serious consideration to mentored associates who have been prepared by God for a new challenge.

LORD, just as you called Joshua (Moses' apprentice) and Timothy (Paul's apprentice) to lead your people, keep us open to the possibility that you may also call an emerging servant to lead our congregation. Thank you for those who have mentored our future pastor. May he or she also develop faithful leaders among us. Amen!

Final Thought:

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. 1 Timothy 4:12

Work Ethic

God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. Hebrews 6:10-12.

This devotional passage lifts up the value of hard work. It demeans laziness and admonishes diligence. A similar exhortation reads like this, "*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving*" (Colossians 3:23, 24).

As a church, you can't afford to call a pastor who just enjoys hanging out with people. You also need a leader who will energize and move the congregation forward in the great commission. How a pastor spends his or her time is of critical concern.

By now in the search process, you have established a job description and a pastoral profile. But perhaps you haven't yet considered the number of hours per week you expect your new minister to work. A reasonable range should be established.

Once I was traveling with a pastor who asked: John, I'm looking for a part time pastoral care minister. Do you have any recommendations? I asked, how many hours a week are you looking for? He responded, forty. Startled, I questioned, how many hours do your full-time people work? He replied, 80 hours. Feeling a sense of sadness, I said: Bob, I'd never recommend someone to work for you in an abusive environment like that. Your workload expectations are unrealistic. You and your team are going to burn out.

Illustrating the other end of the continuum, I queried another pastor on their church's workload policy. He responded, *full time employees are expected to work 35-40 hours per week*. I questioned, *does this include Sundays*? He responded, yes.

From the above two examples you can see that workload expectations for staff can vary significantly. So, what are realistic expectations?

The average professional employee in America works 48.2 hours per week. Those active in their churches—attending worship, serving, and perhaps participating in a small group—spend 4-6 hours per week in their church commitment. If pastors put in a similar workweek as an average American, plus add the 4-6 hours that lay leaders invest in the church, a typical workweek for a minister would be approximately 50-55 hours,

which includes their Sunday responsibilities. Many churches use this range as their work expectations for their pastoral staff.

But just looking at clock hours misses the point of the above passage. The word diligence implies a consistency of service over time. This is an issue of passion, focus, attitude and even energy level. It is an eagerness to pursue with persistence God's best for the congregation.

As you look at applicants, try to ascertain how well they enjoy work. If a prospect seems more interested in the amount of vacation time and study leave offered, be leery. Yes, it's true that regular periods of rest and renewal are essential for ministry effectiveness over the long haul. But in your dialogue with prospects try to get a sense of whether they are overly protective of their own time, versus how deeply they desire to lead the flock. Hopefully, you will find a pastor who knows how to balance these two responsibilities.

While building relationships is critical to ministry, accomplishing agreed upon strategic initiatives is essential for accomplishing the church's purpose. Therefore, hard work focused on missional outcomes is a pastoral non-negotiable.

FATHER, you told us in the Scriptures to respect those who work hard among us. Our desire is to call a pastor who will diligently serve this congregation. Help our people have realistic expectations. Help us to communicate well the priorities and work needed in this ministry. And give us the discernment to select a candidate that while working for us, is really serving you. Amen!

Final Thought:

To be successful, all you have to do is work half days. *You can work* the first twelve hours or the second twelve. Don Shula

Worship

Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the Lord...
Psalms 148:1-5a.

No part of church life has the potential for drawing people closer together, or alienating them from one another, more than church worship. People entrenched in music wars usually have lost perspective on what worship is all about. They argue about familiarity of lyrics, musical instruments, choirs or bands, uplifted or folded hands, and even standing versus sitting. In the Psalms (like the passage above), the people of God are admonished to praise the Lord with everything that is in their being. We are to shout praises to the Lord, celebrate and sing, dance with joy and declare his majesty. We are to create new songs that praise him and play all kinds of musical instruments to exalt him.

You may be wondering why a meditation on worship is included in this compendium for search committees. Frankly, because most people miss the connection between vibrant worship and church health. Unfortunately, even many pastors overlook the correlation between dynamic adoration and congregational vibrancy.

Too often senior ministers are mainly concerned with preaching, pastoral care and church management. And admittedly, much of their personal time should be spent in these essential areas. However, a pastor might spend hours on sermon preparation without realizing that, on any given Sunday morning, the people will experience transformation more by the sung word than by the preached word.

There is something in the wiring of people that makes music and image transformationally powerful. In reality, theology in melody is much more powerful than theology linearly spoken. Some people view worship as the preliminaries. For them, including many pastors, the sermon is the main event. Unfortunately, this is a short-sided view of worship and preaching, and definitely a misunderstanding of human learning.

Let me try something with you. Recite the alphabet. Many of us remember the order of the letters because of a tune that we hear in our minds. The bottom line is that words set to music are more easily retained than words just presented sequentially. Something in the chemistry in our brains facilitates the deepening of neurological patterns (memory) better through melody and image than via straight verbiage.

I say this not from a worship minister's perspective, but from one who preaches each weekend. I believe strongly in relevant biblical communication (see preaching meditation). But a pastor who thinks his/her pearls expositied from the Greek will impact a life more powerfully than a Bible text in melody (especially accompanied by image) is naive. And that same pastor is plain foolish if he or she thinks that a weekly 25-minute exposition will offset the value stamping of dozens of hours of CDs, radio, iPods, cable and movies that are being watched weekly by the flock.

Therefore, as you look for a new pastor, especially a new lead pastor, probe into his/her understanding of worship. A good question might be: What would a Sunday morning service look like under your leadership? Does the response reveal the impact of worship on community, church health and even growth? Does the response reveal the value of intergenerational celebration? Does the reply seem to limit worship to hymns or choruses, or is there a deep engagement with celebration arts such as drama, dance, sculpture, and everything from readings to video clips?

Not every member of a church staff will be a gifted musician. Nevertheless, all those responsible for leading a congregation must recognize the powerful place that celebration has in deepening and expanding the faith community. Consequently, as you look for a new pastor, choose one who highly values corporate worship.

*FATHER, high on our pastoral profile is a minister who can teach well.
We have asked for a pastor who also can lead and love this congregation.
Today we recognize that our church also needs a pastor that is deeply in
love with you, and who highly values the drawing of your people
together to adore you. Therefore, we ask that you graciously lead us to a
pastor who will facilitate dynamic worship. For you, Oh Lord, are
awesome and worthy of our highest praise. Amen!*

Final Thought:

Worship and *Word together* produce a powerful
synergy for transformation.

Vision

Now the people of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb's son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him ... "So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then [40 years ago]. Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said." Then Joshua blessed Caleb's son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. So Hebron has belonged to Caleb ever since, because he followed the Lord, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly. Joshua 14:6-13.

Pastoral ministry today requires good shepherding and communication skills. But solid caregiving and excellent preaching alone will not fulfill the Great Commission. Outstanding leadership is required to move a congregation into a rich Kingdom impact.

In this study passage, we see one such leader, Caleb, though 85 years of age, still had a dream of what God could accomplish for his people. He had vision, faithfulness, and tenacity. He had a realistic appraisal of the difficulties ahead, yet a passion for seeing God honored and an enthusiasm for getting about the task. He envisioned more than the present situation; he saw what the future could become.

As your church looks for a new pastor, keep high on your profile a leader with this kind of vision.

First and foremost, this leader must have **people vision**. While time and energy are invested in programs, these activities in themselves are not ministry. They are simply vehicles for touching the lives of people. A focus on people recognizes the value of adults, youth, and children. It has a heart for P.O.W.S (the poor, orphans, widows, and strangers). It respects race and gender. Pastoral vision sees people over programs, and sees people not for who they are presently, but for who they can become.

While it is true that the apostle Paul said he would do everything possible to reach all people (1 Corinthians 9:22), even he narrowed the focus of his ministry to reaching people who have not yet heard of Jesus (Romans 15:20). Likewise, effective leaders today are inclusive in their ministry outlook, but focused on their missional strategy. The vision of some pastors is to reach unchurched people. Other ministers have targeted nurturing young families. While others want their congregation to be a place where people can find new hope and dream a new dream. In all these illustrations, people are at the heart of the pastoral vision.

Second, spiritual leaders also manifest **product vision**. Bill Hybels and Willow Creek Community Church, for example, are well known for their desire to turn *irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ*. But let me raise a question—what does a fully devoted follower of Christ look like? The desired product of a mature believer in Christ will again take different forms according to pastoral vision. For so-called teaching pastors, their vision is a congregation full of Christians who possess a rich understanding of the Word. Other pastors envision their congregation becoming a bridge to their neighborhood. Product vision clarifies the direction of ministry priorities.

In addition to people vision and product vision, effective leaders also display **process vision**. Some leaders understand where the congregation needs to go, but unfortunately, they are not able to move their people in the desired direction. Effective leaders, on the other hand, are change agents. They are able to lead people into a new future. Some use their enthusiastic persuasion to energize the process. Others use low key, collaborative team building to move people forward. Their common skill is that they can both dream the dream and envision the pathways necessary to accomplish it

As you interview prospective candidates, make sure you check their vision!

FATHER, give us a pastor who has vision— a vision of who you are, and a vision of who we can become. May his vision align with your purposes for our congregation. And under his/her leadership open the eyes of our people to see the many wonderful possibilities before us. Amen!

Final Thought:

Without vision, we merely parish!

Children

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but his disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

Mark 10: 13-16.

If you want to call a pastor who shares the values of Jesus, call one who really enjoys children. In fact, as this Bible passage describes, find one who is even childlike. For Jesus encouraged that we imitate children—not that we should be childish, but that we should maintain certain childlike attitudes. Children are:

Concrete	They take people and God at His word
Humble	Their worth is not marked by power, prestige, or possessions
Investigative	They check things out
Love	They give love and respond to love
Dependent	Their well-being requires a healthy relationship with others

While the primary purpose of this passage is instruction on the Kingdom of God, we cannot help but see in the text how much Jesus valued children. He desires them, he commends them, he holds them in his arms, and he blesses them (see also Mathew 18:1-5).

Let me raise two questions: First, how do you think these children felt being with Jesus? And second, how do you think their parents felt seeing their kids loved by Jesus?

My guess is that parents today are not much different from parents back then. Parents want the best for their kids, and this is especially true of their spiritual formation.

Research now validates how critical children's ministry is to the health and growth of a congregation. In his book *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*, researcher George Barna states: *Having devoted more than two decades of my life and all of my professional skills to studying and working with ministries of all types, I am now convinced that the greatest hope for the local church lies in raising Godly children.*

Think about the tremendous influence these unassuming little ones possess. Every year thousands of parents are brought to faith in Christ because of their children. Many entered a church for the first time because of their kids. Furthermore, it's been discovered that peer evangelism among children—one kid leading another kid to a Christian event—is one of the most prolific and effective means of evangelism in the nation.

In a pastoral letter to young ministers, Dr. Richard Dresselhaus, pastor of First Assembly of God in San Diego states: As I have written previously, I want to admonish you again not to neglect the children who are under your pastoral care. In fact, your success in ministry might well be measured by the loving care and insightful instruction you provide for the children of your flock. Yes, I understand that most of your weekly activities will be spent with adults. But in your attitude and in your heart, and even in your “planner”, I would admonish you to increasingly value children.

Therefore, as you look for pastoral prospects, probe into the area of their relationship with children. Ask questions on their philosophy of children's ministries. Do they genuinely desire Christian formation for your children? Do they use language that older children can understand? Do they use illustrations and examples from the world of children? In their present churches, how do the children's facilities compare to adult and youth facilities? In what ways do children participate in the faith community? And in what ways have they had to personally minister to children and their families?

Jesus commanded people to let children come to him, and not to hinder them. As a search team, you now have the opportunity to fulfill Christ's desire through the pastor you select.

