



# **FINDING A PASTOR**

**Some things to think about**

**By John Benton**

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## Introduction

Pastors don't last forever.

They depart. They move on to other churches. They retire. They die and move on to glory. Their exit is sometimes after many years of faithful service in the same church. Sometimes it's after just a short ministry. Sometimes it is planned. Sometimes it is quite unexpected. Sometimes the church will miss the pastor terribly. Sometimes the congregation will sadly be glad to see the back of him. But for every church, large or small, the phrase 'situation vacant' will apply to their pastorate from time to time. Hence the question, 'How do we go about finding a new pastor?' is frequently a relevant one for churches.

### **A significant crossroads**

Appointing a new pastor is often a significant turning point in the life of a church. So, finding a new pastor is not a job to be embarked on lightly. Care needs to be taken. It can go one way or another. We need to pray to God, and we need to think things through thoroughly.

It is not always the case, but the appointment of a new pastor can make or break a church.

A church that has been a little forgotten back-street congregation can, given the right pastor and a few years, become a large church, the main centre of sound, Biblical evangelicalism in a town. On the other hand, we have all seen churches which once thrived under great preaching and zealous ministry dwindle to almost nothing for various reasons, one of which might be an unfortunate choice when changing ministers.

The *first* lesson to learn is that saying 'goodbye' to one pastor and welcoming a new one needs lots of love John 13.34,35, 1 John 4.7. Give the old pastor plenty of opportunity to finish well. You don't want there to be sourness in the church to greet the new man. And lots of love will help the new man (and his family) to land happily too, Philippians 1.9. However, the change-over or passing on of the church baton is a crucial point in the history of any congregation.

### **Beware rushing things**

The *second* lesson is to be careful not to rush at things and go too quickly in trying to find a new pastor. Paul advises Timothy concerning making leadership appointments in the church, 'Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands', 1 Timothy 5.22. Laying on

of hands with prayer was the NT practice in setting aside someone to a God-given work. It was done by the church at Antioch when Paul and Barnabas were first sent off to the mission field, Acts 13.3. It was part of what the church did to set apart and equip someone for ministry, 2 Timothy 1.6. Paul's message in settling on a new minister is 'Take your time.'

When the pastorate is vacant there can often be a pressure to get things 'fixed' quickly so that the church can get back to normal as soon as possible. This pressure can emerge for various reasons.

It can be that there has been a long and fruitful pastorate in the church, and it simply feels odd not to have a pastor. Or the opposite might be true. Perhaps the church has not had a pastor for many years and there are voices which are understandably crying out that this has gone on long enough and it really is time to get a proper minister. But though that may be true, Paul's advice is, 'Yes, but don't rush.' Then there is the situation where to all appearances a 'good man' makes himself available and the thought occurs 'If we don't move quickly another church will snap him up.' But Paul's advice is still the same. 'Don't be pressurized – make sure you cover the bases concerning this man before coming to a decision.'

Rushing things is often when mistakes are made. Two or three situations come to my mind which have brought huge difficulties to churches. One ended with the man who was taken on splitting the church. Another quick appointment simply proved totally unsuitable for the circumstances the church was facing and caused a lot of grief all round. Yet another appointment where the church was 'swept off its feet' by the apparent ability of the man ended in the man claiming unlawful dismissal and the church losing an immense amount of money in a legal settlement. Paul says, 'Calm down – hold your horses. Don't be hasty.'

### **Be wise**

Thankfully it doesn't always end like those three situations I have mentioned! God is good and very good appointments can be made with prayer and care. But hopefully I have been able to convince you of the wisdom of Paul's words that we should not be too hasty when it comes to seeking and settling on a new minister.

This booklet tries to point out some of the areas where we need to be prayerful and think and ask God for wisdom.

## Chapter 1: Initiating the process

It may be best to initiate the process of looking for a new pastor, if possible, before the old pastor leaves. If you can call a man early such that there is something of an overlap in their ministries and no interregnum, that can be a way of making the changeover a less bumpy ride for the congregation. This, of course, should be done without making the departing pastor feel denigrated or unwanted. Remember, 'lots of love'.

