

# **Vital Spiritual Principles for Pastor Search Committees**

*“Learning to Discern God’s Voice Over Human Reasoning”*

*By*

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## Author's Preface

As we embrace the journey of discerning God's will, it is a glorious comfort to realize the certainty of His powerful promise. *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."* (James 1:5) How wonderful to realize our Father is fully committed to guide all who seriously seek His face. (Jeremiah 29:13)

As a supplement to modern pastor search materials, this tool is written for two key purposes. (1) To aid committees in hearing God's still, small voice in the midst of a sea of "seemingly" good choices. In today's highly programmed society, committees face a subtle tendency to lean more on human reasoning than close spiritual discernment. (2) To give committees clear guides in knowing how to discern the true spiritual patterns of a prospective pastor. As never before, it is crucial for committees to know the right questions and factors to accurately assess a man's true strengths and weaknesses.

In authoring this resource, I purposely omitted many of the organizational and technical aspects of securing a new pastor. Today there are many good resources available that thoroughly cover the basic technical aspects. With all the fine tools already available, I saw no reason to recreate that wheel. *However, I've seen virtually no resource that thoroughly covers the crucial aspects of spiritual preparation for the committees themselves.* For that reason, I wrote this resource to address the spiritual preparation as well as other important items usually missing from search committee questions for prospects.

This tool is intended as a strong supplement to the quality materials already available for the pastor search process. Beyond question, the technical aspects of the pastor search are certainly important and I strongly encourage the use of the search committee guide books. It is my deepest prayer this additional tool will prove a powerful help for discovering the perfect will of God. But above all, I pray it will lead committees to deep spiritual intimacy with God Himself. (John 17:3)

Toward Hearing God's Still Small Voice,

Dr. Gregory R. Frizzell

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### Introduction

This tool for pastor search committees is another of those projects I never “intended” to write. While working on other resources for church renewal, God suddenly gripped me with the urgent need for search committees to know how to seek His face for “above average” pastoral leadership. So great was the urgency, this tool actually came together in about seven hours. Today’s need is highlighted by all too frequent stories of pastors and churches that are badly mismatched. It is further disturbing to discover so many sincere and dedicated committees lack crucial pieces of information for assessing a pastor’s true spiritual effectiveness. The words of Hosea 4:6 describe the plight of so many churches. *“My people perish for lack of knowledge.”*

In a day when over seventy percent of our churches are either plateaued or declining, above average spiritual leadership is more critical than ever. As church conflict and division have risen to alarming levels, it is even more essential to find pastors who can unite and not divide. At a time when healthy, revived churches are the exception, committees must be able to search out pastors who can lead churches to true spiritual health and growth. Yet, far too often we hear examples of committees whose decision truly “seemed” right by human reasoning but ended very badly. In the search for a pastor, we should ever remember the words of Proverbs 14:12 *“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”* But thank God, we can be guided by the One whose judgment is always right!

Serving on a pastor search committee is among the most far-reaching tasks anyone will ever embrace. Beyond question, your church will rise or fall on the quality of pastoral leadership you secure. Because this task demands such keen spiritual discernment, it is vital to remember the following principle of guidance. *Pastor search committees can only be as effective as the prayer life and spiritual cleansing of the individual members!* The pastor search must come out of a very close walk with God rather than an over-reliance on human reasoning and feelings. It is frankly unimaginable that a committee would undertake this most spiritual of tasks without embracing a deep process of prayer and cleansing. To aid in this process, we have placed crucial spiritual preparation materials at the conclusion of the resource.

This document also contains some key elements typically missing from most pastor search tools. These “missing elements” are among the reasons many churches continue year after year in mediocrity, struggle and conflict. It is my deepest prayer this tool will be a practical help toward thorough spiritual analysis, fervent prayer and keen sensitivity to God’s voice. Let us joyfully rest in God’s glorious promise to guide all who diligently seek His face! (Jeremiah 29:13; Hebrews 11:6; James 1:5)

**A Foundational Principle** - *“The best indicator of what a pastor will do is a thorough assessment of what God has done through him over an extended period of time.”* In other words, talk alone is easily misleading because almost anyone can give good answers to a committee. Remember, it is what God has actually done through a candidate that best indicates what he will do. What the pastor’s churches have done in key areas best indicates what his future churches will do. Though there are exceptions and past performance is not the only measure, it must be considered with great analytical thoroughness and spiritual discernment. It is indeed vital that committees know how to assess the key signs of God’s activity with accuracy and insight.