FATHER, lead us to a pastor who is mature and deeply spiritual, yet one who at the same time maintains the humility, wonder and excitement characteristic of children. Give us a pastor who, like Jesus, will know children by name, and enjoy being in their presence. And make our congregation a safe, inviting and nurturing place for them and their friends. Amen!

Final Thought:

Make it big with children, and you'll make it big in God's kingdom.
Richard Dresselhaus

Coaches

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13.

When I am invited to preach at churches in transition, I often share a sermon entitled: *Don't Hire a New Minister!* Needless to say, the title is somewhat disconcerting to the leadership, knowing that they are without a minister, and are in the process of searching for a new one.

The text for the sermon is 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 where Paul tells Christians that they are all ministers: *all of this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation* (v.18). A church with 100 in attendance, therefore, has 100 ministers comprising the congregation. A congregation that averages 450, has 450 ministers.

In essence, every Christian is a minister. Therefore, what a church does not need is one more minister. What it needs is a coach!

Coaches, like other members of an organization, have a role to fulfill. But unlike players who play a particular position, the coach's role is to help the players execute more effectively each of their positions.

From the text above it's clear that the role of leadership is the development of others. Whether it is *apostles* (missionaries), *prophets* (proclaimers of the Word), *evangelists* (church planters) or *pastors/teachers* (clergy), all these gifted leaders are appointed for equipping others. It's the people of a congregation who must accomplish works of service (v.12). The pastor's function is to equip Christ's people to do these acts of ministry. Therefore, the role of pastor is best understood as a coach.

Frankly, churches can't afford to pay people to do ministry. There is just too much ministry that needs accomplishing. If a youth pastor is expected to do all the teaching, head up missions trips and lead camps and retreats, your church will not only burn out that staff person, but will miss out on the reward that God intended for the lay ministers of the congregation. Whether it is worship, visitation, teaching, counseling or outreach, effective pastors develop lay leaders to serve effectively in those disciplines.

Coaching is an important and needed skill. Coaching is not telling someone what to do; that is directing (high direction, low support). Neither is it sending people off to

do what they want to do; that is delegating (low direction, low support). Coaching is a combination of both solid direction and frequent encouragement.

Effective pastors model for the congregation valuable Christian disciplines and ministry practices. Then as they draw people into these same engagements, and provide appropriate affirmation, these disciplines and practices become congregational values. The development of a church culture is the result of this kind of consistent coaching.

So as you look for a new pastor, don't settle for one who is merely interested in performing pastoral functions. Look for one who will train the people of your congregations to minister among the flock. Don't settle for someone who gets excited about what he/she is doing in the church, but for one who gets excited about what God's people are doing in the church.

And since coaching is an intensely personal activity, look for a pastor who gets out of the office (the press box) and enjoys mixing it up with people (the game field). After all, as coach Shula reminds us, *you can't coach people from a distance*.

DEAR LORD, throughout this search process, remind us that we are not hiring a church employee or looking for a solo star performer. Lead us to someone who will teach us how to play the Kingdom game. We desire a coach who will even help those newly attending our church to discover the joy of being our ministers. Amen!

Final Thought:

The real difference in coaching is not about talent, or personality, or pride, or ambition. It is about you believing in someone. And then doing whatever it takes to help that person be his or her very best.

Don Shula and Ken Blanchard

Communication

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." Acts 20:17-21.

Churches looking for a senior minister often set preaching as the most important ability for the position. But as our culture continually shifts from a linear, oral mode of communication to a more multi-sensory means of communication, a typical sermon can become very boring.

Pastors can no longer just be preachers; they need to be effective communicators. Relative biblical communication must take place on several fronts:

Incarnational communication. What made Jesus such a powerful communicator? Part of the answer is that he embodied the truths that he taught. People heard him, and they observed him. This is also what made the Apostle Paul an effective communicator. The text above states that his teaching happened in the context of living with them. Effective communicators realize that their most powerful sermons are not delivered on stage, but in their daily living among the flock.

Teaching and preaching. The next meditation will stress the importance of preaching. But for now, realize that most pastors will spend as much time teaching as they will preaching. Some, even more. Pastors conduct classes and seminars; they lead small groups and facilitate meetings. Some will be directly involved in the training of your church's leadership. All these venues require effective teaching skills. These out of the pulpit opportunities encourage give and take and more ownership on the part of the learner. Through engagement methodologies, an effective teacher can guide people into discovery learning.

Interpersonal communication skills. How often a minister will preach varies from congregation to congregation. However, on a daily basis every pastor must communicate with other staff members, leaders, congregants, seekers and the community at large. It is through interpersonal communication that people discover the heart of a minister. Through empathetic listening and clear communication, the pastor and people stay connected.

Written communication. Search committees always listen to tapes of messages, but rarely do they study prospects' written communication. Yet news articles, congregational letters and personal notes are all valuable means of communication. The best pastors have developed their communication skills whether from the pulpit or in person, whether through a formal presentation or a personal word of encouragement.

We know that Jesus was a phenomenal communicator. Crowds were attracted to him, and they hung on every word of his instruction. He used many forms of communication:

He lectured	(Matthew 5-7)
He asked questions	(Matthew 16:13)
He gave demonstrations	(Matthew 17:14-21)
He used object lessons	(Matthew 18:1-4)
He led discussions	(Matthew 16:5-20)

Like Jesus, effective communicators today will create images with words, will ask questions, and will use illustrations to help people understand biblical teachings. Therefore, as you look for a new pastor, let me encourage you to find a relevant biblical communicator.

Finally, let me add one more admonition. Just as you expect a pastor to be clear in communication and forthright with information, likewise, as a search committee, be sure to exercise good communication with one another and with the congregation. Be open and honest with one another, and gracious in your speech. Provide the congregation with regular updates, through web postings, newsletter articles and informational meetings. And by all means keep prospective ministers up to speed on the status of their candidacy. Especially with strong prospects, maintain contact at least every other week through an email, phone call or text.

O FATHER, no message in this world is more worthy of careful communication than your words of truth. Therefore, we ask you to give us a pastor who can communicate, with excellence, the timeless principles of Scripture. And help us in our responsibilities to communicate well with the congregation and with prospective pastors. Amen!

Final Thought:

A picture is worth a thousand words! — Anonymous

Preaching

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables... Jesus told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field' ... He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed' ... He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour' ... 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field' ... 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls' ... 'Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish'... Matthew 13:1-3; 24, 31-33, 44-47.

Most search committees have at the top of their selection criteria good preaching. But let me ask some questions: Was Jesus a good preacher? Were his sermons engaging? What style of preaching did he use? Finally, what is good preaching anyway?

Some churches say that they want an *expository* preacher. What they mean by this is a pastor who will take them through studies on the books of the Bible. But Jesus never preached this way. When quoting or explaining the Old Testament, for example, he did not offer exegetical studies identifying a Hebrew word's literal meaning, the tense used and the number of its occurrences in the Torah.

If you think about it, most so-called expository messages are in reality topical sermons. A pastor preaching through Ephesians, for example, might make four sermons out of chapter four, verse two: *Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love*. A sermon on humility is appropriate, just as is one on gentleness, patience or bearing. But when a word or text is used only as a launching point to many other passages, then the sermon is really a topical message, not an expository one.

Book studies are appropriate when complete sections are taken to communicate the whole thought of the author. But remember, while nuances of Greek words can be fascinating, the biblical authors probably never intended the readers to parse each word. Rather, written communication has a flow. Keeping the big picture of a passage in mind, supported by the particulars within the text, made the most sense to the early church, and is most helpful to listeners today.

Topical messages are also appropriate to lead the congregation to understand biblical themes, such as the atonement of Christ. Many have found, however, that an

ongoing string of topical messages is not as easy for a congregation to follow, as are thematic mini-series. Yes, there is a time to talk about prayer, community or to explain the meanings of the Lord's Supper or Baptism. But even here, the congregation more easily understands those concepts when they naturally flow from a passage, rather than a dance through all parts of the Bible.

Therefore, the best preaching is always *textual preaching*. In other words, the message comes directly from the text itself. It's not necessarily wrong for a pastor to use a text to back something he/she wants to say. Rather it's more complete and faithful to the context to let the author's intent drive the message. In this way, the congregation learns truths that the Holy Spirit has preserved for over twenty centuries.

Thus, as you look for a new pastor, look for one whose sermons are crafted carefully from the text and whose delivery style is engaging. And through your interviewing and reference checks, also be sure the minister's messages connect with daily living.

*LORD, we know that all Scripture is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. We ask that you give us a pastor who can both explain the Scriptures clearly and live the Scriptures daily. We also ask that you soften the soil of our hearts, so that as a congregation we may be receptive to its multiplying effect in our lives.
Amen*

Final Thought:

The sermon is a door that opens onto a path that leads the pilgrim into new steps of growth and service to the glory of God. Warren Wiersbe

Compassion

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Matthew 9:35-38.

Jesus' purpose in taking on humanity was redemption—the offering of himself as the payment for sin, so that people could be reconciled to God. During his three and a half years of ministry, he spent most of his time teaching, by both word and example. In fact, Jesus is called Rabbi (teacher) more than any other descriptor in the New Testament.

When we look at what motivated Jesus, we see that it was people. From this particular text we observe the teacher moving among villages and towns explaining the Gospel message. Not because it was his job, or even his mission, but because of his deep compassion for people. Ultimately—he gave his life for people.

On another occasion, we see Jesus encouraging the disciples to recharge and refresh themselves by withdrawing to a lonely place. But when they arrived on the other side of the lake a crowd engulfed them. Mark records: *When Jesus went ashore, he saw a great multitude and had compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things* (Mark 9:34).

As you look for a new pastor, keep compassion high on your criteria. However, a compassion for people must not be misunderstood. It does not mean that a pastor must be omnipresent, always available for each troubled individual.

Compassion will manifest itself differently from person to person based on their wiring. Some leaders are team-builders, some are inspirational catalysts, while others are program developers. But a common motivation for Gospel ministry must always be a love for God and a love for people.

Compassion will also manifest itself differently depending on congregation size. In a smaller church, pastoral presence is achieved with most of the members. However, in a larger fellowship, compassionate pastors must develop a cadre of caregivers who together will assure coverage for the needs of the congregation.

During your interviewing process, notice how the applicants speak about people, particularly those with special needs. A minister may have learned the art of building a

church numerically or delivering well-crafted messages. But building a church and building the kingdom of God is not necessarily the same thing. Do they speak mostly of touching lives, or do they seem to be caught up doing church activities? In what ways have they been responsive to people in need?

And to balance this last point, let me encourage you as leaders to protect your new pastor from burnout. With so many needs around them, compassionate leaders have difficulty managing self-care. Church boards need to ensure the emotional health of their leaders, and therefore need to protect them against the abuse of over commitment.

As you look for a new pastor, remember the heart of Jesus. If you find a minister who is troubled by people in need, you may have found the right servant leader for your congregation.

LORD, please give us a leader who shares your compassion for humanity. Lead us to a pastor who will embrace young seekers and mentor strong leaders. One who cares for young and old alike. One who truly loves their neighbor more than themselves. Amen!

Final Thought:

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, *but do not have love, I am nothing.* 1 Corinthians 13:2

Persistence

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:1-8.

Search committees spend a great deal of time waiting for people to respond. Week after week passes waiting for questionnaires to be completed, profiles to be sent, agencies to respond, candidates to reply, telephone calls to be returned and interviews to be scheduled.

In this Scripture passage, Jesus emphasizes the value of persistence. Two individuals are portrayed in this parable—a godless, insensitive judge and a poor, defenseless widow. The judge had power to convict, while the widow could only hope for a positive decision. The widow did not give up as she waited for the judge's response. Although she was the victim of injustice, she discovered a seldom-used weapon—persistence. She continued her pursuit of justice. The judge eventually gave in before she wore him out.