But for various reasons, often there tends to be a break between pastorates. And as a pastor leaves, much responsibility regarding the future of the church obviously lands on the shoulders of the remaining elders or others in church leadership. They have to step up and give a lead. No congregation likes to feel rudderless. It is not good to be without direction. There needs to be reassurance and a plan as to the way forward.

As we initiate the process of looking for a new minister there are at least five matters to bear in mind.

*First*, the decision concerning a new pastor should not just lie with existing leaders. It is important that the people committed to the congregation have a chance to give input concerning what the church needs in a new pastor. After all, they are the people who, under God he is going to be caring for. They are also the people who through their giving to the church will be paying his wages. Further, the gathered church, not the elders, is always the ultimate court of authority, Matthew 18.17; 1 Corinthians 5.3-5; 1 Corinthians 6.1-2. It is the church who should make the final decision about whether or not to call a man as their pastor<sup>1</sup>. So, it is right to hear their ideas and concerns from the start.

### Search committee

This listening to the congregation can be done in a variety of ways. With a small church of say, less than twenty people, it is quite easy for everyone's point of view to be aired in church meetings. In larger churches sometimes a 'search committee' is appointed with the approval of the church meeting. This would consist of a few of the elders plus some trusted members of the church, male and female. Their job together is to try to collate as much information as possible and then through

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<sup>1</sup> A pastor is simply an elder with particular responsibility for teaching and preaching. The word used for appointing elders in Acts 14.23 carries the connotation of raising hands, as in a vote of some kind.

discussions and prayer – perhaps having listened to a few potential pastors’ sermons online – to bring a suggested short-list of candidates to the church’s attention.

Some churches opt to include not just church members in the conversation about a new pastor but also those who are regular attenders. Obviously, every situation is different, and it may not be right to lay down hard and fast rules here, but generally that way of going about things does not commend itself.

If people will not commit to a church, why should they expect to have a say in big decisions of a church? It seems wrong. Besides, it may well be that those people attend but have not become members because they have a different view of what they want the church to be. To give them a say concerning a new pastor is to open a door to them pushing their agenda. This is likely not to be a wise move. It could well be a source of argument and division just at a time when the church needs to stick together, Philippians 2.2.

### **Managing expectations**

However, the main thrust is that the remaining leaders ought to listen to folk. The eldership must not become a closed off cabal, a ‘boys’ club’ separate from the church in this matter.

There will be many ideas from the church concerning the new pastor – some regarding preaching, others concerning visiting, some concerning the needs of the youth work etc., and these various concerns will need to be fielded and prioritised by the elders or the search committee (preferably both); for example, ‘yes a pastor should visit his people but the existing eldership do a great deal of that already, so perhaps that is not our number 1 concern.’ Or again, ‘It is good for a pastor to take a real interest in the work among young people, but we already have some excellent youth leaders, and there are other areas of church life that require attention.’ Expectations will need to be managed and thinking explained to the church. We must try to keep everyone on the same page.

This managing of expectations by the leadership should not only apply during the process of appointing a new pastor but would also be helpful, having brought in someone, during the early months of the new pastor’s ministry. Some in the congregation might expect immediate change or immediate growth in the church. It rarely happens like that, 1 Corinthians 3.6. Mostly a man needs time to get settled and to understand what he has taken on before he can discern the most effective and helpful approach to moving the church forward.

## **The advantages of a home-grown pastor**

The *second* point is that before we look over the horizon for a new pastor it is worthwhile considering whether there is anyone already in the church, a home-grown member or leader, who could do the job.

Though this, for some reason, is hardly ever considered these days, there are good reasons to begin here.