For this reason, search committees should determine his church’s measurable patterns in ten critical areas of kingdom activity: (1) baptisms, (2) Sunday school growth and quality, (3) strong prayer ministries and worship development, (4) finances, (5) missions, (6) discipleship ministries, (7) lay leadership development, (8) church organizational health, (9) church unity and (10) strategic vision. Some additional areas for consideration are; strength of his men’s and women’s ministries, youth and children’s emphasis, singles, seniors, marriage and parenting emphasis. Though the pastor is not directly responsible for these secondary areas, a man of God will certainly foster and encourage their growth. Obviously, smaller churches will have limited organized ministries in some of these areas. By no means do all questions apply to every church and committees will prayerfully decide which are relevant to them.

**A Personal Word of Perspective** – I am deeply grateful to God for the excellent foundation and encouragement I was blessed to receive at First Baptist of Lexington, TN. Our church has a remarkable history of truly great pastors and leaders blessed by God. Because my church *did* find God’s choice in their pastors, my life is powerfully impacted for all eternity.

In the following points, I included some crucial issues not always assessed in pastor search efforts. I believe these are all critical points and yet it should be understood that virtually no one will be excellent in all. Since unrealistic expectations are often a serious problem, “walking on water” should not be required of your pastor. Certainly all pastors have some areas for needed growth and no one is equally strong in every area. Some pieces of this information should be determined by your own research rather than directly asking the prospect. Most Directors of Missions can help you compile key information from their associational annual reports.

In assessing the twenty-eight points, also remember that issues beyond the pastor’s control can influence statistical numbers. Be further aware that “problems” in a previous church may have been no fault of the pastor. Though the statistics are vital indicators, you will certainly consider surrounding circumstances. For example, a man with even average growth numbers in a terrible setting might well suggest he could be strong in a good setting. Finding a pastor ultimately comes down to a committee’s very close walk with God not merely a mathematical science of statistics. Indeed the numbers can all line up and the candidate still not be God’s will for your church.

In the case of younger or less-experienced ministers, you will naturally lean much more on verbal interviews. Though they lack lengthy experience, you can certainly get a sense of a young minister’s quality by discussing his convictions in the ten areas listed above. We should not automatically eliminate a candidate simply on the basis of somewhat limited experience. The greatest pastors who ever lived started somewhere and God mightily blessed many of their first churches.

For an honest perspective, I again remind committees that truly great pastors are the *exception* not the rule. They are out there, but you must know how to assess their true quality and depth. I pray the following twenty-eight points will provide specific areas for deep prayer and penetrating discernment. Since some of these questions are fairly in-depth, you will use loving tact and discretion in your interviews so the prospect doesn’t feel overly “grilled”. May God give you the determination and patience to find His very best for your church. Beyond question, your choice will profoundly affect the community for years to come. But rest assured dear committee, God will give you guidance and wisdom equal to your task. (James 1:5) Our merciful Lord has promised wisdom and He can be fully trusted to provide it!

### **Key Questions for Assessing a Prospective Pastor**

*(An \* is placed by items to be assessed by your own research and not from the candidate)*

- (1) \* Is there a pattern of “above average” ministry and progress over the years of his ministry? In other words, do you see distinct patterns of growth and accomplishments only explainable by the special blessing of God? *(Based on a concrete assessment of baptisms, prayer ministries, church finances, unified vision, mission support, numeric growth, etc.)* \*Churches whose immediate surrounding areas are not growing simply *must* have someone whose patterns are well above average or they will almost surely decline! The same is true for churches that must minister beyond their immediate locales. Another factor is when other area churches are actually experiencing more growth and ministry momentum. If these conditions are present, the church simply must seek a pastor who is well above average in the key areas of God’s activity and blessing.
- (2) Determine if the prospect has a significant daily time in serious prayer and scripture study. Ask him to fully describe what he does and its average length. Get him to describe his study habits and his strategies for continuing personal growth. Is his daily prayer time an absolute priority? To be a truly powerful man of God, he *must* have more than a brief little daily devotion.
- (3) Determine in detail what type of prayer ministries his churches have developed. Did he start them and did he have a strong active role in leading them? Ask him to describe the prayer ministries he would lead a church to develop. Get him to describe his typical weekly church prayer meetings. Is it mostly a prayer meeting or mostly a devotional study with a very small prayer time at the end?