In a parallel parable found in Luke 11:5-10, Jesus described the persistence of a man who, late in the evening, keeps knocking on a friend's door with a request to borrow some food. In those days, they did not have 24-hour marts, and the man needed food for the guests visiting in his home. Jesus explained: *I tell you even though he will not get up and give you bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need* (v. 8).

Christ tells his disciples that they too can utilize the resources of prayer and persistence. In the Luke 18 text, he explained his reason for telling the parable: *Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up* (v. 1). Furthermore, in the Luke 11 text, the Lord emphasized: *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For*

everyone who asks receives; those who seek find; and those who knock, the door will be open (vv. 9, 10).

Through these two parables, Christ taught that prayer and persistence are collaborative resources. We need to be persistent in our prayers and prayerful in our persistence.

One area where persistence has helped some search teams is in contacting former prospects. Perhaps early in the process a highly qualified candidate graciously declined pursuing the position. Surprisingly, some of these ministers may be willing to have another discussion a few months down the road. Circumstances change, and the Holy Spirit works on hearts. It is not unusual for a prospect's initial resistance to soften, and later be open to further dialog.

So when you come to times in the search process when things seem to slow down, or even when nothing at all seems to be happening, remain prayerfully persistent. Keep cultivating your candidate pool, keep reviewing applicant qualifications, keep evaluating sermons, keep asking questions—and by all means keep bathing your whole process in prayer.

LORD, we confess that we get discouraged when nothing seems to be happening. Help us to understand that while we are waiting, you are working. Give us the persistence to continue to pray and not give up. Amen!

Final Thought:

Just keep starting—and finishing will take care of itself! Neil A. Fiore

Halfway

So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart... Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall." Also our enemies said, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work." Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us." Therefore, I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your people, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes." When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work. From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Nehemiah 4:6-16.

Anyone who has ever played team sports knows the significance of halftime. The halfway period of the game is not just a pause in the action when the players get an opportunity to rest from the conflict; it is a time for encouragement and assessment.

Some teams are fast starters who pile up points and statistics during the first half of the game. Then either from laziness, lack of discipline or a flawed game plan, the tide turns and the momentum shifts.

On the other hand, a team that appears hopelessly outclassed exits the locker room for the second half with new determination and stamina. They gather momentum and fight to the finish, usually ending up victoriously. They are known as second half teams.

Nehemiah and his group of volunteers had begun the wall-building project in Jerusalem with God's help and great enthusiasm. Immediately after the project started, however, the evil troika that opposed the project began their strategy to halt the building construction. The Samaritans, Ammonites and Arabs began throwing a barrage of rumors, insults, ridicules and intimidations.

The Jews, under Nehemiah's leadership, were able to use their spiritual and physical resources to make remarkable progress despite the opposition. But when they reached the halfway point, a different type of opposition reared its ugly head.

Prior to this point, the enemies were from outside the walls. The opposition was expected and identifiable. But this new wave of opposition began to mount from an unexpected source—from inside the city—from some of the builders themselves. *The Message* describes the mood of the builders like this: *The builders are pooped, the rubbish piles up; we're in over our heads, we can't build this wall* (4:10).

So, Nehemiah encouraged the people and they *continued to work* (4:20-21). And with more focused energy, the project was finished: *So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days* (6:15).

Churches go through similar experiences. At times things bog down, or expectations are not met. When this occurs, criticism can surface from within. It can arise in the middle of a building project, a new program initiative, or even during a search process. It is not uncommon, for example, to hear the query—*Why is this taking so long?* A member's eagerness, or frustration, can feel like criticism.

Much of the ability to finish any task is to keep your eyes fixed on the goal. Push beyond the present and reflect on the sense of achievement you will know when your new pastor is finally present. As members of the search committee, keep pressing on! You will eventually know the joy and satisfaction of a job well done.

LORD, we are thankful you have been with us on this spiritual adventure. As we come to the midpoint of our search, help us not to get discouraged by prospect responses, nor congregant expectations. Energize us to persevere with eternity's values in view. Amen!

Final Thought:

If it still seems so *far to go*, remember how far you have come!

Humility

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:1-11.

Did you hear about the church that gave their pastor a pin for being so humble? They had to take it away from him because he insisted on wearing it all the time.

Humility is one character trait you admire in other people, but you can't talk about having it in your own life. You can't be proud that you are humble.

Perhaps it would be helpful to distinguish between two similar words found next to each other in the dictionary. The words are *humiliation* and *humility*. Humiliation is *the wounding of pride*; humility is *the absence of pride*. You can never humiliate a humble person.

God doesn't make people humble. An examination of biblical verses that refer to humility reveal the word is usually followed by *yourselves* or *themselves*.

The Bible text above describes the *self-emptying* of Jesus: *He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross* (Phil. 2:8). Christians, in the same manner, are to consider others better than themselves. According to Andrew Murray, humility is *not thinking less of yourself; it's not thinking of yourself at all*.

Humility is often associated with the term meekness. Some consider meekness to mean spineless. However, as one leader recognized: *If you think meekness is weakness, you should try being meek for a week*. Humility is actually strength. The New

Testament lists humility along with unity and purity as character traits reflected in mature churches and spiritual leaders.

I once had the privilege of driving a well-known Christian leader to the airport. The trip took about one hour. It seemed to take only a few minutes. After I dropped the gentleman off, I reflected on our conversation. What was it about our time together that made me appreciate and respect him? I realized he had told me nothing about himself. The entire time was spent in his asking questions about my family and my ministry. During our time together, I learned very little about what he did, but I learned a whole lot about who he was.

As members of the search team, how can you discover if humility is a characteristic of the pastors that have contacted your committee? Obviously, references will be helpful. But simply let your interviews inform you. Listen to what the ministers talk about. Is the content of their speech about themselves or about others? Do they tend to dominate the conversation? How well do they acknowledge the contributions of others to their success? When they ask questions, do they listen attentively to the answers? And finally, how do they respond to praise?

LORD, we seem to be asking for two different things when we request of you a pastor who is both dynamic, yet humble. For your Kingdom's sake our church does need a leader with solid competence and confidence. But we also want one who is quick to give praise to you, and eager to acknowledge the contributions of others. So, give us a leader with Christ like humility. Amen!

A Final Thought:

Ability is God-given ... Be thankful.

Praise is man-given ... Be humble.

Conceit is self-given ... Be careful.

Due Diligence

Part 2

We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.
Colossians 1:28, 29.

Let's face it—serving on a search committee is hard work. The national average for finding a new pastor is approximately eighteen months. And most call committees meet an average of once per week, with assignments for team members between sessions. As members of the search team, you can identify with the feelings of Paul who said that he *labors* in his ministry.

In an earlier meditation, you reflected on the fact that God is sovereign; that ultimately, this is Christ's Church; and that God is more vested in the outcome of the search process than even your team. His promise is that he will lead and guide. His Spirit is active in your lives and in the lives of prospective candidates.

But while God is sovereignly doing his work of touching minds and hearts and influencing circumstances, your team must also continue its work of identifying the next pastor. The balance is similar to that mentioned in the text above—I *labor... with his* energy. So again, consider the importance of Due Diligence, particularly as it applies to the following pursuits:

Due diligence in reviewing resumes. Whatever the source of referrals, your committee is responsible for carefully sorting through resumes and/or applications. A good practice is for your team to consider resumes independently, and then meet together to place them into one of three piles: A *doesn't match the profile* pile; A *possibility* pile; and A *hot prospects* pile. The style, content and professionalism of a resume provides good initial information on the prospect.

Due diligence in communication with prospects. Frequently I hear complaints from pastors who have submitted resumes that they haven't heard anything from a search committee, even after a month or more. Simple courtesy requires a response notifying candidates when they can expect to hear from the committee. Those who obviously do not match the profile can immediately receive a *thanks, but no thanks* letter. Prospects in the potential pile should be communicated with at least once a month. This will keep them active and will buy you time to look more closely at your best fit prospects. And with pastors who match the profile well, contact by somebody on

the committee should happen at least every other week. Throughout the process your team will receive inquiries from new prospects. Continue to respond appropriately. But definitely pursue quickly and diligently the best prospects.

Due diligence in interviewing. As a search team you will have at least four opportunities to question prospective ministers. The first Q & A time is usually over the telephone through a video conference call. The second and third opportunities occur when serious prospects are brought to your campus for onsite interviews, and when part of your team visits their settings to observe their ministries. Questions are also asked during the candidating weekend as a way for congregants to better know the pastor.

Due diligence in reference checks. Thorough committees conduct reference checks to three levels. If the candidate is seriously interested in your church, you must have permission to contact the references supplied by the prospect. Using a structured interview format, you will acquire the information needed to determine the degree to which this prospect fits your profile. The initial references provided by the prospect should be called prior to any site visit. If the prospect becomes one of three finalists, second level and at times, third level reference checks are in order (see meditation on *References*).

Due diligence is an expression that attorneys use because of the importance of thoroughness in legal matters. The expression, however, is even more descriptively appropriate for the efforts of a search team, because your work has eternal consequences. Finding the best person to be your next pastor is no easy task. Therefore, just as you follow Christ in full devotion, likewise serve him with careful commitment to this pastoral search.

FATHER, it seems like we have been in the formation phase of this process for a long time, but now we are actually in dialog with potential candidates. We do not know if we have talked yet with our future pastor, but we are excited about the possibility. Simultaneously, with each resume that arrives, we sense a growing amount of work before us. Please keep us focused; please keep us energized; and please keep us diligent. Our desire is to honor you through our labor. Amen!

Final Thought:

The plans of the diligent lead to profit. Proverbs 21:5

Emotional Intelligence

Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Philippians 2:1-5

From the Ten Commandments to the Sermon on the Mount, the Bible emphasizes personal and spiritual formation. However, *personal* formation seldom happens in a vacuum. Personal maturity is relational at its very core. This truth is revealed in the great Commandment that expects Christ followers to love *God* and love our *neighbors*, just as we would love *ourselves*. Holistic maturity can only happen in the context of life with others.

Interestingly, the connectedness of personal and relational growth is gaining recognition in the field of leadership theory. A clear example of this, for example, is in the research and writing of Daniel Goleman and associates on *Emotional Intelligence (EQ)*. The authors have discovered that effective leaders have the ability to manage both themselves and their relationships. They argue that the best leaders have good *self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relational management*.

Self-Awareness. As you look for a new pastor you will obviously look for someone who has good self-awareness. Through your interviews you will discuss with prospects their strengths and limitations. They will identify their spiritual gifts and competencies. Perhaps, through assessments you will also discover personality themes and leadership styles. A minister that lacks good self-awareness must be eliminated as a potential candidate, no matter how good of a communicator or lover of people he or she may be. Your church cannot afford the leadership mistakes this minister will likely make.

Self-Management. In addition to self-awareness, effective pastors must exercise good self-management. While it is important for them to utilize their strengths as often as possible, they still need the ability to manage areas of lesser strength. For example, the extravert will still need to withdraw for reflection and the crafting of sermons. And the introvert will still need to push into the crowd to welcome and engage people. Good self-management will enable your next pastor to do what must be done.

Social Awareness. Just as self-awareness and self-management work best in tandem, likewise good social awareness and social skills strengthen ministry effectiveness. Social awareness includes empathy, organizational awareness, and the ability to recognize and meet the needs of others. Obviously, ministry is maximized when its leaders have a genuine concern for people, and when they are able to build systems that touch the heartfelt concerns of their people.

Relational Management. Social skills include: visionary leadership, influence, developing others, communication, change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds, teamwork, and collaboration. It isn't hard to see how these competencies identified by the researchers apply to congregational ministry.

Therefore, as you interview prospective candidates, and as you conduct reference checks, you will want to formulate questions that provide a clear picture of a prospect's track record in these relational competencies.

