

Searching For a New Pastor

A Brief Theology

By Nick Watts

THESIS:

- **God's Word never changes.** And, since God's Word never changes, the principles used to find Spiritual Leadership today should be in line with the principles God has graciously given us in Scripture.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

1. If I had never been a part of a church that was forced to search for new staff – and my **only source** for knowing what to do was **the Bible** (what a novel idea) – what would I find in the Bible that would help me understand (1) what a Search Team should know, and (2) what a Pastor should be? That is what I've attempted to answer in this paper.
2. I have divided this paper into two sections. The first section, *The Search Team*, deals with questions a Search Team may have about various issues. The second section, *The Potential Pastor*, contains, per my study, the foundational traits a pastor should possess.
 - a. Just as in heavy-weight-training, we're sticking with compound-exercises that work the major muscle groups. For example, I didn't include that the pastor should be evangelistic. If he truly loves Christ and people, evangelism will be a byproduct. Thus, I will be sticking to the major "compound traits" here.
3. Different denominations seek pastoral replacements differently. But these biblical *principles* apply to *all* pastoral search processes, regardless of denomination or method.
4. There are "job descriptions", of sorts, for pastors (all pastoral staff) in **1 Timothy 3:1-7** and **Titus 1:5-9**. However, these "job descriptions" are not exhaustive. And neither is what I've written here. That said, the two passages mentioned above should be studied – not in isolation, but in light of the entire Bible ("*the whole counsel/purpose of God.*" Acts 20:27)

THE SEARCH TEAM

DISCOVERY: "ONE AMONG US...AND A WITNESS TO HIS RESURRECTION" (Acts 1:21-22)

1. Theological Framework

- a. The story of finding a replacement for Judas (who had killed himself) is a story with simple, yet **profound**, implications.
 - i. Luke records in Acts 1:15-26, the (now eleven) disciples came together at the request of Peter and assembled for the purpose of finding one who would replace Judas. The candidate (narrowed to two men) must be:
 1. A man with whom the disciples were familiar: "*a man who has accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out*

among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us.” (vss 22-22)

2. A man who would be a faithful *“witness to Christ’s resurrection.”* (vs 22)
This implies Judas’ replacement be a man who was not only an effective teacher/communicator, but one who is “battle-tested” since persecution was, both, imminent and frequent.

b. God: The Original “Discovery Channel”

- i. *“And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. (vss 23-26)*
 1. That God, *Himself*, chooses His earthly leadership is consistent throughout Scripture.
 2. It’s man’s goal to simply **discover** whom God has already chosen.
 3. This is accomplished through the reading of Scripture, prayer, and wise, godly counsel.
 4. Anything a Search Team Member believes he/she has received through prayer and/or counsel must be weighed against the Word of God, since *“the sum of God’s Word is truth.”* (Psalm 119:160)

2. Comments

- a. God promises to speak to us through His Word.
 - i. *“The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.”* (Psalm 119:130)
 - ii. *“[My Word] shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”* (Isaiah 55:11)
- b. God promises to speak to us through prayer.
 - i. *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!* (Matthew 7:7-11)
 - ii. Keep in mind that prayer is, at its root, a **conversation** which means that **listening to God** is every bit as important as **talking to God**.
 1. *“Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend...”* (Exodus 33:11)
 2. *“Be still, and know that I am God...”* (Psalm 46:10)

“THE LORD SEES NOT AS MAN SEES...” (1 Samuel 16:7)

1. Theological Framework

- a. The Lord instructed Samuel to visit Jesse’s home because that’s where the successor to King Saul would be found. When Samuel asked to see Jesse’s sons, David was considered so insignificant by his family that he wasn’t even called in from tending the flocks. So, as Samuel was looking at Jesse’s other sons (they were bigger, stronger, etc.), the Lord said to Samuel, *“Do not look on [their] appearance or [their] height..., because I have rejected [them]. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”* (1 Samuel 16:7) More examples:
 - i. Moses - While others saw a goat-herder, God saw a prophet. Before he was called to tell Pharaoh *“let My people go,”* Moses had been herding goats for 40 years.
 - ii. Esther - While others saw Esther was a “mere” woman (women in the Middle East were/are not respected), a foreigner, and an orphan, God saw a hero, using Esther to save the lives of the Jews from the murderous plot of Haman.
 - iii. Gideon - While most saw Gideon as a runt, God saw a military general. Gideon was the smallest representative among the smallest tribe of Israel, yet God addressed him as *“mighty man of valor.”*