- It seems that the churches we find in the NT adopted this practice. Generally speaking, the elders of a church were selected from among the membership, Acts 14.23; 1 Timothy 3.1f; Titus 1.5f. In NT terms a pastor is simply an elder who is particularly gifted and set aside to teach the word of God to the people, 1 Timothy 5.17. Furthermore, a church is looked upon in the NT as the body of Christ with each member being given gifts by God to be used for the well-being of the church as a whole. Among those gifts is the gift of being a pastor/teacher, Ephesians 4.11, 12. It therefore seems both Scriptural and natural to begin the process by asking if there is anyone already in the church who could do the work of the pastor.
- Apart from this Scriptural basis, there are other grounds as to why this makes sense. Some of the main causes for pastorates going wrong is either that the pastor did not really understand what he was taking on when he said 'Yes' to the church, or that the church did not really know very well the man they were calling as a key leader for their church. If we find someone already in the church who is both gifted and willing to become the church's pastor, then these potential sources of problems are minimized. The man already in the church, perhaps for some years, knows (and hopefully has already grown to love) the people he will be pastoring. What he is taking on will come as no surprise to him. And in addition, the people of the church will have had plenty of time to know who they are taking on as pastor. When it comes to answering the questions which the NT poses concerning whether or not a man is of the right calibre to be a pastor/elder – things like 'Is he quick tempered?' or 'Is he hospitable?' (See 1 Timothy 3.1-7; Titus 1.5-9) – they will not have to guess. They will know the answer from experience of him.

It might seem unusual in these days, but the NT would encourage us to start by looking for a home-grown pastor. But, having looked, suppose there is no-one truly gifted or willing in the church to take on the work of being the pastor. What do we do then? At this point it would be right to look outside.

### **Advertising versus advice?**

*Thirdly*, once we begin to look outside our own congregation there are two chief lines along which churches tend to proceed. These are A). advertising the position of pastor in the Christian press, B). seeking advice either from a senior statesman evangelical or a Bible college principal. Both of these methods have their plusses and minuses.

The advantage of going for an advert is that you are casting your net as wide as possible. From my experience of spending a number of years editing a Christian newspaper I know that many more people read a paper than officially subscribe to it and that such newspapers can end up being read in places you would never expect across the whole world. An advert might prompt a response from Aberdeen or Australia, from Southend or South Africa. Brilliant! The downside of advertising in this way is that in casting your net as wide as possible you may draw responses from all kinds of people you did not intend. You are opening yourself up to oddballs of various kinds, to people who are simply fed up with their job and feel like a change and maybe even to people whose prime motive in applying to your church is not the good of Christ's kingdom, but moving to UK and possibly getting British citizenship. It is as well to be aware of such things. Be careful.

The other route is seeking advice. Senior pastors who have been around the block of evangelicalism a few times often have an ear to the ground. They have many contacts. They may even know your own church a little and not only know of men who have a pastoral/preaching gift but also know whether or not the man they are drawing to your attention might fit well with your people. 'Is there anyone you could suggest for us?' The question is worth asking. The positive here is that the candidate comes with some measure of commendation from someone you trust. The negative is that having been recommended by a senior figure you might feel duty bound not to refuse him, even if he is inappropriate.

The same approach can be made to principals of Bible colleges. They too can be helpful. But there is a caveat. With the advent of online, long-distance learning coming into theological training, the college principals tend no longer to know the men they teach with the same depth they once did.

### **Sifting through**

*Fourthly*, using such avenues, the search committee can look at the responses (assuming you get some!) and draw up a possible short list of men. The church then has to assess who it would be worthwhile approaching.

Again, it is wise for the church as a whole to be invited to get involved in this part of the process. This is not the time to tell parts of the body of Christ, 'We don't need you', 1 Corinthians 12.21. Perhaps the church can be encouraged to listen to a sermon or two of the men on the short list. There could then follow a church meeting where people say what they think. It is very important that in a church meeting people do feel free to honestly express their thoughts and not think that they necessarily have to agree with the elders or the search team. Maybe with this in mind, it is for the elders and search team to simply keep quiet and listen. Then the elders / search team can make an informed decision on who they might approach and ask to come and preach for the church, which constitutes the next part of the process.

### **Candidates are human too**

Here too a decision has to be made about whether to approach one man at a time or to ask several candidates to come and preach over a period.