Two centuries ago, the apostle Paul told a young pastor: *Watch your life and doctrine closely* (1 Timothy 4:16). The leadership challenge has basically remained the same from the 1st century to the 21st century. Both character and competencies matter. As you look for a leader with a heart for God, also look for one who is relationally astute.

FATHER, we know that there are no perfect human leaders. Only you are perfect. But for this, your Church, we do ask that you give us a leader with solid personal understanding and good people skills. Bring us a pastor who has the capacity to move us deeply into the community to impact lives for the Kingdom. Amen!

Final Thought:

It's not a person's IQ that makes them effective, *but rather their EQ!*
Daniel Goleman

Consensus

So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question... The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: ... The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul... When they finished, James spoke up: ... It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us... Acts 15:1-29

One issue that needs early resolve in the search process is how the committee will make decisions. Determining the mind of Christ on the matter is not always easy. No individual has the sole pipeline to God.

In this devotional passage, we see that some things haven't changed over 2000 years. As the church expanded to include more people who did not have a Jewish background, a question arose as to how much of the Hebraic practices needed to be fulfilled by Gentiles who became Christians. The text reveals that many voices were given the opportunity to address the issue. Then we read James' summative words: *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...*

Though we do not know exactly how the Jerusalem council arrived at their consensus, we do know that they moved forward with one mind. And this leadership challenge is equally important for your work as a search team. Arriving at consensus is essential as you seek to identify one final candidate to present to the congregation.

But what exactly does *consensus* mean? Is it the same as *unanimous*? Early in the search process you as a team will need to be unanimous about your understanding of consensus. In other words, the committee must be in *complete accord* and *of one mind* (unanimous) that they will present the candidate for whom they have *general agreement* (consensus).

When a search team adopts the standard that they must be unanimous on the final candidate, problems can arise. For more often than not, a full committee rarely gets equally enthused about a particular prospect. One member of the team prefers the academic preaching of Minister A, a second likes the down-to-earth application of Minister B, while the third prefers the humor of Minister C. Search teams that define *unanimous* as *everyone's preferred choice* frequently struggle finding a qualified pastor.

If on the other hand, when consensus is understood that the team will present to the church the candidate *who best fits our profile*, irrespective of whether that minister is everyone's personal number one choice, then the committee can make progress and accomplish its task.

When one hundred percent unanimous agreement is sought for a finalist, a couple of process problems can arise. First, a more reserved, harmonious type team member may not honestly voice concerns about a prospect if the majority of the committee seems to affirm the minister. They don't want to be a stumbling block to the process. Second, one member with a personal passion or agenda can block the advancement of even the most qualified candidates.

Early in the search process, your committee established a pastoral profile for the position. When you look at finalists, it is helpful to develop a template for weighting the various aspects of the profile. Team members can then independently assign a score (1-5) on each part of the criteria, with a cumulative score for each minister.

What the committee needs to be unanimous about is that they will present by consensus to the congregation a candidate who best meets their profile criteria. If this decision is not made early in the process, ignored until the time when real prospects are being interviewed, it is almost too late to establish the ground rule.

When each team member is in agreement, upfront, that they are willing to present to the church a quality pastor (even though the individual may not be their personal first choice), healthy closure on an excellent candidate can become a reality.

DEAR LORD, you are the one who made us unique, each with individual personality and preferences. You are also the one that drew us from different places from the congregation and set us apart for this task of selecting your next servant. Warm our hearts to be drawn to the best pastor for our people. Give us a spirit of humility and submission to one another. Bring us to agreement in our selection, and may our deliberations bring you honor. Amen!

Final Thought:

...be of one mind, live in peace. 2 Corinthians 13:11

Call

The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt. Exodus 3:7-10.

As a search committee, you are working on behalf of the church. But ultimately, you are working on behalf of God. Notice from this Bible passage that the Lord says ***I have indeed seen...I have heard...I am concerned...I have come down...so now, go, I am sending you...*** When God has a mission to accomplish, he invites people to partner in the process. Therefore, your role in the selection of a new minister for your church is actually God's work of calling through you.

Not only is God working in your hearts as a search team; he is also working in the lives of pastors nearing transition. While he is guiding your committee's process, he is also calling a new shepherd toward you. You'll be able to recognize these convergent calls as they are identified through five critical factors: *compulsion, character, competencies, compatibility, and confirmation.*

Compulsion. Pastoral ministry is not for the faint hearted. People who view it simply as a nice career will eventually lose their passion for the job. Ministers who make it over the long haul are those who deeply sense the hand of the Lord placing them into his service. It is this compulsion that keeps them moving forward in both the good times and difficult times. So, as you interview various ministers, try to ascertain the depth of their call. If they make it into your finalist category, you'll also want to discover how strong is their sense of being drawn to your church.

Character. No doubt you've heard the expression: *The Christian life is more caught than taught.* Transformation does not occur by hearing religious verbiage from professionals. People are changed when they see Christ's values flowing from their leaders. Therefore, a challenge for your committee is to select a candidate who is *above reproach* (1 Tim. 3:2), knowing full well that no perfect pastor exists. While acknowledging that everyone is still in process, you must nevertheless pursue a candidate of integrity and godliness. Prospects that show significant character cracks

must be eliminated. The reference checks and background investigations that your team performs is critical to your process.

Competencies. Everyone has things they do well, and things they do not do well. With your pastoral profile in mind, seek a candidate whose finest strengths match your greatest needs. Churches get in trouble when they lower the hiring standard to accommodate a personality that they like. The greatest Kingdom results will only happen when the requisite skills are present.

Compatibility. Sometimes it's hard to explain, but you can just tell when *chemistry* is present. Some teams just seem to click, while others don't. Through your discussion with potential candidates, get a sense of how the DNA of the prospects fits in with the DNA of the congregation, and particularly the DNA of the church's ministry team.

Confirmation. The last factor in the process is the like-mindedness described in the previous meditation (*Consensus*). Many of the pastors you review will have a compulsion for ministry and a character that reflects Christlikeness. A select group will have the competencies for the task, and a narrower group the compatibility for which you are looking. With those factors in place, when the committee comes to consensus on one individual, the fifth factor, *confirmation*, becomes a reality. When the confirmation stage is reached, the committee, the candidate and the congregation affirm God's call.

DEAR LORD, we're not expecting you to supernaturally drop a pastor out of the clouds and into our congregation. But neither do we want to mechanically put in place someone who just seems to have the requisite ministerial skills. Please give us a Godly leader who reflects the character of Christ. One who is passionate and committed to Kingdom service. One who has the right gift mix and people skills to be compatible with our church. And we will rejoice and give you praise for your divine guidance and graciousness once again. Amen!

A Final Thought:

When God places a call, we better pick up the receiver.

Diplomacy

"So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me." The astrologers answered the king, "There is not a person on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among human beings." This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death. When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. He asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. At this, Daniel went into the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him. Daniel 2:9-16.

Howard Cosell was one of the best-known sportscasters in America. Some people loved him, while other people despised him. You never had to wonder what Cosell meant. When someone challenged his manner of expression, he would often respond, *I'm just telling it like it is*. Few people questioned Cosell's knowledge of the game or the accuracy of his comments. Many, however, were offended by his lack of tact. In fact, it was because of this impropriety that the sports network eventually let him go.

Some people believe that telling it like it is (no matter whom it hurts) is a virtue. But as Christians we understand that truth-speaking requires love as its companion (Eph. 4:15). In addition, we are encouraged to be patient with people, forgiving in spirit. For some, telling it like it is serves the purpose of venting frustrations. But the Christian leader's focus is for the well-being of others. Therefore, confrontation must always be offered in the context of love.

Biblical diplomacy requires both wisdom and tact. Daniel, a wonderful example, demonstrated a skillful manner of combining these two qualities. Long before he served as a diplomat under King Nebuchadnezzar, he developed the quality of diplomacy.

While living in captivity in Babylon, Daniel and his three friends acquired a broad range of knowledge in many areas of life. He was considered one of the wise men in his adopted country. When a group of wise men was unable to interpret the king's nightmare, all the country's wise men were condemned to death. Even though Daniel was not part of the group who was unable to interpret the king's dream, he was included in the death warrant.

When Daniel heard the decree from Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, Daniel responded with wisdom and tact (v. 14). Wisdom is not simply the accumulation of knowledge. It also includes the ability to use sound judgment and discernment. Tact is the ability to say and do the right thing, at the right time, in the right way. Tact has been described as the ability to make a point without making an enemy.

Diplomacy for a Christian leader may occasionally call for telling it like it is, but that direct approach should always be surrounded with love. Daniel displays his wisdom and tact by asking questions of Arioch and then listening to his reply (v.15). He further displayed wisdom by asking the king for more time. Daniel needed to find his three friends in order to spend time in discussion and prayer.

The context for your pastor today is quite different from that of Daniel's day. But while circumstances change, relational work among people remains relatively similar. So be wary of a prospect that appears sharp or narrow. Watch out for one who is sarcastic or uses humor at another's expense. As you choose a new pastor, select one who has demonstrated gracious speech and relational tact.

LORD, thank you for the privilege of being your children, and now, also for the invitation to serve in our church's leadership. As individuals, and as a team, may we always speak honestly. Help us communicate truth with wisdom and with tact. May we constantly be aware that we are your representatives. Amen!

Final Thought:

Tact is the ability to give people a shot in the arm, *without letting them feel the needle.* O. A. Battiste

Short Cuts

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ.

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Ephesians 4:14-16.

One of the most famous *short cuts* in history took place at the New York Marathon. A contestant started the race, then boarded a subway and rejoined the race later. People were amused to think she thought she could get away with the deception.

Short cuts are not confined to athletics, nor are they always as obvious. Even search teams can be guilty of attempting to shortcut the process.

I was interim pastor at a church on the east coast. Because of the distance from my home to the church, I could only spend one day a week there. Someone suggested that there was a pastor nearby who had recently resigned from his church and was available to lead the Bible study on Wednesday nights. Also, whenever I could not be there on a Sunday, he preached. After a few weeks, it became known that he and his family did not have a place to live. Because the parsonage was vacant, the church board let the pastor move in temporarily.

The congregation liked his teaching and preaching. As they became better acquainted, several people suggested that he be considered as a candidate. It would make it easier for everyone and would avoid the expense of moving a new pastor from another location.

At a church business meeting, an influential member brought a recommendation that the visiting pastor be called as permanent pastor. The congregation voted to call him and, in the process, by-passed both the constitution and the Search Committee.

The result of shortcutting the search process was disastrous. Within a couple of years, the pastor left the church, took a number of families with him, and started another church a few miles away. It was later discovered that splitting churches was his pattern.

No one had bothered to obtain any references or talk to the leadership of the previous churches he had served. The man had literally walked through the open door backwards.

In the text above Paul reminded the congregation at Ephesus that the Church is a body, and that each individual has a part to play. Christ is the Head; the members are joined together; and *the church grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

The search process appears to be painfully slow at times. References, interviews, profiles, phone calls, listening and viewing sermons all take time. There are those in the church (and on the search team) who may suggest ways to shortcut the process. But remember, your part in the Body of Christ, at this present moment, is to complete a quality, God-honoring search.

Rushing a minister to candidate status, for example, because he is close to accepting another call is wrong. If God is leading, and the pastor really desires to be with you (and is not just in a hurry to get a job), then it's appropriate to take the time necessary for the requisite interviews, reference checks and assessments.

Similarly, if you are impressed with a minister who doesn't fully match your profile, again a reminder is in order to go slowly with that prospect. Lowering hiring qualifications has rarely led to a good congregational fit.

While the length of your search may seem to stretch on, and while everything in you desires closure, resist the temptation of short cuts that may cost the church dearly in the long run.