- (4) \* Research church baptism ratios in each year of his previous pastorates. If at all possible assess at least a five year pattern in each church. The Southern Baptist “average” is one baptism for every eleven persons in Sunday School attendance. The “ratios” seen over time give a much clearer picture than numbers alone. Anyone can have a high or low year so it is *patterns* that tell the real story!
- (5) \* Research his church attendance growth in direct comparison with population trends in the surrounding community or region. Again, the ratio comparison is *crucial!* You might also compare his growth and ministry patterns with three or four other churches in the immediate area. Directors of Missions can help you with this information.
- (6) Ask the prospect to describe his understanding of the difference between an evangelistic meeting and genuine revival. Has his church experienced what he would call genuine biblical revival? Has he led any of his churches to conduct solemn assemblies or something similar? How important (or practical) does he think such emphases are in today’s church? Why or why not?
- (7) Have him fully describe his average church planning meeting. Then ask him if he takes specific steps to keep church planning prayer-filled and God-focused. (Rather than just coming up with plans and asking God to bless them.) If he seems somewhat taken aback by this question, you know this is not a strength. Determine his patterns of seeking God’s face for church unity and strategic vision (or lack thereof). Have the prospect give several specific examples of finding God’s direction in setting and reaching church goals or projects. (building programs, evangelism strategies, mission trips, etc.).
- (8) Determine if he has a multi-level strategy of developing a “regional” church. What kind of specific strategies has he employed to reach people from a whole region instead of just the immediate area. Ask him to fully describe a multi-level church publicity strategy. (Assess among yourselves whether he understands publicity that magnifies God rather than people or programs.)
- (9) Ask him his specific strategies for preventing and minimizing church controversy and division. What are his strategies for strengthening church fellowship and creating a positive spirit of joyful togetherness? Determine if the pastor has ever been publicly accused or the subject of serious moral scandal. If so, get him to fully describe the circumstances and the outcome. Sometimes such situations are completely false and unfounded. (However, you must thoroughly check out any serious accusations through independent sources.)
- (10) Determine if the prospect has a strong record of leading his churches to unity and peace. Conversely, determine if there is any pattern of frequent conflict and disunity. A major part of pastoring is to be able to prevent serious conflict and quickly neutralize it when it does occur. Ask the Director of Missions whether there are persistent patterns of conflict in the prospect’s church or associational relationships.
- (11) Determine in detail the various controversies or divisive issues he has encountered and how he handled them. What did he learn from the situations? You might also pose some hypothetical cases and ask how he would handle them. (This will give you an idea how he thinks.) Assess his awareness of legal liability issues in today’s litigation-ridden society.
- (12) \* Figure financial giving increases in comparison with attendance growth. Assess the stewardship strategies and patterns of his church in comparison with other churches of similar size.
- (13) Determine the candidate’s level of Cooperative Program support as well as his church’s performance in Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong. Determine if he has aggressively led his church to mission projects, trips or church planting. Is he deeply committed to the Cooperative Program as well as associational and state giving? Ask him to describe his involvement with Women’s Mission Ministries. Have missions giving and projects grown significantly under his leadership? (True growth will be specific and measurable.) Assess his commitment to developing missions organizations for various age groups. Ask his involvement with the Gideons Bible Society.

- (14) Ask the candidate to describe his strategies and experience in leading a multi-staff team to good cohesion and teamwork. Determine his patterns of leading church staff to personal and professional development. Assess his skill and priority in ensuring good communication among staff and the entire church. How does he establish accountability in his staff? Look for very specific strategies.
- (15) What are his specific views concerning gifts of healing and speaking in tongues? Has he ever dealt with charismatic issues in a church? How did he handle it? How would he handle it if it arose?
- (16) Assess the candidate's skills in relating to the various age groups of the church. Ask him to describe the specific strategies he uses to maintain closeness and trust with each age group.
- (17) Has he encountered "worship wars" and if so, how was it handled? (Worship wars are conflict and tension over changing worship styles.) What is his philosophy of leading a church through changing worship styles? Have him describe *in detail* the music and worship styles he would most encourage.
- (18) Determine his personal long-term goals? Ask him to fully describe his greatest strengths and his greatest weakness. Ask him to describe any specific steps he is taking to strengthen his weaknesses.
- (19) Have the candidate describe his understanding of helping a church find their God-given vision. By his answer, assess whether he leads his church to seriously *seek God* in planning or mostly just come up with goals and call it a "vision". Ask the prospect if his church has adopted short and long-term strategic visions or plans. Get him to describe them in detail. Does his church embrace a yearly vision or strategic goals? Why or why not? Have him describe how they form their church vision. (The whole process should be built around intense prayer.)
- (20) What is his leadership style? (In terms of personality, organizational and biblical foundations of leadership.) How often does he convene the church council and how are they used? Have him describe his specific strategies for giving strong leadership to key committees while still giving freedom for lay leadership to do their job. What specific strategies has he employed to develop and encourage lay leadership? What is his pattern and beliefs concerning office hours?
- (21) What is his biblical philosophy of deacon ministry and deacon leadership? Ask him to describe his beliefs and practices in detail. What specific strategies has he employed to develop his deacons? How does he work to maintain a close cooperative relationship with his deacons? What is his belief and practice on ordaining or utilizing deacons who are divorced and remarried?
- (22) What kind of Sunday School growth and evangelism strategies has he employed? Look for specifics and well thought-out strategies, not generalities. How does he secure good church involvement?
- (23) Determine his grade point average in college and seminary. Low grades could indicate a concern in the areas of personal discipline and or IQ.
- (24) \* Conduct a thorough credit rating on the prospect. In checking references, I strongly encourage committees to go far beyond those given on a resume. Ask if he or his family has serious health needs.
- (25) Determine his view of scripture by having him describe it. Ask him if he believes there is any "mixture of error" in the Bible. Determine his view of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship or other groups who might describe themselves as moderates. Ask him to describe his view of different translations of the bible. What translation does he typically use in preaching or teaching?
- (26) Determine his patterns of denominational leadership and active involvement. Is he highly involved in several committees and has he held high elected positions in the association, state, or national convention? If so, what steps did he take to keep it from interfering with his pastorate? Does he see himself in increasing roles of local, state or national denominational leadership? Has he been heavily involved in local, state or national