*Fifthly*, at this point it is wise and loving to realise that in your search to find a pastor you will from now on be dealing with real human beings. The different candidates will have their own hopes and fears and sensitivities and need to be treated with respect. The last thing you want is for a sincere servant of God who is willing to take on the difficult work of becoming a pastor to be deeply damaged in some way by the process. Try not to be rough or unkind in your engagement with them. Gentleness is the order of the day. With this in mind, it may be helpful from the outset to spell out to them the way you hope to go about things and to keep them informed as to what is going on. Meanwhile the church is keeping them lovingly in their prayers.

## Chapter 2: Scriptural qualifications

As we have already intimated, a pastor is simply an elder who has a specific job – that of teaching the congregation what God’s word, the Bible has to say, 1 Timothy 5.17. That being the case, the qualifications required for someone becoming an elder become the very minimum characteristics you must look for in a pastor. The pastor does not get a pass on these things. He must match up here.

The apostle Paul sets out these requirements most fully in 1 Timothy 3.1-7 which says ‘This saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer<sup>2</sup> must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, apt to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.’

The structure of this important passage can be seen to consist of a headline, five character traits and a proven ability (apt to teach) followed by another five character traits followed by a second proven ability (managing his family well). Then it is all rounded off by two warnings about the devil’s traps for church leaders. Before briefly commenting on the different elements of these verses it is worth mentioning three things.

- *First*, notice that far more attention is given to a man’s character than to his gifting. The headline of the passage is about a man’s character and behaviour – ‘above reproach.’ The ensuing required character traits outweigh the abilities by five to one. The spotlight is on godly living. It is easy for a church when looking for a new pastor, to forget this. Our attention tends to focus on the question, ‘What is he like as a preacher?’ Obviously, that is a relevant question. I would not want to encourage a church to take on a pastor whose pulpit ministry bores people stiff. But on the other hand, the church has often suffered terrible scandal centred on men who are marvellous speakers and can enthral any audience but whose morals are a disaster.

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<sup>2</sup> The word overseer is used with reference to elders – see Acts 20.17, 28.

- *Second*, we see that two proven abilities are required in a pastor/teacher. He needs not only to be a good teacher; he needs to be a good ‘people person’. The test of his abilities in handling and helping people are to be seen in the quality of his family life. As head of the family what is his track record? Does he look after his wife well? How has he done in raising his children? Here we find a measure of his people skills. Pastoring a church is not just about preaching, it is about helping and developing the people to become mature in Christ and able to serve others, Ephesians 4.12. And in a way the preaching is simply an aid to that great end. Bear in mind that both abilities are needed.
- *Third*, if a man is going to stand at the front and preach every Sunday then the church is going to look at him a lot. We will, therefore, be tempted to be influenced by the man’s physical appearance. Israel looked for someone like Saul as their king, who handsomely stood head and shoulders above others, rather than scruffy little David. We too can be drawn by attractive looks. We can enjoy the glow of youth. But Paul’s requirements of a pastor mention nothing of what someone looks like. A church must be reminded that ‘Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart’, 1 Samuel 16.7. And a church must concentrate on the heart too when they are seeking to find a pastor.

### **An overview of what to look for**

Looking after God’s people is a ‘noble’ task, v1. It follows in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus. The position of pastor is crucial for any church and therefore we need to take seriously what the apostle Paul advises us in 1 Timothy 3.1-7. He firstly gives us a headline, character traits, and proven abilities.

- *One headline*

A church needs to look for a man who is ‘above reproach’. That does not mean he must be sinless. There is no-one (except Christ) who is sinless, 2 Chronicles 6.36, Romans 3.23. Rather it means that he is not deserving of public criticism or the subject of scandal. It might be tempting for a church to ‘take a chance’ on some well-known preacher who has fallen morally and been dismissed by his church. ‘Perhaps his name has been in the newspapers, but he is still a great preacher,’ might be the argument. But Paul is saying, ‘Don’t do it.’ He has brought grief to one church and he could do the same again. ‘Don’t do it. Leave that situation to God.’