DEAR GOD, we believe you are not only interested in the leadership of this church; you also want to be in control of the search process. Help us not to procrastinate or be presumptuous. Give us the discipline to follow the procedures that you have helped us establish no matter how tedious the process may be. Amen!

Final Thought:

The right process will yield the right product.

Postmodernity

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

Increasingly we hear that we are living in a post-Christian culture. While it is true that church attendance has declined with successive generations (Builders, Boomers, Busters, and Bridgers), the cultural shift is far more pervasive. Note the contrasting beliefs and comfort zones distinguishing post-moderns from moderns:

Modern

Absolutes

Evidence

Declaration

Certainty

Predictability

Principles

Words

Post-modern

Tolerance

Experience

Dialogue

Openness

Excitement/Adventure

Story

Images

Any congregation serious about reaching the unchurched, particularly those under forty, must recognize the shifting perceptions and values of post modernity.

Interestingly, the challenge today is not much different from the situation facing the expanding Church two-thousand years ago. Almost all the early Christians were Jewish. They understood Christ as the Messiah. They appreciated the boundaries of their faith as religious expression.

As the church reached out to Gentiles, however, many of the Hebraic customs seemed extraneous in other cultural settings. Thus, the Apostle Paul, in reaching out to seekers, pushed past contextual entrapments to the purity of a relationship with Christ.

Similarly, to be effective in reaching an increasingly spiritual but irreligious culture, we too need to meet people where they are in order to draw them to Christ.

The reason many teens and young adults struggle with today's churches is because many of its services have evolved into a religious event. Perhaps one of the events is called a traditional service, and another event the contemporary service, but very little is different. They are both: we will perform, and you will mainly sit and listen.

But young adults want to experience the power of God, and they want to participate in all aspects of the services. They learn by image through the arts, and they thrive in community. This cultural shift may explain the vibrant growth of Christian groups like the Charismatic Church (hand clapping and dancing), the African American Church (joyful movement and preaching dialog with the audience) and the Anglican Church (icons, incense and liturgy).

The pastor with fifteen logical reasons for believing in Christ will not be as effective as the minister who allows seekers to experience his presence. The pastor who gives a crafted thirty-minute sermon may not be appreciated as well as the pastor who gives a twenty-five-minute sermon, with relevant application and/or an opportunity, somehow, for questions.

As a search team, I would admonish you to ask your pastoral candidates how they plan to reach all generations for Christ. Younger candidates may better understand the cyber world. Nevertheless, older prospects may better recognize the complexities of multigenerational ministry. Perhaps a good compromise is to seek a young thinker, with an intergenerational and intercultural savvy.

FATHER, our desire is that all people come to know you. We do not want to miss opportunities to reach seekers who may live outside of our comfort zones. Help us to ask, 'why not' instead of 'why.' Help us to dream of possibilities, rather than make assumptions. And help us to reflect Christ to others, more than merely talk about him. Amen!

Final Thought:

To reach post-moderns with greater effectiveness our ministries must become more EPIC: Experiential; Participatory; Image Driven; and Connected. Leonard Sweet

Questions

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ... "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of death will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Matthew 16:13-19

In this passage, Jesus asks his disciples two questions. First, he inquired about popular opinions about himself. Then he narrowed the conversation to their belief: *But what about you*, he probed, *who do you say I am?*

Jesus was good at asking questions. In fact, the gospels record Jesus asking 225 different questions. Here are a few examples:

Do you understand what I have done for you? (Jn. 13:12b)

What do you want me to do for you? (Mt. 20:32)

Haven't you read...? (Mt. 19:4a)

Why do you break the commandment of God for your traditions? (Mt. 15:3)

Who of you by worrying can add an hour to his life? (Mt. 6:27)

Do you truly love me more than these? (Jn. 21:15b)

As members of the search team, you need to get comfortable asking questions. You will ask questions of the membership to inform the profile. You will ask questions of each other to determine one another's perspectives. And you will ask questions of applicants to determine their suitability for candidacy. Here is a sample of questions that you may want to use during an interview:

Tell us about your spiritual journey.

What person has been the most influential in your life? In what ways?

Tell us about your strengths. Who are you at your best?

What is one of your weaknesses and how do you compensate for it?

What makes you open to a move at this time?

What makes our church of interest to you?

Please give us an example of a good experience that you have had in your current ministry. In your present situation what has been disappointing?

Tell us how you developed and communicated your vision for the church.

How do you assess your ministry and the ministry of the church?

What have you done at your church that has been effective in reaching unchurched people? How does your church promote missions?

What would a Sunday morning look like under your leadership? Describe the services.

What are some of the ways you have promoted your church in the community?

When you came to your present church, how did you manage the current staff?

What are your expectations of staff members?

What are your expectations of the church board?

If you started all over again in your present ministry, what would you do differently?

Looking back on your past year, what is the greatest lesson God has taught you?

Whom do you turn to for accountability and pastoral care?

How does your spouse complement your ministry?

How does your family feel about a move at this time?

What do you want to tell us that we have not asked?

Is there anything you should tell us that might be embarrassing if we found out later?

At the conclusion of your process, your team will recommend one pastor to the congregation. During that candidating event, no new information should surface. Everything you need to know about the candidate should be discovered during your

dating and engagement. You only go to the altar (candidating) if your interviews have led you to the conviction that this is the right leader for the church.

O FATHER, just looking at these sample questions, knowing that we will be interviewing dozens of pastors, reminds us of the importance of our task. Help us to ask good questions, but more importantly help us to be discerning listeners. May these interviews with prospects be warm times of discovery, not awkward times of interrogation. May your Spirit guide us throughout our deliberations. Amen!

Final Thought:

Good questions are like keys—they unlock knowledge and understanding!

Reputation

Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

Acts 18:24-28

Profiles are wonderful tools. Search committees can glean a great deal of information from them. They provide a snapshot of an individual's personal wiring and leadership style. However, these documents have their limitations. First, they are self-reports—potential candidates generate the information through their own lenses. Second, some of them are contextual—personal styles can vary in a different environment.

So how can a search committee determine if a candidate's description of himself/herself is accurate? The best way is to check what other people say about the prospect. What is the person's reputation?

In Acts 18, Dr. Luke gives us a profile of the new pastor who came to the church in Ephesus from Alexandria. Apollos had come from another city, as well as from another continent.

Let us examine the profile of Apollos. The characteristics described by Luke will give us a guideline for questions we can ask regarding the reputations of the candidates we are considering. Here are five questions based on Luke's profile:

Is the individual an educated person? *Apollos was a learned man with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.* He was a native of Alexandria, a city that was known for its library and scholarship. Apollos knew the Word of God (vs. 24, 25). His education was both broad and thorough.

Is the individual a capable communicator? *Apollos spoke accurately, boldly and with great fervor.* Education is important, but its value is diminished unless a person is able to communicate the truths one-on-one and also to a group (vs. 25).

Does the individual have a teachable spirit? No matter how educated and talented a person is, there are still areas where one needs to grow. Apollos was willing to be taught, not only by scholars but also by laypersons like Priscilla and Aquila. It is important that leaders be life-long learners.

Is the individual a reputable leader? While Apollos was recognized as a leader at Ephesus, he also had an impact in the larger Christian community. He used his preaching and teaching gifts in other places such as Achaia.

Is the individual a credible witness? Apollos' testimony was consistent. He was someone who could be trusted to represent the church among Christians and where the audience was indifferent, or even antagonistic, to the gospel. Apollos was willing to take a stand for his faith.

In the next meditation, we will consider references more fully. For now, it is valuable to recognize that reputation goes beyond references from those that know a candidate. As a committee, it is helpful for you to get feedback on the pastor from other ministers in the prospect's denomination and from other ministers within the prospect's community (irrespective of denomination). Furthermore, if it can be ascertained, what reputation does the church have in the community? Responses to this question can reveal a minister's values and engagements.

LORD, help us to discover the reputation of our prospective candidates in a sensitive manner. Give us good judgment without us becoming judgmental. We pray for discernment. And Lord, help us to be a search team to maintain a good reputation with the prospects that we contact, as well as the congregation who entrusted us with this charge. Amen!

Final Thought:

What people say behind your back is your standing in the community.
E. W. Howe

References

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me. Romans 16:1-2

Though not as sophisticated as some endorsements today, what you have just read is a 2000-year-old personal reference. After heavy theological teaching (chapters 1-11) and practical instruction (chapters 12-15), Paul closed his letter to the Romans with some greetings and personal comments. In the text above, he commends Phoebe to their congregation. If past performance is a good indicator of future performance, Paul had no reservations providing a reference for this fine servant of Christ.

As a search team, you too will hear many endorsements of ministers. Regarding the timing of these calls, some search teams like to check primary references prior to setting up a conference call with pastors. Their thought is that if any red flags occur, they can avoid a lengthy phone interview, or at least ask clarifying questions if an interview is scheduled.

Most committees, however, prefer to have an initial conversation with prospects, to determine whether they would like to pursue the relationship. After hearing first-hand, the candidate's views, they will then conduct telephone interviews with primary references to hear their observations of the minister's passions, track record, strengths, weaknesses, etc.

Phone conversations are more helpful than letters of endorsement (especially, if presented directly by the prospect). As you ask your questions, let the respondents provide as much feedback as they deem necessary. Even if you do not get through all the questions, more information is gained by listening than talking. Don't just take notes on the content you hear - listen for tone, enthusiasm, hesitancy or even silence.

Many search teams develop a list of questions that are systematically asked of each reference. You may find the questions below appropriate for your search:

How long and in what capacity have you known the candidate?

What are the character qualities you appreciate most about this candidate?

Describe this candidate's relational skills:

How does he/she relate to those in authority, those under his/her leadership, and with peers?

How does he/she relate to members of the opposite sex and to children?

Describe Pastor _____ communication skills (teaching, preaching, writing and conversations).

Describe the candidate's leadership abilities.

Describe Pastor _____ care-giving practices.

Please rank his/her abilities in these three areas:

Communication Skills

Leadership Skills

Caregiving Skills

To what degree is the candidate's spouse supportive of and engaged in his/her ministry?

At [Church Name] our purpose is [insert purpose statement]. In what ways do you think this candidate's life and ministry parallels our purpose?

What are the greatest strengths this candidate will bring to our church?

What might be the greatest challenge for the candidate in this position?

If you were on our selection committee, is there anything about this candidate that we have not discussed that you would want to know?

Please name two other people who know him/her well. Do you know their numbers, or how can I reach them?

Since you will want to maintain the confidentiality of the candidate, the additional references generated by the last question will only be contacted if the prospect becomes a *finalist* (one of three prospective candidates). In this case, the same questions will be asked of the people identified by the initial references, and the secondary references will also be asked for two names, thus soliciting three levels of feedback on the candidate.

Those who graciously provide references should not be expected to answer every question we have about a pastor. Thank them for the time they have given to you. And if their endorsement squares with other reference checks, your search team has a green light to send this minister to the next phase of the search.

HEAVENLY FATHER, give us the ability to focus and listen well as we make these calls. Please give these references the clarity to paint an honest picture of the minister. Give them the boldness to disqualify an inappropriate candidate. And give us all a renewed enthusiasm about this joint venture of calling your leader to this congregation. Amen!

Final Thought:

Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.
Proverbs 15:22

Worry

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Matthew 6:25-34

Worry. Apprehension. Dread. Fear. Anxiety. Dismay. Uneasiness. Call it what you will, there comes a time for most search committees where doubt surfaces. Team member's emotions can range anywhere from mild concern to serious fear. And these emotions tend to surface at three stages in the process.

First, some committee members are prone to worry over the immensity of the task before them. There is an apprehension regarding their ability to fulfill all the time requirements. Some may also sense an anxiety over the weight of responsibility of the task.