politics? (Either government or denominational) *\*It speaks very well when the denomination sees your pastor as a leader.* In fact, great pastors usually do exert considerable leadership beyond their church. You just want to make sure it is not a passion to the point of interfering with his pastoral role. Also ask how much he wants the church involved in state and associational activities. A healthy balance is the desire. (You don't want an isolationist.)

- (27) Determine if he has any views that might be considered extreme or could easily become controversial. In other words, does he have any views or patterns that are atypical of most Baptist churches? You should definitely ask his specific views and practices in the following areas: unusual music or worship styles, any extreme emphasis on the doctrine of election, charismatic leanings, the use of elders, alien immersion, the use of women as deacons or ushers, his personal wedding policies and beliefs, committee selection process, deacon election procedures, Masonic lodge, isolation from association involvement etc. In other words, you don't want any "surprises" after the pastor comes on board. You must also inform him of any atypical patterns in your church. (The new pastor doesn't need surprises either!)
- (28) Ask if he is committed to a "day of rest" each week? (If he is not, he is living an unbiblical lifestyle and is a prime candidate for burnout.) Seek to determine if this candidate has a genuine passion for personal spiritual growth and revival. Have him describe in detail any specific points of recent spiritual growth and transformation in his own life. You definitely want a man who is experiencing fresh growth and change. Ask him to fully describe the studies and conferences he has attended for continuing professional development. You need a man who is very committed to continuing development and growth. Many pastors fall into a rut and this very negatively impacts the church. Churches should strongly encourage *and fund* continuing education and spiritual development for their pastor.

### **Three Areas Crucial to an Effective Modern Pastor**

1. **The pastor must be a man who spends significant time in daily prayer and scripture study.** No pastor can lead a church beyond his own prayer depth and relationship with Jesus! Truly powerful ministry flows out of fervent personal prayer, deep holiness and an intimate walk with God. He should also be a man who truly understands history's great revivals. He must understand the role of spiritual cleansing and repentance in his life and that of the church. He must have a very strong commitment to effective church prayer meetings and prayer ministries. (Matthew 21:13; Acts 6:1-6) Your pastor must also understand the importance of maintaining his own day of Sabbath rest. (Which for him is certainly not Sunday.) He must understand the vital importance of periodic retreats for spiritual renewal and communion with God. Too many men think extreme overwork and little rest are spiritual when just the opposite is actually true.
2. **It is vital for a pastor to have a powerful sense of balance in three critical areas.**
  - (1) *Preaching/Teaching* – The pastor must have a strong "balance" of preaching through the Bible as well as special series and relevant topics. Expository preaching is highly desirable. You want to be sure he has a pattern of balanced preaching to a wide range of issues and purposes. He needs a balance between preaching that is evangelistic, teaching, healing, encouraging and prophetic (confrontive when needed).
  - (2) *Pastoral Care* – He needs to have a strong pattern of ministering to the sick, hurting and discouraged of the congregation. However, he cannot even begin to do it all or many other areas of his ministry would greatly suffer. He must be able (and willing) to mobilize staff and deacons to strongly share the care ministry load. This is especially crucial in mid-size and larger churches.
  - (3) *Leadership* – He must have strong skills of strategic leadership. Through deep sensitivity to God's leading, he must be able to set short and long range goals with practical steps to help the church achieve them. You want someone who has a track record of being able to convincingly articulate God's vision and motivate people to follow it. He must have strong communication patterns and demonstrated ability to help many different groups work together. A wise pastor can usually lead churches through major changes with minimal conflict. He fully understands the importance of discerning God's "method" and "timing" when making

changes. This skill is vital because of the unprecedented changes facing today's church. He must also be able to relate to all age groups. (At least to a reasonable degree.)