2. Comments

- a. Scripture is *replete* with *“I didn’t see **that** coming”* stories – from the *Red Sea* parting to the *Walls of Jericho* crumbling to a young *Mary* becoming pregnant *before* marriage. In short, don’t ever try to figure God out. He never changes, yet He is unpredictable in how He works His will in us.
- b. A particular candidate over whom a Search Team is looking may have, up to this point, served in vocational ministry in a different capacity i.e. youth ministry, family ministry, etc. According to Scripture, this doesn’t matter.
 - i. Samuel was a prophet, priest, judge, and anything else God wanted him to be during those turbulent years in Israel’s history. Clearly, based on Samuel’s life (and everyone else God used), God calls us by *“assignment,”* gifting us for said *“assignment”* as we, with Isaiah, tell God, *“Here am I, send me.”*
 - ii. Our primary giftedness notwithstanding, because God’s leaders are called by *“assignment,”* a candidate may have travelled a road very much unlike what a Search Team might have predicted.

PASTOR or PREACHER?

1. Theological Framework

- a. Scripture tells us a pastor is to be able to teach *as well as* shepherd the people. And God is very capable of equipping men to do so.
- b. *“He must hold firm to the trustworthy word he was taught, so that he may be able to **give instruction** in sound doctrine...”* Titus 1:9
 - i. *“An overseer must be...able to teach.”* (1 Timothy 3:2)
 - ii. *“You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.”* (Titus 2:1)

- c. *"...I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, **shepherd the flock of God among you,..**" (1 Peter 5:1-2; emphasis added)*

2. Comments

- a. I was once the following question by a Search Team member searching for a Lead Pastor. They asked, *"Which do you think we should focus on: a man who is a strong pastor, or a man who is a strong preacher?"* My answer: **Yes/Both**
- b. I went on to explain that the understanding that we've come to this "pastoral fork in the road" is biblically fallacious. The God who spoke our cosmos into existence, by whose word our planet hangs in space (at precisely the correct degree of tilt, and precisely the correct distance from the sun) – this **Mighty God** can, without effort – provide a *Shepherd* who can also *preach*.
- c. Again, since the very term "pastor" means "shepherd", it would behoove all Search Teams to find a man who (1) is an effective preacher/teacher, and (2) has the heart of a Shepherd.

THE POTENTIAL PASTOR

"THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE" (1 Cor. 13:13)

1. Theological Framework: *Love*

- a. I was asked once by a Search Team member, *"What, in your opinion, is the most important trait of a pastor?"* Without hesitation, I replied, **"Love."** Jesus said, *"Love one another...By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.* (Jn 13:34-45)
- b. *"For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* (Galatians 5:14)

2. Comments

- a. Christ-like love is the lynchpin of Christian traits. ***"...the greatest of these is love,"*** Paul wrote. When a person loves others as Christ loved others, everything else begins falling into place.
 - i. *"Above all things have intense and unfailing love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins [forgives and disregards the offenses of others]."* (1 Peter 4:8)
- b. Jesus said that the single-most important distinguishing characteristic of a believer is love. If a church desires to be known by the love **they** show, they will need a pastor/leader known by love **he** shows.
- c. *Group Magazine* (a Student Ministry resource) did a nation-wide poll among high school students asking them what makes them want to keep coming back to a particular church. The far-and-away number one answer: ***I felt loved.***

- d. In *Preaching That Connects*, Mark Galli & Craig Larson make it clear that the first and foremost lesson in life-changing preaching is not syntax, eloquence, or sentence structure. The first lesson is to make absolutely certain what one preaches is motivated by love: *“The first act of love in preaching is an act of self-denial – to become more interested in people than in the subject. That means giving up the love of knowledge and replacing it with a love for people.”*

“HUMBLE THYSELF IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD” (James 4:10)