A second occasion where worry might manifest itself is when a committee is disappointed by a lack of viable candidates seeking the position. Churches that solicit prospect names through nominators can get discouraged by the small return rate of recommendations. Searches that use website postings are overwhelmed by the large response but dismayed by the lack of qualified prospects. Where are we going to find a good pastor? Is the question that expresses the committee's uneasiness.

The third place where worry may surface is at the final selection phase. A search team that has worked closely together wants to honor one another, yet differences in preferences makes drawing to consensus less than automatic. Occasionally anger might pop out if a committee member feels marginalized, pressured, or held hostage by a dissenter or two. But more likely, the search process has been a bonding experience for the team, so when impasse surfaces a more typical response is discouragement and uneasiness regarding forcing closure.

In the Bible passage above, Jesus encourages Christians to lay worry aside. He doesn't flippantly say, don't worry; be happy! He simply raises the question; can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? (v.27). Then he reminds his followers

that the God who cares for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field cares much more for them (v.30).

In this text, Jesus acknowledges that the Father knows that people need things like food and clothing. It is also appropriate to recognize that the Father knows that your church needs a pastor.

So how can worry be kept in check when it begins to surface? Here are three suggestions from Jesus:

Seek first Christ's kingdom (v.33). Your anxiety will elevate the degree to which you feel responsible for finding the church's next pastor. Contrariwise, the more you can acknowledge that this is Christ's church— that he is sovereign, and that he can draw a pastor to your congregation, the lower becomes your level of worry.

Seek first Christ's righteousness (v.33). These words of Jesus serve as a reminder that being is as important as doing. In quiet times with Christ, seeking his godliness, you will be refreshed—enabling you to serve well.

Do not worry about tomorrow (v.34). While it is important to have the search timeline in mind, don't bother wasting emotional energy on issues or procedures that have not yet surfaced. Jesus' words should remind the team to focus on the present more than fear what may be down the road. He is saying to live one day at a time.

Finally, it will be worth the committee's time to memorize these words from Paul: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus* (Phil 4:6-7).

DEAR LORD, we pause at the beginning of this meeting to affirm our trust in you. We acknowledge that we can get overwhelmed by the weight of this responsibility and worry that we might not do the best job. Thank you for the reminder of your presence, your encouragement, and your guidance. We ask that your peace would continually guard our thoughts and emotions. Help us to keep focused on you, more than the circumstances around us. Amen!

Final Thought:

Cast all your anxiety on him, for he cares for you! 1 Peter 5:7

Encouragement

I have spoken to you with great frankness; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds. For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever. Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it, though I did regret it ... See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done... By all this we are encouraged. 2 Corinthians 7:4-13

The search process can have its moments of discouragement. Your team, responsible for finding a suitable candidate, may struggle with periods of doubt. On the other end of the search process, individuals seeking placement may also need encouragement from time to time. Delays, lack of communication, and rejections seem par for the course.

Most search teams begin their process with little experience or direction. Potential candidates may feel helpless, and sometimes hopeless, because they are unaware of how the process works, and the timetable for making decisions. Search team members should make it a point to encourage one another, as well as prospective candidates, throughout the process.

So how exactly do you go about this encouraging process? From the devotional passage above, three fundamental principles of encouragement stand out:

Expresses trust in each other. Paul affirmed that he had great confidence in the Corinthians. He mentions that he took great pride in them and that he was greatly encouraged by them (v. 4). We build up people by expressing our confidence in them and their ministry. In Philippians 1:6, Paul tells the church that because of their partnership in the gospel he was confident that they would complete their task.

Comfort each other. Paul encouraged the believers in Corinth by his sensitive awareness of their struggles. Just as he was comforted by Titus, he extended his comfort to them, assuring that God will provide his comforts when they are downcast (v.6).

Demonstrate concern for each other. The church in Corinth encouraged Paul by exhibiting concern for his well-being and for his ministry. He was overwhelmed with joy because of their longing for him and concern for him (v.9).

Encouragement builds and strengthens others. In verse 13, Paul notes that by all this we are encouraged. In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you.

Years ago, I started two files: one for letters of encouragement, the other for “kook” letters. (Fortunately, the encouragement file is by far the largest.) It is amazing the number of letters of encouragement that arrived exactly when I needed them. They have made a difference in my approach to my task. They renewed my spirit; they refreshed my mind; and they reinvigorated my service.

Much of the communication in a search process is not done face-to-face. Letters, phone calls and emails are usually a daily affair. As you use these venues in communication, make sure also to add a word of encouragement to the recipients. How can you be an encourager this week?

LORD, your Word and your people have been a great joy to us. Help us to take the time to encourage those who have assisted us and who are praying for us. And help us to be there for each other throughout this search process. Amen!

Final Thought:

Correction does much, but encouragement does more. Encouragement after censure, is as the sun after a shower. Goethe

Family

Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) 1 Timothy 3:1-5

In this devotional passage, a number of character qualities and behavioral practices are delineated for spiritual leaders. The term *above reproach* that heads the list is the umbrella descriptor, which is unpacked by the particulars that follow. Notice that family relationships are included. Particularly if married, a leader must focus solely on their spouse—meaning committed to their spouse. Regarding children, he or she must rear responsible and respectful kids. For it's the apostles' conviction that leaders who cannot nurture their own families, will have difficulty nurturing the larger church family. Therefore, it's appropriate in your search process to consider the family dynamics of prospective candidates.

Consider how the pastor relates to his/her own family. During your visits, observe how the pastors interact with their spouse. Does their demeanor demonstrate what you would like the church's families to emulate, or are you uncomfortable by some of their comments or ways they treat one another? For those who do, listen to how they talk about their kids. Do they find them a sense of joy and enthusiasm? Do their activities reflect time reserved for them? No one can guarantee how a marriage or children will turn out, but at this present time, how enthused are you by the pastor's family life?

Consider the pastor's family of origin. Somewhere in the interview process, you will want to know how the minister came to faith. It is helpful to know whether he/she grew up in a church or unchurched family. What values did they pick up from their parents? As adults, what kind of relationship do they maintain with their parents? Some ministry advisors like to probe particularly, though cautiously, about the minister's relationship with his/her father. People bitter towards or rejecting of their parents, may have issues with authority or forgiveness that could surface in other relationships in the larger church family.

One interesting fact regarding family of origin has been noted by many consultants. A prospective candidate who has grown up in a pastoral family has a five-year experience advantage over other candidates. They have a level of maturity and

understanding of congregations that exceeds their chronological age. This is especially important to remember if you are looking at younger candidates.

Consider the pastor's church family. Irrespective of the life-stage of the prospective candidate, how does he/she engage family ministry in the current ministry setting? Are they a priority, as evidenced by room assignments, the quality of teachers assigned and budgets allocations? Questions worth asking include: *How are families strengthened in your current church? And how are children valued and included in the faith community?* Churches that draw young families will grow. However, it doesn't necessarily take a young pastor to draw young families. The values and priorities that a pastor brings will determine the level of family life within the congregation.

No fixed template exists to determine the success of a family. Nevertheless, it is an important lens through which to view prospects. What vibes do you get on how they value their own families? And what picture do you see on how family life might look in your congregation under their leadership?

OH FATHER, there is nothing more valuable in this church than our families. It is not our campus; it is not our programs, but our people. And particularly, Lord, we want our children and youth to grow up to love you. So give us a pastor who values families, and like Jesus, enjoys people of all ages, especially the young. Amen!

Final Thought:

Family faces are magic mirrors. Looking at people who belong to us, we see the past, present and future. Gail Buckley

Keeping the Big Picture!

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is true worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2

Too often in the search process, we can get bogged down with the details of reviewing resumes, listening to sermons, and updating the database of contacts. Therefore, it is important periodically to step back and reflect on the big picture. This study passage reminds us first and foremost that we are God's children, and our deepest pleasure is found in spiritual transformation. So let me put the search process in proper perspective by offering the following reminders:

You are honoring Christ, more than serving on a committee. The above text states that your service is holy and pleasing to God. Few people get excited about serving on another committee. However, it is exciting to think you can bring pleasure to God through joyful service. Paul admonished, “*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not people*” (Colossians 3:23). In addition, to the church at Corinth he emphasized, “*So whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God*” (1 Cor. 10:31).

You are worshiping, more than working. Interestingly, some Bible scholars translate this Greek expression *your spiritual worship*, while others translate it *your reasonable service*. The Greek word used there, *latreia*, may be translated worship, service, or ministry. Many people have a limited understanding of worship—they think it is what happens in an auditorium on Sunday morning. However, the Bible teaches that daily living should be an act of worship. As a member of the search team, you are doing far more than working on resumes and making phone calls. You, in essence, are worshipping through these activities.

You are choosing encounters of significance more than escapades of escape. While many activities in daily schedules are prescribed because of responsibilities at work and with family, everyone has some discretionary time. Certainly, participating in a sport activity, attending the theater, or even watching TV, can serve as a relaxing break. But some people seem to weary themselves in a pursuit of amusement and pleasure. Life requires that the grass be mowed, groceries purchased, and the clothes laundered. However, if at the end of each week, work, chores, and leisure activities define life, then the urgent was probably placed ahead of the important. The Bible affirms: *Be very careful how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every activity...* (Ephesians 5:15-16). While service on this search team takes a

big chunk out of your schedule, remember that your time invested here will pay eternal dividends.

You are doing what is natural, not exceptional. As a member of the search team, I commend you for your commitment to Christ and his church. However, at the same time please realize that serving Christ is only natural for his followers. Some people think that only the specially gifted or spiritually mature can serve. This passage affirms that worshipful service is a natural, reasonable act. It flows automatically from being devoted to Jesus. Christian service is not for the exceptional few. Frankly, those who are not sharing their lives with others just don't get it. Serving, for a Christian, is as natural as breathing.

You are fulfilling a spiritual calling, not filling a ministry commitment. If by serving we are doing what is natural because God has pre-wired us for good works, then it is through exercising our spiritual gifts and abilities that we find fulfillment. When Christian service is viewed as filling a ministry slot, rarely is joy the result. In the verses that follow this text (vv. 3-8), Paul delineates the gifts of preaching, helping, teaching, encouraging, contributing, leading, and showing mercy. These gifts will only produce fruit, with resulting fulfillment, when planted in the field of service. Serving fulfills the Christ follower

FATHER, we realize that the work of our search team is very important. We do not take the calling of a new shepherd to lead this congregation lightly. But amidst the details of our work, we ask that you lift the value of our charge even higher. Open our eyes and hearts to see that our service is an act of worship pleasing to you. Amen!

Final Thought:

Some workers view their job as laying bricks; others view the task as building a cathedral. Embrace the greater vision!

Leadership

After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me." Acts 27:21-25

Growing churches agree that leadership is their most important need. Teaching, caregiving and outreach are all necessary ministry components. But without leadership, these ministry directions falter.

From Acts 27 we observe a case study on leadership. If you have time, read the whole chapter. But at least for now notice several priorities of effective leadership:

Effective leaders demonstrate trustworthiness. The background of this chapter is Paul's travel to Rome. And though a prisoner, the centurion in charge allowed Paul to visit his friends when they ported at Sidon. Later during the shipwreck Julius gave the order to spare Paul and let the prisoners swim to shore (vv. 42-44). He trusted Paul. Similarly, your church will follow a leader who demonstrates trustworthiness. So, as you interview ministers for this critical opening, look for one who has a great track record in speaking forthrightly, keeping promises, and demonstrating dependability.

Effective leaders take initiative. The text tells us that the storm raged for days and the crew finally gave up all hope of being saved (v. 20). At this moment Paul gave directions and provided encouragement. His confidence in God enabled him to take initiative and speak to the need (v.25). By way of application, when you call a leader to your church, let him/her lead! Obviously, a wise leader will build consensus and ownership. But make sure the pastor you select can take the initiative.