- *Ten character traits*

We will try to skim through each of these. The pastor/elder must be a man who is faithful to his wife. If he is faithful to her, it is a good sign that he will be faithful to God. He is to be 'sober-minded' in the sense of knowing what is going on, vigilant not inebriated or fuzzy in some way. He is to be 'self-controlled'. That is, he is a man in control of his impulses – not easily tempted into sin. 'Respectable' means to have a good reputation – even an outward beauty about his life that is recognised by others. 'Hospitable' is the next requirement. It means the man (and if married, his wife) must have a home with a door that is open to all – especially those in need. The pastor/elder should 'not be a drunkard,' or have a tendency to violence. No church member could feel safe with such a person. Instead, he is to be 'gentle', like the Lord Jesus, Matthew 11.29. This includes being humble and patient with people while being firm on the truth, 2 Timothy 2.25. The pastor/elder must not be 'quarrelsome' – someone who loves to pick a fight over everything. This will not help towards the unity of the church but is more likely to split the church. Nor must he be a 'lover of money'. In the NT the love of money is often the mark of false teachers, Titus 1.11. Jesus made it very clear that we cannot serve God and money, Matthew 6.24.

- *Two proven abilities*

*First*, a man must be 'apt to teach'. He must be good at teaching the Bible. That is to be true of all elders but should especially be true of a pastor who will handle the majority of the public ministry. This means that his preaching must have at least three things. It needs to be engaging, understandable and life-changing. A). It needs to engage people, to grab and hold on to their attention. His sermons should not be those which send people to sleep, but rather elicit a degree of concentration. B). It should cause people to understand Scripture. It should leave people feeling that they now grasp what that passage or those verses are about. They should leave church being able to explain what they have just heard to other people if called upon to do so. C). His teaching should be full of legitimate application of the passage, so that people know what they ought to do in the light of it. In other words, his preaching ought to be an agent of change – change of thinking, change of affection, change of behaviour. *Second*, the man must manage his family well<sup>3</sup>. This, as already noted, is an indication of the man's 'people skills'. The great NT rubric for communication is 'truth in love' Ephesians 4.15. The gift is truth, but it needs to be wrapped in love for people to accept it. The 'apt to teach' ability relates to truth, while the 'people skills' end of things relates to love. A pastor needs to have both of those things.

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<sup>3</sup> His children do not necessarily have to be believers but 'faithful' to their dad, not unruly. We can't make our children Christians.

It is worth saying at this point, that it is eye-catching that Paul's words here concerning the required qualities of church leaders both begin and end with family matters – faithful to his wife, managing his children well. This gives us a clear insight into the fact that a local church ought to be a family (of 'brothers and sisters') and what a church leadership should seek to build is a spiritual family. Hence Paul's concern, 'If someone does not know how to manage his own household how will he care for God's church?', 1 Timothy 3.5. When you are looking for a pastor, you are looking for a man who will build a family of God, with an emphasis on family.

- *Two serious warnings*

Paul warns in v6,7 of the dangers of conceit in church leaders and church leaders bringing disgrace on the church. If a young convert is made a pastor too soon, he may well come to think too highly of himself. I remember a pastor telling me of his church making a young man an elder and he said that almost immediately it changed his character. He became proud and arrogant such that the other elders could not work with him. It can happen. Beware. Don't rush. There is plenty of time and that young man needs to mature. Lastly, Paul returns to the general thought of being irreproachable v2, but now with a particular audience, unbelievers, in mind. Deficiencies in the overseer's reputation or behaviour damage the testimony of the church and open the leader to disgrace, giving the world a reason reject Christ and the gospel. It shuts the church off from those it is meant to reach.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 1 – 2 Timothy and Titus, by Philip H Towner, IVP,1994, page 89

## Chapter 3: Preaching ‘with a view’ and interviews

Although it is essential that a church requiring a pastor keeps its eyes on the full range of qualifications for leadership set out by the apostle Paul (see previous chapter), clearly there will be a desire to take on somebody who is a good preacher. The heartbeat of any vibrant church is the exposition of the word of God, 2 Timothy 4.2. It is here that Sunday by Sunday the church is touched by the supernatural as the Holy Spirit’s book is brought to bear on their lives, 2 Peter 1.19-21. It is as we hear, hold on to and keep the word that we find ourselves in Christ the true vine and he in us, John 15.1-17.