1. Theological Framework: *Humility*

- a. Jesus led by example: *“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!”* (Philippians 2:8)
- b. *“This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at My word”* (Isaiah 66:2) [emphasis added]
- c. When God chose to include a description of one of the most influential leaders of the Old Testament, He chose to highlight only one characteristic: *“Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.”* (Numbers 12:3)
- d. *“...in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”* (Philippians 2:4)
- e. About Jesus, John the Baptist exclaimed, *“He must increase, but I must decrease.”* (John 3:30, Amplified)

2. Comments

- a. *“God will not share His glory.”* Henry Blackaby, *Chosen to be God’s Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Samuel*
- b. When God scans the earth for potential leaders, He is not on a search for [superstars]. He is searching for people who have a heart that is sensitive to the things of God: *“For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His...”* (2 Chron. 16:9) Chuck Swindoll, *David*
- c. *“God has two dwellings: one in heaven, and the other in a meek and thankful heart.”* Izaak Walton

“THE LAW OF HIS GOD IS IN HIS HEART.” (Psalm 37:31)

1. Theological Framework: *The Bible*

- a. *“His delight is in the Law of the Lord; and on His Law he meditates day and night.”* (Psalm 1:2)
- b. *“I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.”* (Ps 119:14-16)
- c. A responsible expositor and exegete will be a passionate **student** of Scripture so that *“[the church] may no longer be children, tossed [like ships] to and fro [by]...every changing wind of doctrine...”* (Eph. 4:14, Amp)

2. Comments

- a. If a pastor is not passionate about studying and expositing Scripture it will be obvious to all. It's only a matter of time until people begin leaving.
- b. *"Today, the nutritional value of what is passed off as biblical teaching is often nothing more than gruel. Flippant preparation of God's Word is causing many to slowly starve on the pabulum of watery philosophies and thin, tasteless principles."* Chuck Swindoll, *Hand Me Another Brick*
- c. The Puritan preacher, Richard Baxter, embodies biblically passionate preaching in his statement, *"I preach as a dying man to dying men."*

"BE SHEPHERDS OF GOD'S FLOCK..." (1 Peter 5:2)

1. Theological Framework: *Pastor*

- a. The imagery of the shepherd/sheep relationship is found throughout Scripture with Jesus, Himself, serving as the example. (cf. Psalm 80:1; Jn 10:1-18; Jn 21:15-17)
- b. The most beloved of all Psalms, the 23rd, is commonly called *The Shepherd's Psalm*.
- c. *"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be."* (1 Peter 5:2)
- d. *"[God] chose David, His servant, and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep He brought him to be the shepherd of His people, Jacob..."* (Psalm 78:70-71)
- e. God takes the responsibility given to pastors of "shepherding His flock" very seriously. **Judgment** is declared on *"shepherds who only take care of themselves"*. (cf. Jeremiah 23-25 and Ezekiel 34.)

2. Comments

- a. I've met Lead Pastors who don't particularly enjoy "being among the sheep." This is unfortunate since the very word used in the New Testament for *Pastor* means *Shepherd*. Certainly, we all have our insecurities. But, a pastoral candidate should, according to Scripture, demonstrate a sincere desire to *"shepherd the sheep."*
- b. *"Many churches confuse superb preaching skills with effective shepherding skills."* George Barna, *Habits of Highly Effective Churches*
- c. Some pastors simply want to preach without having the burden of "caring for the flock." That man should become a *public speaker* and abandon his attempt at being a *pastor*.

LEARNING/EDUCATION: "LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD...WITH ALL YOUR MIND." (Matthew 22:37)

1. Theological Framework: *Learning/Education*

- a. *"Do you see someone skilled in their work? They will serve before kings;..."* (Proverbs 22:29)
- b. *"Do your best to present yourself to God as...a workman....who correctly teaches/handles the word of truth."* (2 Tim. 2:15) [emphasis added]

2. Comments

- a. Leaders are lifelong learners. *"When you stop learning, you stop leading."* Rick Warren
- b. Because ministry is a marathon, and not a sprint, this is where many leaders bog down. Like the proverbial lumberjack, all leaders must understand the following axiom that