Effective leaders exercise faith. Faith is a certainty regarding an unknown future. That statement in itself is paradoxical. Nevertheless, Paul had full confidence that God would deliver on his promise. As a search team, don't be duped into thinking that your church needs a wonderful shepherd or a great CEO. Yes, ministry competencies are important. But beyond all that, look for a spiritual leader who will model faith among you.

Effective leaders instill hope. Notice how Paul paints an optimistic picture of their future. It wasn't just his words that moved them; it was his calm demeanor throughout the crisis. Amidst the upheaval, he calmly gave thanks to God for the food they were about to eat. And then he reassures them with, *not one of you will lose a single hair from your head* (v.34). As you interview applicants for this ministry position, try to determine if they are a *glass half empty* or *glass half full* person. Are they limited by the present, or optimistic about the future?

Effective leaders recognize priorities. The apostle Paul probably never heard of a *carbo-load* (the practice of athletes consuming a meal high in carbohydrates the day before a sporting event) but, in essence, that is what he asked the crew to do. Another person might have suggested prayer and fasting. But Paul recognized the priority at the moment was nourishment. Churches today have many ways to reach their neighborhoods, but they can't do everything. As you look for a new minister, seek one who has the ability to recognize the highest priorities for a given situation.

Effective leaders give encouragement. Throughout this maritime ordeal Paul provided encouragement to the officers and crew. As you search for a new pastor, try to ascertain how comfortable these leaders are giving praise to others. In addition to telling you about themselves, how well do they acknowledge the contributions of others who have fostered their ministry success? Also notice their interest in you. Does he/she remember your names; do they offer appreciation and encouragement to you as a search team.

OH FATHER, every week we come to you in prayer asking for the right pastor for our congregation. This week we request that you give us an effective leader-- one who hears your voice and has the ability to lead us in your directions. Also, prepare the hearts of our people to follow the leadership of the one you are calling. As pastor and people, we entrust the future of this church to you. Amen!

Final Thought:

Our greatest need is not more textbooks, but more text-people.
Abrahams Herschel

Spouses

Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the believers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila... They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila ... Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. Acts 18:18-26

This is the second time we are reflecting on this passage. The first time we looked at Apollos and considered the importance of *reputation*. This time we will focus on Aquila and Priscilla and see their relationship as *spouses*.

A minister need not be married to serve a church or Christian ministry, but it is usually seen as an asset. When I was a young pastor, I received a call from a new church in rural Michigan. I inquired of the chair what the vote count was. *Twenty-six to three*, he replied. Although it wasn't a unanimous call, it did not upset me.

A few years later when I was riding with a young man in his truck, he asked me: Do you want to know who voted against you? No thanks, I replied. But if you want to tell me why they voted negatively, that might be helpful. Two voted against you because you preached over their heads. (I had just graduated from seminary, so it was probably an accurate observation.) The third person voted against you because your wife couldn't play the piano!

Most churches today do not have unrealistic expectations for the pastor's spouse. However, the minister's spouse still plays an important part in a pastor's ministry. Too much engagement is looked upon with suspicion, while too little service is questioned. The typical congregation assumes the cleric's spouse will use his/her giftedness to serve the same way any other committed lay leader would serve.

One of the most famous ministry couples in the Bible was Priscilla and Aquila. They were instrumental in the training of both Paul and Apollos. Because of the cultural patterns of the New Testament period, we assume Aquila was the minister who was assisted by his wife, Priscilla. Interesting to note, however, Priscilla's name appears first the majority of times they are referred to in Scripture. This may indicate that she had superior ability and social standing. Regardless of their roles and relationship, they were always mentioned together and viewed as a team.

What qualities should a search committee look for in the spouse of a candidate? Let me suggest five that seem appropriate areas of concern, whether the spouse is female or male:

Is the spouse confident? Does she/he have his or her own identity, and make a unique contribution?

Is the spouse content? Is he/she pleased with their partner's vocation and role as a leader? Does he/she view the ministry as their ministry? And is he/she happy for the opportunity to serve a new congregation?

Is the spouse complimentary? Do husband and wife recognize their own uniqueness? Do they build each other up? Or does it appear they are competing with one another?

Is the spouse compassionate? Does he/she display a genuine concern for the poor, disabled, lonely and disadvantaged?

Is the spouse congenial? Do verbal and non-verbal signals indicate genuine warmth, a sense that everyone is important?

The American Medical Association conducted a study of physicians who practiced their residencies in rural communities. Part of the research was to determine what would keep a physician in a rural setting after the residency loan/payback requirement was completed. Surprisingly, the most critical factor for remaining in a rural setting was not the physician's background, job satisfaction, compensation, or other personal factors. The number one retention reason was whether or not the spouse was happy in that environment.

Success in pastoral ministry is quite similar. Without the sympathetic support of a spouse, long term job satisfaction and ministry effectiveness is not likely.

LORD, it is a privilege to be called to serve a body of believers. Although you give us grace, power and wisdom, the support of a godly spouse enhances and enables us to serve more effectively. Thank you for the lifetime partners you have given us. Amen!

Final Thought:

Being there for each other, and together being there for others,
gives a marriage joy and significance!

Compensation

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "Workers deserve their wages." 1 Timothy 5:17-18

A few years ago, a pastor shared with me that at his interview a member of the committee asked: *would you be willing to come here for all the oats we could feed you?* The minister said he was dumbfounded; he did not know how to respond. The committee member no doubt thought he was posing a spiritual question—*are you coming for the call, or just the job.* If I were present, I would have been embarrassed for him, because as noted in the verse above, there is worthiness to Kingdom service. In fact, in the original language that word *double honor* means *double stipend*.

When I'm asked the question: How much should we pay our pastor? I respond: Just take the gross income of all those present in the room and divide by the number of people, then pay your pastor two times that amount. This is the meaning of 1 Timothy 5:17. Almost always, there is silence in the room. Then I say, just kidding, followed by a brief time of instruction on appropriate clergy compensation.

Too often churches have the attitude: What do we have to pay to get this pastor? Rather, they should consider: How can we honor God and our pastor with this compensation?

As a search team, you need to realize that dialogue on compensation is a difficult matter for pastors. Since the qualifications for an elder include *not being a lover of money*, even the concept of salary negotiation to them is disconcerting. Too often, pastors accept an inadequate salary to avoid any appearance of greed.

Yet pastors are to provide for their families, and if they do not care for their families, they are *worse than unbelievers* (1 Timothy 5:8). The best way to relieve a candidate from this kind of pressure is to design a compensation package on good research.

While some denominations provide guidelines for their churches (based on years in ministry and educational background), many boards are on their own in determining the package. In order to establish a salary range, some churches contact other churches of similar context (same denomination, size, location type, etc.) for input on how they pay their staff. Most churches won't reveal their exact salary package, but they are willing, in confidence, to share a salary range.

When determining the package, make sure you distinguish between salary, benefits, and expenses. Salary includes base pay and housing allowance. Benefits include items such as vacation pay, health insurance, life insurance and retirement. Expenses are reimbursable line items such as mileage, meal expenses, gift expenses, conferences, books, and education.

In one pastor's compensation package, a church had put in three thousand dollars for an annual mission trip. I asked the chair if the pastor could avoid the mission trip and spend the money on a plasma television, to which he responded, *definitely not*. Then I tried to help him see that the mission trip was not compensation, or even a benefit. It was an expense, and should be placed somewhere else in the budget, but not in the pastor's compensation.

A word of caution is in order here. Make sure you compensate for the job, not necessarily the needs of a particular minister. If a minister has chosen to take out loans for school or furniture, has bought a new car, or decided to have a large family, these are not responsibilities that the congregation automatically has to own. While a pastor is free to seek employment that meets family expenses, churches are free to compensate the pastoral task, not the clergy's lifestyle. Obviously, a church can be extra generous to a desirable candidate, but as members of the search team, you should not feel obligated to underwrite past financial choices.

The bottom line for both the congregation and the church, is that you want a pastor who is deeply engaged in the ministry; one who is not worrying about how to make ends meet financially. By designing a reasonable, appropriate compensation package, pastors are free to focus on kingdom endeavors.

LORD, please give us a pastor who has a good perspective on finances; one who manages his/her own finances well, and one who can help our church be good financial stewards. Guide us in our conversations so that we treat compensation openly and fairly. Help us to provide appropriate and generous compensation, so that our pastor can primarily focus on Kingdom concerns. Amen!

Final Thought:

You cannot serve both God and money. Jesus

Relationships

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." Luke 15:1-7

The key issue that brought Bill Clinton into the White House in 1993 was the economy. In fact, in his campaign offices he had signs that read: *It's the economy, stupid!* This reminder kept him and his team focused on the main thing on the minds of the American people.

I wish each pastor's office had a sign that reads: *its relationships, stupid!* Okay, maybe we should leave off the word *stupid*. But too easily, all of us, especially ministers, can get caught up doing church activities. But ministry is not primarily programs; it's people. Programs are only valuable if they prove good vehicles for connecting people.

For example, just having a Sunday school doesn't mean transformation is occurring. Just having a worship service doesn't mean adoration is taking place. And just meeting in a home every week doesn't mean that community is developing.

In this devotional passage, the theme is clear: *all people matter to God!* Each individual is so valuable, that the shepherd leaves the flock just to find the lost sheep. In the paragraph that follows (vv. 8-10), a woman with ten silver coins rejoiced when she found the missing one. And in the familiar parable of the prodigal son (vv. 11-32), the father is overjoyed when the wandering boy comes to his senses and returns home.

Congregations should be *home*. They should be places where brothers and sisters live together as family. In fact, Jesus taught that spiritual family supersedes, and is more important, than biological family (Mark 3:33, 34).

Biblically speaking, we don't attend church; we are the church. That's why healthy churches keep people a priority. Programs and new initiatives come and go, but they are evaluated through the lens of building relationships. After all, worship is the faith community celebrating together. Small groups are the faith community doing life

together. And children and youth ministries are the faith community nurturing the next generation of Christ followers.

Therefore, as you look for a new pastor, keep high on your priority list one who values people. This should not be taken for granted. Some ministers prefer studying to interacting with people. Some prefer planning or preaching to working with people.

A constitutional revision may be beneficial, but face time with people is more important. It is not the eloquence of a funeral sermon, but the presence of the minister that brings comfort. Transformation does not happen just because ministry checklists are knocked out—it occurs when the lives of people are touched.

It is also good to realize that valuing people is more about a person's commitment than his or her personal wiring. True, extraverts are energized in a crowd greeting many people, while introverts are more comfortable one-on-one. But wherever a minister is positioned on the personality strengths continuum, other people's needs must always inform pastoral priorities and calendar.

Accordingly, when you interview prospects, pay attention to these items:

Do they look you in the eye?

Do they smile?

Do they remember your names?

Are they interested in personal stories more than the history or programs?

Do they speak of their relationship with God?

Do they refer to people in their current ministry more than accomplishments?

Do they speak of relationships with unchurched neighbors?

Do they have friendships at different levels, from acquaintances all the way to companions?

OH FATHER, please give us a pastor who has a shepherd's heart. Though responsible for the well-being of the whole congregation, may he/she have compassion for each person. And we ask not only for our church, but also for this community, that our next pastor would engage with and enjoy our neighbors. Please remind us that it is most importantly about relationships. Amen!

Final Thought:

They say, *You can't take it with you*. While that's true for things, it's not true for relationships!

Relaxation

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:25-30

I'll sure be glad when this search process is over, then I'll be able to relax. No doubt as a member of the call committee, you can identify with this statement. Depending on your form of church governance, the journey, which you have undertaken, can take a few months or a couple years.

In Matthew 11 Jesus reminds us of the importance of finding rest in him when we are tired. He knows that life is busy, and He's aware of when we are feeling depleted. He understands that ministry is consumptive. For this reason, he invites the weary and burdened to relax in him.