3. **The pastor needs a strong family in which all members are serious disciples and committed to support his ministry.** When you call a pastor, in a real sense you call his family. It is scriptural to determine if there are significant spiritual issues in his marriage and family. (1 Timothy 3:4-5) Above all, the pastor must be a man committed to give his family the regular time and attention they both need and deserve!

### **The Seven Essential Areas for Church Priority and Intentional Focus**

In my years of researching historic revivals and truly great churches, I have noted seven key areas in which they are always strong. The seven areas should represent points of intentional focus, not mere lip service. To a real degree, these areas are objective and measurable in a pastor's ministry. Be aware that almost anyone will "say" they focus on these seven areas. Remember, it's what they've actually done that most tells the real story. I strongly suggest you question the prospect about his strengths, philosophies and *specific activities* in the following seven areas. Again, look for specific patterns of strong action, not theories.

1. **Prayer** - (Is he committed to developing strong personal prayer in his people along with powerful prayer meetings and prayer ministries?)
2. **Evangelism** - (Is he committed to preaching evangelistically, developing strong outreach strategies, Sunday school, soul winning, evangelistic campaigns, strong baptism patterns, etc.?)
3. **Missions** - (Is he committed to developing strong local, state and foreign missions projects and increased giving patterns?)
4. **Discipleship** - (Is he committed to developing strong Sunday school, discipleship training, personal growth, marriage emphases, special needs focus, etc.?)
5. **Worship** - (Is he committed to developing ever stronger patterns of worship and music ministries?)
6. **Loving/Fellowship** - (Is he committed to developing strategies for ever-increasing oneness, fellowship, united vision and care ministry to the hurting?)
7. **Repentance/Revival** - (Is he committed to developing patterns for leading the church into deep holiness and genuine revival as well as periodic evangelistic meetings?)

### **Seven Vital Considerations for Search Committees Themselves**

1. ***Have pulpit committee members make a serious commitment to deepen their individual daily prayer lives and holiness before God?*** The process for finding God's pastor is one of the most vital and spiritual tasks anyone can ever embrace. To put it plain, spiritual tasks require spiritual people. It is especially vital for each member to personally undergo a thorough spiritual examination to ensure there is no unconfessed sin that has been overlooked. For this reason, I strongly encourage every committee member to pray through the book, *How to Develop a Powerful Prayer Life*. Special attention should be given to working through Chapter Five, "Getting Clean Before God". Before each committee meeting, all members should at least pray through the Brief Cleansing Guide for Pastor Search Committees (attached). If there is unconfessed sin in the group, your spiritual hearing will be hindered.

Each committee meeting should be characterized by three words — pray, pray, pray! Though we must use all the practical facts and principles we can find, our ultimate principle is Proverbs 3:5-6, "*Lean not to thy*

*own understanding in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths*". To clearly hear God, we must be clean, yielded and full of His Spirit. Never forget the following principle: "No pulpit committee will be any stronger than the personal prayer and spiritual cleansing of those in the group." Yet, let no reader be overwhelmed! God's grace is greater than your sin and more than sufficient for your task. Dear committee, if you seek Him (and His guidance) with all your heart, you will surely find Him. (Jeremiah 29:13; James 4:8) At the back of this document, I have included a simple tool to assist with your daily prayer lives. Also included is a brief cleansing guide for individual members to pray through prior to each committee meeting.

At this point, I should mention a word about the importance of seeking God's perfect will and timing. It is a grave mistake to try and predict or pre-determine how long it should take to find God's man. We must be cautious about any tendency to "rush" to get the job done. Be prepared that some church members can at times put you under pressure that is not from God. Be sure to give the congregation frequent reports but do not yield to any timing other than God's.

It is also dangerous to have your mind rigidly set about exact age parameters or other factors your pastor must fit. While establishing sound spiritual guidelines are absolutely essential, some factors (such as age) cannot be so rigid. It is a foundational mistake to try and put God in a small box and tell Him how He must guide. By no means does God's will always fit expected human norms.