- states, if we want to continue to be effective, we must regularly “sharpen our axe.” Otherwise the blade dulls, progress slows, and eventually comes to a screeching halt.
- c. This “life-long learning” doesn’t have to be in the form of “formal education.” It can be in the form of regular *conferences*, “*think tanks*” with other Pastors, *clinics*, *workshops*, *conversations with friends/church members*, etc – **anything** that will stimulate the mind.
 - d. *Seminary/Graduate School* can be *greatly* advantageous. (*It has been for me.*) **However**, as longtime pastor, Charles Stanley, once stated to a room of preachers, “*When you look at those degrees framed on your office wall – all that means is that you’ve spent three or four years somewhere. Until you humble yourself, allowing the Holy Spirit to fill you, God will not use you.*”
 - i. It is worth noting that, when Jesus chose his disciples, not a single man was chosen from the religious leadership/elite of that day. **Not. One.**
 - e. When a pastor stops learning and growing intellectually, a particular “law” begins creeping in, affecting every area of the church.
 - i. *The Law of the Lid*: An organization [church] will never exceed the leadership capability of its leader. John Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*.

“SERVE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS” (Psalm 100:2)

1. Theological Framework: *Servant*

- a. Jesus said, “...*whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” (Mark 10:43-45)
- b. “*Then [Jesus] poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet.*” (John 13:5)

2. Comments

- a. ***Jesus led by example.*** Moreover, Jesus turned the modern concept of leadership on its head by *leading through serving*.
 - i. “*A leaders’ persuasion is never enough unless accompanied by personal example.*” Unknown
 - ii. Christ, as the Great Servant/Shepherd, modeled for modern-day pastors that sheep are led, not driven. A Servant/Shepherd leads; a boss drives.
- b. “*The principle of service is what separates true leaders from glory-seekers.*” Laurie Beth Jones; *Jesus, CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership*
- c. “*According to the Bible, God is not necessarily looking for leaders, at least not in the sense we generally think of leaders. He is looking for servants. (Is. 59:16; Ezek. 22:30) When God finds men willing to be molded into His servants, the possibilities are limitless.*” Henry Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*
- d. In his modern-day classic, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins propounds what his research had discovered: the CEO’s of the successful, billion dollar businesses have something in common: they are *humble*, they are *team builders*, they *show tremendous respect for even “the lowest person on the totem pole”*, they are *life-long learners*, and they are

always pouring themselves into members of their team so as to develop leaders who will be able to take over when he's gone. **Sounds a whole lot like Jesus doesn't it?**

"AND DAVID SHEPHERDED THEM WITH INTEGRITY OF HEART..." (Psalm 78:70-72)

1. Theological Framework: Integrity

- a. "...and David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them." (Psalm 78:70-72)
- b. "The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out." (Proverbs 10:9)

2. Comments

- a. "Character is who you are when no one is looking." D.L. Moody
- b. "Let the minister take care that his personal character agrees in all respects with his ministry." Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*
- c. "It's as if God says, "I don't care about all that slick public image business. Show me a person who has the character, and I'll give him all the image he needs. I don't care about a certain temperament, I don't care if he has a lot of charisma, I don't care about size (Think: Gideon), I don't care about an impressive track record. I care about character! Is [the pastor] authentic in his spiritual walk or is he faking it? Chuck Swindoll, David
- d. "**Natural** gifts (as opposed to supernatural), such as personal charisma, mental brightness, emotional strength, and organizational ability can impress and motivate people for a long time. Sometimes they can be mistaken for spiritual vitality and depth. Sadly, we do not have a Christian culture today that easily discriminates between a person of spiritual depth and a person of raw, natural talent. We must always be aware that there are leaders who can build great organizations (including churches) on **natural** gifts, alone...The result is that more than a few people can be fooled into thinking they are being influenced by a spiritual giant when in fact they are being manipulated by a dwarf." Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World*
- e. "People are warily looking for leaders they can trust." Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*
- f. One's lack of integrity affects not only him/her – it will infect your entire church: "You teach what you know, but you reproduce what you are." Unknown.
 - i. "A [church] is nothing more than a distinct reflection of who you are (as a leader). If your thinking is sloppy, your [church] will be sloppy. If you are disorganized, your [church] will be disorganized. If your information about what needs to be done in [the church] is limited, your [church] will reflect that limitation." Michael Gerber, *The E Myth* – (NOTE: this is a powerful quote from a wonderful book on leadership. I have replaced the original word, *business*, with the word, *church*.)