### Preaching visits

So, having made a short-list of possible candidates the obvious next move is to ask a man if he might come and preach one Lord’s Day.

At this point it may not be necessary to tell the man that you are asking him to preach ‘with a view’ – that is with a view to the possibility of him becoming your next pastor. If you do tell him, it might be quite a damaging shock to him if the church immediately decides he is not the right man. As has been said before, you are dealing with a human being, you do not want to wound a sincere servant of God unnecessarily in this process of seeking a pastor. Also, if you keep the ‘preaching with a view’ idea under wraps it enables the church to listen to several men on the short-list without any expectations on anybody’s part.

If there is a lot of positive response to the preaching visit of one of the men, that might be the time to ask him to return and to tell him that, if he is open to the prospect, the church is considering him for the position of pastor. Again, this has an element in it which looks after the man. If you do finally have to refuse him, you can at least encourage him by telling him that many church folk enjoyed and were helped by his preaching.

There are two things to suggest here. *First*, there might be an understandable tendency on the part of the man preaching with a view to bring his best sermon. This may not be a true reflection of his preaching ability generally. Perhaps, therefore, it might be good for the church elders to set the text on which he is to preach. Don’t make it ridiculously hard, be sensible. (There are not too many preachers, for example, who are confident they have a good grasp of the final chapters of Ezekiel). But a set text which might give you a better idea of whether he is ‘a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth’, 2 Timothy 2.15.

*Second*, it might be as well to get the church members to think about what makes a good sermon. Alert them not to be ‘charmed’ by fine oratory or a man who says all the things they enjoy hearing, 2 Timothy 4.3. A healthy future church will need both comfort and challenge from the Scriptures – so listen out for both things.

### **A ‘getting to know you’ time?**

With a desire to gain insight into a man’s character and family – as per 1 Timothy 3 – often churches set up a time when church members can meet the man and his wife and family and ask questions. This ‘getting to know you’ session can be quite a trial for the candidate and family. They feel as if they are being put on display, quizzed and judged – which in a sense they are of course. And it is understandable if they feel uncomfortable about this.

But there is no way round this kind of thing if you are considering a man from outside and you want to be faithful to what the NT has to say about appointing new leaders. The only way to alleviate the situation for them is to remember our first lesson, ‘lots of love’. Find practical ways of trying to be helpful. Perhaps if the family has a new baby, someone could offer to care for the child during the fellowship tea or whatever it is, so that the parents don’t have to try to cope with two things at once. Be supportive.

Though perhaps difficult, this opportunity for the church to get to know the family a little is useful. I remember one after church event where the prospective pastor and wife were asked about how they first met and got to fall for one another. Usually such a question would relax everyone and bring lots of smiles. But this time it didn’t. The answer was decidedly awkward and almost non-committal. Alarm bells should have sounded at that point. But the leaders of the church were so keen to take him on that it was brushed over. But it spelled problems. Some months later, the leaders realised that a mistake had been made and the man left. Remember, as we have already seen, in looking for a new pastor you are looking for a man who will build a family.

The possibly tense ‘getting to know you’ meeting can of course be avoided. It is not necessary if a church is considering one of their own members or leaders to become the pastor. They already know the man, his qualities and his wife and his children.

### **Interviews**

The current leaders of the church (certainly elders and maybe search-team too) need to give the man a thorough interview at some point and report back to the church meeting. They should not hold back on asking any relevant question. You don’t want,

later down the line, for elders to be kicking themselves and saying, 'If only we had asked about that!' This interview (or couple of interviews) should also give time for the man to ask his own questions – maybe about the strengths and weaknesses of the church, about the terms and conditions of his employment (more on this later), about accommodation etc.

An essential part of the interview concerns the prospective pastor's doctrinal stance. Is he in agreement with the church's doctrinal basis? Is he comfortable with the statement of faith as giving a fair and balanced overall idea of what the Scriptures teach? It is no good taking on a man to pastor a church whose stance he fundamentally disagrees with.