- 2. *Ask God's direction in an honest, thorough assessment of your church's strengths, weaknesses, challenges, opportunities and needs.*** The following are key areas to assess: (a) Growth patterns. Assess the past three years by the following scale. More than a 5 % increase in average Sunday school attendance = a growing church, more than a 5% decline = a declining church, somewhere between = a plateaued church. (b) Secure demographics and projections for a three mile radius around the church. (Is the area stable? Are people moving further out? Are they moving in? What are the projections?) (c) Are other churches in the surrounding region experiencing greater momentum and advantages in terms of growth and opportunities? (d) Staff size and effectiveness, (e) Lay-leadership size and effectiveness, (f) Do we have a strong sense of excitement and specific vision for numeric and spiritual growth? (g) What is our current level of togetherness, fellowship and unity? (h) Do we currently have a comprehensive strategic vision or is this an area our church needs to improve? (i) Is our congregation reasonably balanced in terms of age group ratios? Do we need special focus in reaching more of a particular group? Are we prepared to make the necessary changes to reach more of a particular age group? If all you think about is your own personal preferences, there are many groups you will never reach.

- 3. *Be utterly honest and thorough in communicating both your church's strengths and weaknesses to the potential pastor.*** Be sure to provide a demographics package and a realistic assessment of projected patterns. The prospect needs to fully understand both the strengths and challenges. He should fully be apprised of the church's history in terms of growth, decline or issues of unity. If there are various factions and dynamics, he needs to know it. Be utterly candid about any significant trouble spots or controversy presently (or recently) occurring in the church. If there are current or recent "undercurrents" of significance, he needs to be made aware. As much as possible, communicate any issues you think will likely arise in the near future. If there is a situation you are expecting the new pastor to deal with, you need to tell him. The new pastor should have no "surprises" about situations or expectations soon after he arrives on the field.

Dear committee, please do not be afraid your honesty will run off a true man of God. If he is indeed God's man for your church, he will accept the call in spite of trouble spots. (All churches have them.) The key words are "balance" and "honesty". In other words don't oversell or undersell, just be honest and thorough. The candidate will greatly appreciate your honesty and thoroughness.

It is equally important to share your full hopes and dreams for the church. After all, you are trusting God to lead you and your new pastor to a higher plane of ministry, growth and closeness with Himself. It is right to dream big because our God is big! You should share in detail the specific ways you think your church could move to much higher levels. Be sensitive to whether the prospect seems genuinely excited about the challenges and potential of your church.

- 4. *Prayerfully identify the specific strengths most needed in your next pastor.*** It is very important to agree on certain non-negotiable characteristics *before* you get into interviewing prospects. Once you start interviewing, personalities may get involved and you sometimes become influenced by emotion rather than facts of what

God says your church really needs. Remember, many candidates can persuasively “talk” a good fight. Though they have good intentions, it’s what they’ve actually “done” that best reveals their real strengths and likely future actions. Sometimes if a candidate really wants to leave his present situation, he may unconsciously try to persuade you he is the man. Candidates with strong personalities can sometimes almost take control of a meeting.

5. ***Assess whether the pulpit committee and the congregation has realistic biblical expectations of the new pastor.*** As churches grow or situations change, the congregation’s expectations of the pastor must also change. As a committee, you need to identify these necessary changes and help prepare the congregation. That is the job of the search committee, not the incoming pastor.

A major problem in today’s church is unrealistic (and unbiblical) expectations of the pastor. In essence, he is often expected to be and do everything. Yet scriptures describe the heart of his role as giving himself to prayer and Scripture. (Acts 6:4) Of course, he will also help equip the saints as well as oversee, lead and minister to the hurting. (Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Timothy 3:5) However, he *cannot* do it all by himself! He must have enormous help from the entire church body. Especially in larger growing churches, the pulpit committee must help congregations have realistic expectations and realize God has ordained the ministry as a church-wide “team” effort. As churches grow, the pastor’s role must change or he will be overwhelmed and the work greatly suffer.

6. ***Is the church leadership prepared to pay the price for significant congregational growth?*** (Both numeric and spiritual growth) If you are praying for significant growth and ministry, you must honestly address the following questions. “Would God send an ‘above average’ pastor and leader to a church unwilling to pay a great price to go forward?” If we truly want one of God’s ‘above average’ ministers, are we prepared to make an ‘above average’ commitment to Christ and His service?

Calling a pastor should be a time of deep reflection and recommitment for the key leaders of a church (deacons, teachers, staff, committees, etc.). It is a serious mistake to expect a pastor to come in and “make it all happen”. Is the church lay-leadership prepared to step up to the plate so the pastor can have ample time to “*give himself to the Word and prayer*”? (Acts 6:4) The interim period should be a time for key leaders to ask the following question. “Based on our current commitment to prayer, giving, unity and evangelism, what kind of pastor do we deserve?”

Make no mistake — God will seldom waste a really truly great leader on people unwilling to embrace above average commitment. If your honest assessment is that you’ve been average or less, you should fervently pray about how you can prepare your church to be ready to change and grow. You may want to consider having a godly leader come to address your church on what it takes to get ready for real change and growth. Perhaps your interim pastor could give special focus to this issue.