“[ABRAHAM] LAUGHED...IN DISBELIEF. “HOW COULD I BECOME A FATHER AT THE AGE OF 100?”

1. Theological Framework: *Age*

- a. “Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.” (Genesis 21:5)
- b. Josiah was sixteen years old when, as King of Judah, began “to seek the God of his father, David.” (2 Chronicles 34:1-3)
- c. Moses was eighty years old when God called him to be His representative in leading the Jews out of Egyptian bondage. (Exodus 7:7)
- d. Paul counseled Timothy: “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.” (1 Timothy 4:12)

2. Comments

- a. Clearly, **according to God, age is irrelevant**. The real issue is **maturity**.
- b. It *does* amaze me how many Search Teams think that a young pastor will attract young families. Granted, it sounds like a good idea but there’s just one problem: *it’s not scriptural*. **A naturally gifted “personality” may attract a crowd. But, only Christ can change lives** – the lives of young families, middle-aged families, elderly families, and everyone else on planet Earth. Jesus said,...
 - i. “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” (John 12:32)
- c. *Maturity* and availability appear to be the factors that matter. Not age.
 - i. And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.” (Isaiah 6:8)

“BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART, FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD.” (Matthew 5:8)

1. Theological Framework: *Vision*

- a. “Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.” (Prov. 19:21) [emphasis added]
- b. Jesus was on His Father’s agenda/plan: “By Myself I can do nothing;...for I seek not to please Myself but Him who sent Me.” (John 5:19-20)
 - i. “Spiritual leadership is moving people onto God’s agenda. Blackaby [emphasis added]
- c. Jesus summed up His vision/purpose succinctly: “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10)

2. Comments

- a. **God’s vision for the Church is an ancient vision**. The vision has never changed anymore than God, Himself, has changed.
- b. On occasion, candidates will rattle off Proverbs 29:18 – “Where there is no vision the people perish...” They interpret this to mean that the onus is on *them* to create a vision for the church. There’s just one problem: that is **not** what Prov. 29:18 means!
 - i. The Amplified Bible renders the passage as follows: “Where there is no vision [no redemptive revelation of God], the people perish;...”

- ii. Henry Blackaby comments on this passage, rendering it: *“Where there is no fresh word from God, the people do what is right in their own eyes.”*
- c. It is often asked of candidates, *“What is your vision.”* A candidate’s particular insight and experience notwithstanding, a more biblically accurate question would be, *“What do you believe God’s overriding vision to be for our church?”* The follow-up question would then be based on the candidate’s gifts i.e. *“What would your strategies/methods be in pursuing this vision?”*
- d. *“God has the vision of what He wants to do. God does not ask leaders to dream big dreams for Him... He asks leaders to walk with Him so intimately that, when He reveals what is on His agenda, they will immediately adjust their lives to His will and the results will bring glory to God.”* Blackaby [emphasis added]
- e. *God forbid we follow a vision based on mere **human** logic, reason and intellect.*
- f. *“People are looking for someone to lead them into **God’s** purposes, **God’s** way. They need leaders who truly believe God will do what He says He will do.”* Blackaby [emphasis added]
 - i. *“If [church leaders] would...begin responding in radical obedience to everything God showed them (God’s ancient vision), the world would be turned upside down. How do we know? Because that’s what the first century Christians did, and the world is still talking about it.”* Blackaby [emphasis added]

I CONCLUDE WITH A WORD OF CAUTION

- For every truth given us by God, Satan has a *counterfeit* waiting to be embraced by unsuspecting believers. The Corinthian church (as well as most churches in the post-resurrection 1st century) was being infiltrated by men trying to corrupt the gospel. Paul wrote of them....,
 - *“For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness...”* (1 Cor. 11:13-15)

*Soli Deo Gloria, Nick
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