Further, questions need to be asked in the interview about whether or not the prospective pastor is a 'team player' when it comes to working with other elders<sup>5</sup>. Avoid anyone who is over-authoritarian in his outlook and seeks to dominate others rather than work with others. Elders and pastors are to be humble, accountable servants, 1 Timothy 5.19,20. We are warned against those who would 'lord it' over God's flock, 1 Peter 5.3.

Two more matters are important to think about when it comes to interviewing a prospective pastor. The *first* is to discuss the possibility of a probationary period for the new pastor. This is sensible simply because with the best will in the world usually church and candidate do not know each other all that well at this stage. A time of probation is sensible and cuts both ways. After a year or so the church might feel that the arrangement is not working. Or the new pastor might feel the work is taking too much of a toll on him and his family. Either side can gently draw back without acrimony. This would need to be written into the initial employment contract for which legal advice should be sought. The way a man reacts to the idea of a probationary period will also tell you much about the man. The *second* matter is to talk through together a general job description of what is to be expected of the pastor. What will he be responsible for? How will care of the flock be shared with other elders? When would be the pastor's day off? Clarity on such issues can avoid many problems which might otherwise emerge.

#### **Four critical issues**

There are four areas these days that I suggest particularly need searching out in an interview. I may seem a little harsh here, but experience tells me that unless there is

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<sup>5</sup> Here especially it is important to take up references from work colleagues. Anyone can say they are a team player.

clarity and agreement in these matters it spells trouble for a church. In no particular order these are, his wife's character and commitment, his stance on home schooling, his ideas about whether or not children should be kept in the service throughout, and whether or not he has suffered from mental health issues.

- If this man is going to be a good pastor his wife needs to be a good woman who is fully on board. A woman who pursues her own career and is hardly involved in church will be a discouragement rather than bring enthusiasm to a church. But again, a woman who is totally committed but is a gossip or very fierce with her views on disputable matters (say Covid vaccinations) will generate problems.
- Not all home schoolers are the same. But for some, home schooling of children seems even more important functionally than the gospel. The real problem comes when home-schoolers have a missionary zeal about their stance and see Christians who send their children to state schools as second-class or disobedient Christians. This is highly divisive. Also, they tend not to be fully involved in church life but rather look on the church as simply a Sunday resource for their main concern which is home schooling. If a man and his wife are that kind of home schoolers it is probably best to steer clear of him as a pastor. Whether intended or not, a home-schooling pastor sends a message to the community, 'I don't want my children mixing with yours.' It isn't helpful.
- Whether or not children should stay in the sermon or go out to Sunday School at that time to be taught at their own level may seem like a small issue, but it isn't. A church should want to draw in non-Christian families to hear the gospel and hopefully come to Christ. But the children of non-Christian homes will not be able to sit still through a 30-minute sermon. The parents will feel embarrassed. And they will feel alienated from the church and never come again. However, if children are cared for and have a fun learning time in Sunday School during the message, it means not only that parents can relax and concentrate on what is being said, but that the children themselves will want to go to church again. Avoid taking on a man as pastor who wants to keep the children in while he gives his monologue. It is not helpful<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, you may not agree with me on this. If the whole church wants children in the sermon, then you must go with it. The main point is that the prospective pastor and the church should be in agreement.

- We have to be sensitive and loving over issues of mental health. I am not saying that a man who has had mental health issues should never be a pastor – after all even Spurgeon did. But elders need to think very carefully if in their questioning they discover the candidate has had problems with depression or anxiety. Such men are often gifted and mean well, but many of them have been weakened by their experience and do not have the resilience and robustness that is needed to face the pressures which come in pastoral life. To become a pastor may well be no good for him or the church.

These are all delicate matters. But it is wise to explore them during the interview process and not avoid them.

## Chapter 4: Making your church attractive

A church needs to make the job of being their pastor an attractive prospect. After spelling out all the qualifications and questions that should be asked of a candidate it is only right that a man should be excited about the position and want to come.