7. ***Consider establishing a church policy of periodic sabbaticals for your pastor.*** For a wide variety of reasons, today’s churches are increasingly difficult to pastor. *At astounding rates pastors are burning out and thousands are functioning in an emotional rut.* Few lay-people have any concept of the intense pressure of speaking three or four times a week to the same people. Neither is there real awareness of the enormous complexity of the administrative issues constantly on the mind of most pastors. And only those who have done it can fathom the emotional toll of ministering to the heartbreaks and crises of huge numbers of families. On top of all this, the pastor and his family are targeted by Satan’s most vicious attacks. They are also targeted by unprecedented attack from people.

For all the above reasons, it is extremely wise (and biblical) for a church to give their pastor periodic sabbaticals for focused prayer, rest, study and spiritual renewal. This can be done in many different ways. One practical option is to give him at least a two to four week sabbatical every other year. (This is in addition to his family vacation time.) It is understood he will use this time for prayer, spiritual renewal and study as God directs. In his seventh year, he should be given a more extensive two to six month sabbatical. Each church would decide frequency and length of sabbaticals. I stress the sabbaticals are times for rest, deep study and growth, not waste.

During the sabbaticals, the church would secure a guest preacher or preachers. In fact, this can be a time of healthy variety for the congregation. The staff and lay-leadership would commit to take up the entire administration and care ministry load. Though a sabbatical may sound impractical, in the long run, churches

actually receive far more and better ministry from their pastor. It is often the best money a church ever spends. It is good for the church, good for the pastor and great for the kingdom! This concept is biblical and makes excellent psychological sense. You may also have a much better chance of securing a truly great man of God. Such a policy says you really care about him and about kingdom growth principles. When you inform your prospective pastor of this policy, you would be amazed how much this appeals to a serious man of God. I advise committees to seriously pray about this rather than just dismissing it because “we’ve never done it that way”.

Behind each point in the document, there is significant biblical principle and rationale that

I could not address in this brief resource. If you need further information or have questions about some of these points, feel free to contact:

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## **A Personal Prayer Guide for Pastor Search Committees** **“Establishing a Powerful Daily Prayer Time”**

*\*Special note: The following outline is a general description of an effective daily quiet time. The times listed are only samples and are not meant to be rigidly followed.*

- I. Begin with a period of praise and thanksgiving (5 - 10 minutes)** Psalms 100:4-5
- Take a few moments to thank God for past, present, and future blessings
  - Spend some time praising God for who He is (His characteristics and names)
  - Take time just to freely worship and adore Him from your heart
- II. Continue with confession and repentance (at least 5 - 15 minutes)** Proverbs 28:13; Psalms 66:18; 139:23-24
- Ask God to search your thoughts and attitudes
  - Carefully examine your speech
  - Ask God to thoroughly search your relationships
  - Confess any sins of commission and be sure to forsake the sins God reveals
  - Confess any sins of omission and make a definite commitment to obedience
  - Resolve to fully repent of any known sin of thought, word or deed (Be specific)
  - Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit
  - Be sure to utilize a thorough biblical tool designed to search all areas of your life with God’s Word (Provided in the cleansing guide)
- III. Move into Prayers of Personal Petition (10 - 15 minutes)** Philippians 4:6, Matthew 6:33
- Pray for the development of character and holiness. Pray through the specific fruits of the Holy Spirit or other character words (Matthew 5:1-12; Galatians 5:22)
  - Pray for your ministry and service to God (be very specific in your prayers)
  - Pray for any physical, emotional, spiritual or financial needs
- IV. Proceed with Prayers of Intercession (10 - 20 minutes)** Ezekiel 22:30, 2 Timothy 2:1-4
- Pray for needs of family and friends
  - Pray for your pastor and church
  - Pray for specific needs of the pastor search
  - Pray for missionaries and mission efforts (Use guides from both the *International and North American Mission Boards*)
  - Pray for revival and spiritual awakening in your church and nation
- In your intercession, seek to be as specific as possible. Also remember the value of focusing on only two or three categories per day. If you thoroughly prayed for every category, you could literally pray for hours. Though some may be led to prayer for hours, most people will be led to focus on specific categories on certain days. As always, the guiding principle is close sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. True prayer is a relationship, not a ritualistic formula.
- V. Conclude with a Time of Scripture Meditation and Listening for God’s Voice**
- Reflect on key points of your scripture reading and prayer time
  - Assess how God has impressed on your heart
  - Write down key impressions in a daily journal
  - End your time with thanksgiving for God’s grace, mercy and power

Again, I emphasize the previous pattern is a general guideline, not a rigid program. As you allow God’s Spirit to guide, you will be amazed at the ways He will direct you day by day. It is awesome to pause and remember that Almighty God desires a very close personal relationship with you. If we’re willing, He enables us to walk with Him in deep spiritual intimacy. May God help us settle for nothing less than the glorious reality of His presence!