Burnout can happen in many areas of life, and service in the church is not exempt. Recognizing this, Jesus invites followers to spend time away from their busy schedules for personal and spiritual renewal.

Presently, we are not living in Galilee, and we are not physically traveling with Christ. Nevertheless, when feeling spent, Jesus invites us also to walk with him and to learn how to rest. Notice two dimensions to the concept of rest:

First, Jesus relaxed by physically withdrawing to a remote setting. In fact, Christ's biographers reveal that he *frequently withdrew to lonely places* (e.g., Luke 5:16). Sometimes rest can only be found when we are removed from the regular activities of our day.

When the weight of life's demands, including your responsibilities in the search process, begin to burden you, perhaps it's time to get a way for a short break. A day away from one's normal routine can be refreshing. As a member of the search team, simply skipping a meeting can be the mini break that restores margin. A night out, a weekend away with your spouse, or a personal retreat can prove renewing. Note particularly from the Luke passage, that Jesus regularly prayed in those times away.

A second way to relax is *to learn the unforced rhythms of grace*. This means that when there is no visible evidence that anything is being accomplished, we understand that God is still at work. Specifically, he is active in the hearts of others who are involved in the search process. Sometimes he is opening the heart of a pastor to be responsive to your inquiry (similar to his work in the heart of Lydia in Acts 16:14).

Remember, we are not so indispensable that God is thwarted in his work if we take a break. Rather, God is more likely honored by our obedience to take rest when needed, and our trust in his sovereignty to continue to draw servants toward your church.

The search process can easily be viewed as a process or routine. There are certain hoops to go through: telephone calls to be made, profiles to be read, references to be contacted, and interviews to be scheduled. If we are not careful, a routine can easily become a rut.

When we relax a bit, however, we can see within our routine *God's unforced rhythm of grace*. When this occurs, an excitement and expectancy begin to build. We see afresh that God is doing something unique and wonderful in our lives. We can relax as we trust him with the entire process.

HEAVENLY FATHER, thank you for your daily grace. We confess that it is easy to view our ministry as tasks that need to be checked off. And we confess that sometimes we get wearied in the process. Help us to relax in you. And enable us to understand that even when we see no visible progress, you are at work in the unforced rhythms of grace. Amen!

Final Thought:

If you do not take time to come apart with the Lord, you may eventually just come apart! Vance Havner

Style

Sometime later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Acts 15:36-41

Did it surprise you to read that spiritual leaders like Paul and Barnabas could have such a sharp disagreement that they went their separate ministry ways? It doesn't surprise me. For if we look more closely at the style of these two leaders, we realize they are quite different. Paul was tenacious, exacting, and driven, while Barnabas was generous, gentle, and encouraging.

Barnabas' generous nature expressed itself financially when he sold a field and gave the proceeds to needy Christians (Acts 4:36). His generosity was also expressed relationally when he reached out to the newly converted Saul and introduced him to the apostles (Acts 9:27). Later he brought Saul to Antioch where they taught together (Acts 11:25). They even traveled together on the first church planting enterprise.

But as they began to plan their second missionary journey, the high standards, high energy Paul refused to take young Mark with them, for he had left them on their first travels. The patient, nurturing Barnabas didn't hold Mark's homesickness and abandonment against him. He wanted him on the team again.

In appearance, it might look as if these men had a spiritual problem. More likely, though, their expectations and personal style influenced their separation and the start of two new ventures. Paul went on to introduce Christ in new cities. Barnabas went on to nurture Mark and minister in other regions.

Interestingly, their ministries merge again decades later when the aging Paul requests: *Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry* (2 Timothy 4:11). Christians in Rome were instructed in their faith because of the passion and achiever wiring of Paul. The co-worker he sought at this time was the mature and effective Timothy—the product of the passion and nurturing nature of Barnabas.

Everyone has a style. Some people are *creators*, full of ideas, while others are *refiners*, able to weigh alternatives (*Team Leadership Profile* terminology). Some leaders are results-oriented or inspirational; others are perfectionist or developers (*DiSC Profile* terminology). Some lead by *serving others*, some through *team building*, while others through excelling in personal *performance* (*Dimensions of Leadership Profile* terminology). Again, leaders can have any combination of the following personality traits: *achiever, arranger, command, developer, empathy, includer, maximizer, relator, or strategic* (Gallup *Strengths Finder* terminology).

All this is to say that every individual has personal default settings. No one does everything well. We all are good at some things, but not at others.

So, with your team's pastoral profile in mind, observe the personal style of the ministers that you interview. It is not likely that an entrepreneurial, driven achiever will become an empathetic, harmony builder, just because your church needs this at the present time. Nor is it likely that a gentle, collaborative, restorative leader will initiate new strategic directions and hold staff accountable for producing results.

Realistic expectations will keep the team from trying to find someone who is wired with all of these abilities. And good listening, thorough reference checks, and even the use of assessment tools, will help you select a pastor that has the best style match for your next season of ministry.

OH FATHER, like Jeremiah, we realize that you knew us and knit us together in our mother's womb. Much of our personality and predispositions are a given. Please give us the sensitivity to select a pastor who, at the core of his/her style, is a great fit for our congregation. Amen!

Final Thought:

We find no evidence that you can educate or sensitize a person into a motivational pattern fundamentally different from what it was before you started the process ... fundamentally at odds with their motivational pattern. Arthur F. Miller, Jr.

Preparing the Congregation

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13

While the congregation will vote to call your next pastor, everyone must realize that Christ has actually appointed this new minister to the church. As this text states, he is the one who gives gifted leaders to the Church in order to build up his Body. Thus, preparing the congregation to receive the new pastor will be one of your final tasks as a call team.

Encourage your congregation to:

Be devoted to one another. Helping your people to realize that they are family will strengthen the ministry season ahead. Members devoted to one another, do not expect the pastor to do all of the devoting. They are to care for each other. *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love* (Romans 12:10).

Esteem the pastoral calling. Pastors are not just another person in the congregation with an opinion. They are under-shepherds of Christ, and though human, deserve respect. A minister with a shepherd's heart feels the overall weight of the ministry—both individual concerns and organizational challenges. So esteem their role. *The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially to those whose work is preaching and teaching* (1 Timothy 5:17).

Value diversity. People differ in background and preferences. For this reason, healthy churches offer a variety of ministries. But when a church comes together for common programs (such as Sunday worship), we need to be accepting of differences.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all people (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

Maintain unity. While the congregation recognizes, and should even celebrate its diversity, it must pull together in unity regarding its purpose, values and ministry directions. *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.* (Ephesians 4:3).

Emphasize function over form. Healthy churches are good at keeping the main thing, the main thing. They are about outreach to the unchurched, and the nurture of believers. Discipleship is a non-negotiable function. But whether you use a class or home group structure for discipleship is a form choice. Shortsighted congregations fuss over forms, and forget the big picture of transformation. *To the weak, I became weak to win the weak. I become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some* (1 Corinthians 9:22, 23).

Maintain your personal support network. People who are in community with other Christians have a built-in support network when problems occur. Whether it's a marital crisis, a hospitalization or a job transition, God's design is to have the Body minister to the Body. The expectation that the pastor is to be the omnipresent people helper weakens a church. Members who maintain their support networks (e.g., small group), have many people to bear their burdens. *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the day approaching* (Hebrews 10:24,25).

Become part of a ministry team. The day of the congregation having one minister is over. Even a smaller church of fifty members, still has fifty ministers. The pastor's calling is to be an equipper of the minister, a coach to the fellowship. By serving on a ministry team, people start thinking less about what they want, and more about the needs around them. *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.* (1 Peter 4:10).

So encourage your congregation not to let down when your new pastor arrives. Rather encourage them to deepen their commitment to one another and to those in their communities.

DEAR LORD, we know that a pastor, even a pastoral staff, cannot do ministry alone. You have gifted all of our people, and have admonished all of us to be there for one another. Please help our congregation to build into each other, and not expect our new minister to be the only presence of Christ among us. Amen!

Final Thought:

Ask not what your pastor can do for you.
Ask what you can do for Christ's Church!

Installation Service

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. Acts 13:1-3

As the old expression goes, *you've come a long way baby!* At the beginning of the search process, you were somewhat apprehensive, yet excited. During the forming of the candidate profile, you were energized and eager to cultivate a prospect pool. Shortly after, you were discouraged by the lack of quality applicants coming your way, though a number of prospects seemed intriguing. During the second half of the search, you were maintaining your regular meetings, while also scheduling interviews and site visits. Fatigue was setting in. But as your process narrowed to a few finalists, and your committee selected a candidate, a renewed enthusiasm buoyed your spirits. Now you are at the place where the church has called your candidate, and in a few weeks, an installation service will take place for the new pastor.

Many denominational resources provide a format for a service of installation. For those not affiliated with a denomination, and for those who want an early jump on the process, the following format can be helpful:

Welcome and Greeting. The moderator of the church greets those present, enthusiastically welcoming them to this service of installation and dedication for their newly appointed minister.

Prayer. A brief prayer of invocation is offered, inviting God's presence and blessing on the gathering.

Praise and Worship. This Lord's Day gathering, in particular, is one of celebration. For months, the congregation has been praying and looking forward to receiving a new pastor. Hymns and choruses of praise, enthusiastically sung, testify to God's goodness. Songs like *Great is Thy Faithfulness* and *Let the Praises Ring* affirm God's gracious provision for the congregation.

The Pastoral Call. The chair of the search team briefly reviews the steps of the search process that led to the selection of the new pastor. This brief biography of the minister will set the stage for the installation.

Charge to the Pastor. Frequently, an outside guest is invited to bring an admonition to the newly appointed minister. Typically, this is given by a denominational representative, seminary professor, mentor or ministerial colleague.

Charge to the Congregation. The service of installation also provides opportunity for the congregation to be instructed to respect and honor the pastoral calling, to pray and support the new cleric and to follow the leadership of this new shepherd. A denominational representative, retired/former minister or even moderator can bring the charge to the congregation. If a highly respected minister has been the interim pastor, the charge may be brought by the exiting interim.

Prayer of Commitment. The new pastor and spouse are invited to the platform to kneel and receive the blessing of the leadership. Frequently the board and ordained ministers present will lay hands on the couple during the prayer.

Praise and Worship. In response to these charges and prayer of blessing, an affirmation of thanksgiving, such as *The Doxology*, is appropriate. This praise song also serves as a point of transition before the pastor's message.

Installation Sermon. Because of the length of this service, a sermon of normal duration is not given. But on this special occasion, it is appropriate for the new shepherd to share what is on his/her heart. A fifteen-minute message accomplishes this purpose very well.

Communion. The Eucharist is a symbol of what the Christian faith is all about. The pastor officiating for the first time at the Lord's Supper serves not in a priestly function as much as in the role of the papa at the Passover. This memorial draws the congregation together around what is most meaningful—the Lordship of Christ.

Closing Song. Once again, celebration is in order. Just as Jesus' disciples concluded the Last Supper with a hymn, rejoicing together as a congregation is an appropriate conclusion to the installation service. The song selected should be one of hope and joy, and upbeat in nature.

Benediction. The final part of the installation service is the receiving of blessing from the newly installed pastor. In this capacity, the new minister declares God's grace and peace for the congregation.

Following the installation service, a reception is in order. At the conclusion of the day, I trust that as members of the search team you will hear the words of Jesus: *Well done, good and faithful servants!*

OH FATHER, it has been a long journey. Today our hearts overflow with gratefulness for your provision of our new pastor. Thank you for your

faithfulness. And while we recognize that our specific task in this pastoral process is now over, keep us supportive of our new minister and sensitive to what you want to accomplish through him/her in our church. Amen!

Final Thought:

*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand has provided—
Great is thy faithfulness Lord unto me.
Thomas O. Chisholm*