### The call of God

Ideally a prospective pastor should feel the call of God to the church. He should feel that it is not just the church but the Lord who desires him to be there. That, of course, is very much in God's own hands. But it is so helpful when a man (and his wife) can feel that it is not just their own inklings or the church's agreement which have brought them to a place but that God himself is in this. A church can't manipulate such things. But the members can pray for God's clear guidance for the man.

It is a sense of God's call which is likely to result in a fruitful long-term ministry in a church. If God himself is truly with the new pastor, often good fruit will result. Again, if a man and his wife feel that God has put them there, then they will not pull out easily when troubles come (as they inevitably will in a fallen world where the devil does his worst). With a sense of the Lord's call comes a resilience and gentle patience in pursuing ministry – which is surely what a church needs. So, pray very much for the man.

### 'I want to pastor that church'

But there are a number of things the church and its leaders can do to make a church attractive to a prospective pastor. Here are a few examples.

- They can offer a good salary. This might call for some real and long-term financial sacrifice on the members' part. But in a sense, this can be seen as a fragrant offering to God. You are calling a pastor who will preach on the Lord's Day. The size of his salary is a measure of how much the church values God's word. To offer a pittance may well save the church money, but the spiritual implications which accompany that are not good<sup>7</sup>.
- The church can make itself attractive to a prospective pastor by being unified. No pastor relishes the thought of taking on a divided church where there are factions and church meetings are battlefields. If a church is truly of

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<sup>7</sup> There are Christian charities who can help churches in the matter of providing a good salary – for example The Particular Baptist Fund. These resources are worth exploring.

one mind and heart, there will be a sense of love in the congregation, 1 John 4.12, which is palpable and which the man preaching with a view can sense during his visit. Work at being one. And, of course, a close to 100% call from all the church members to a man would not only indicate such unity but would also be a great confidence boost for the candidate. 'They all want me to come! I want to pastor that church.'

- A clear enthusiasm for Christ and the things of God in a church is what a preacher wants to see. He wants to open the Bible to people who are clearly hungry for the word of God and do not treat it with relative indifference. People taking notes in the sermon or nodding along in agreement through the message encourage the man in the pulpit. 'These people value God's word. I would not be wasting my time if I came and ministered in this place to these people.'
- A willingness to honestly consider change is also something that a prospective pastor wants to see. Preachers are meant to be agents of change – not least in bringing people to repentance and sanctification. A preacher needs to feel that his ministry will be listened to and make a difference. If, for example, there is a dominant family in the church which has been there for years and insist on things always being done their way, it is likely to put a man off. He will feel that, if he came to that church, he would face a constant battle. As a church looks to find a new pastor it may be the time for the elders to confront such a family and ask them to be supportive. They need to realise the church belongs to the Lord and not to them. The ground may need to be cleared in order to give a new man a sense that the church is willing to change.
- Another area to think about is housing. If you have a manse, what is the state of it? Would you like to live in it as it is? If not, something needs to be done. It is a lovely welcome to a new pastor if you have had the decorators in and they have done a good job. That is a great encouragement to a pastor and family. If you do not have a manse, be as considerate and helpful as you can in finding good accommodation. Perhaps there is someone in the church who could take this on as a project. Such things assure a new man that he and his family will be looked after.
- Be a child-friendly church. Go out of your way to really love the possible new pastors' children. If the children feel they are wanted and special to the

church, again it will help the whole family to feel supported. Maybe help with finding good schools would be appropriate here.

- Be a serving church. A new pastor is not meant to be a magic bullet for all the gaps in the church. A church which is prepared to be involved in serving will not have unrealistic expectations of the pastor or his wife. They will not think that they can pull back and relax and leave it all to them. This will make the couple feel that if they come they will be joining a good team.

What is really being said here is that in looking for a pastor it should lead a church to first look at itself and ask, 'Are we the kind of church that a good man and his family would want to come to? Are we being the Christians we ought to be?' It opens up a new dimension to lesson 1 which we mentioned earlier on in the booklet, finding a new pastor requires 'lots of love'.