## **A Spiritual Preparation Guide for Search Committee Meetings** ***“Embracing the Vital Missing Element of Deep Spiritual Cleansing”***

Search committees should never forget the following principle — *Your spiritual hearing can only be as clear as your hearts are clean.* Yet, when you sincerely confess and repent of your sins, you can rest assured of God’s forgiveness. You can now ask Him to fill you with the Holy Spirit. Rely upon God to fill you with His mighty power and wisdom for the committee meeting. Each week as you prepare to meet, take time to work through the primary questions for cleansing. (You can have members do this before they come or take some time for cleansing and prayer at the start of each meeting.) As cleansing becomes a serious practice, you will experience a fullness and power you never dreamed possible! You will experience the powerful reality of Galatians 2:20, *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”* Conversely, if we neglect this principle, we can easily miss the still, small voice of God.

### **A Brief Weekly Checklist to Prepare For Weekly Pastor Search Meetings**

- 1. Do I have any sinful thought patterns I need to confess and forsake?** Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5  
*Areas to consider:* unclean thoughts, worldly thinking, anger and malice, doubt and fear, bitterness, etc.
- 2. Do I have attitudes I need to confess and lay before God?** Revelation 3:15; 1 Peter 5:5; Hebrews 11:6; Ephesians 4:2  
*Areas to consider:* lukewarmness, pride, jealousy, prejudice, unbelief, unkindness, worldliness or materialism, a critical harsh spirit, etc.
- 3. Do I have sins of speech I need to confess and forsake?** Ephesians 4:29; 5:4; Colossians 3:9; 1 Corinthians 10:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:18  
*Areas to consider:* inappropriate slang speech, cursing, off color jokes, exaggeration, lying, complaining, bitterness, divisive speech, critical or judgmental speech, etc.
- 4. Do I have damaged or wrong relationships I need to address?** Matthew 5:23; 6:14-15; Ephesians 5:25; 6:3  
*Areas to consider:* people I have offended, people who have offended me, inappropriate relationships, fathers who fail to act as spiritual head, wives rejecting God’s patterns for women, neglecting to honor parents.
- 5. Do I have sinful action or habits I need to confess and forsake?** Ephesians 5:5, 12; 2 Corinthians 6:17; 3:16; Exodus 20:2-3; Malachi 3:8-10; 1 John 3:20-22  
*Areas to consider:* immorality, pornography, abusive habits against my body, idolatry (putting others ahead of God), any form of gambling, dabbling in horoscopes or new ageism, spiritual compromise, violating my conscience, any form of harshness or mistreatment of others.
- 6. Have I sinned against God by sins of omission?** John 15:4-5; Ephesians 4:18; Romans 6:14; Hebrews 4:1; James 1:23-24  
*Areas to consider:* failure to regularly pray and read God’s Word, failure to witness in daily life, neglecting to discover and use my spiritual gifts, refusing to press forward into spiritual victory, disrespecting Christian leaders, failing to pursue holiness, lack of spiritual hunger, failure to tithe and give offerings, failure to generously support missions, failure to work to improve my marriage, etc.

7. **Have I refused to die to self or in any way relied on my own strength?** Matthew 16:24-25; John 12:24; Proverbs 17:3; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

*Areas to consider:* Has God told you to do something yet you've ignored Him? Is there a point in which you insist on your way over God's? Are there points you try to ignore God's conviction in your life? Do you rejoice in your trials or view them only as impositions? Do you seek to let God prune your life or do you resist Him? Have you in any sense relied more on your own strength than on prayer and the Holy Spirit? Are you in any way relying more on human reasoning than fervent prayer and deep sensitivity to God?

### **Drawing Near to God in Full Confidence**

Once you have thoroughly confessed your sins and yielded to the full Lordship of Jesus, He promises to draw near and fill you with Himself. "*Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.*" (James 4:8) As a committee, take significant time to pray and express your love to God and your deep desire to hear His voice. Specifically ask God to guide you in two ways absolutely critical to your task. (1) To cause you to find His perfect will and timing. (2) To guard you from any mistake in direction or timing.

With cleansed hearts and fervent prayer you can indeed stand firm in God's wonderful promise of mercy and wisdom. "*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*" (James 1:5) Though we are all imperfect, His grace is greater than our weakness. Let us be utterly confident in His merciful guidance. God can be fully trusted to reveal His full and perfect will. To Him be all glory, honor and praise!