

Searching for the Right Pastor

Looking for the right pastor or ministry leader can be a difficult process for many churches. The key to any search is prayer and listening for the direction of the Holy Spirit. A fellowship should strive to come together in the spirit of oneness and elect leaders that are qualified, full of the Spirit and called by God.

While searching for a pastor should not be done in the same way that a Fortune 500 company would look for a CEO, we can learn important things about any potential candidate based on their answers to questions. As a journalist, I love to ask questions that get right to the heart of the matter. Jesus did the same thing in many encounters with people.

These are questions that I would ask a pastor applying for the top spot at a local church or other ministry. As with any conversation, it is more important to listen than to talk. These questions are only a guideline. The sons of God are led by the Spirit of God. You should divert your questions in whatever way seems right to you based on the leading of the Holy Spirit.

These questions assume that you have already reviewed a doctrinal/belief statement from the candidate and find yourself in basic agreement. Below each question, I explain why I choose the questions and what you might want to look for based on my many conversations with Christian leaders from various ministries and churches.

QUESTIONS

What do you believe is the primary responsibility of a pastor in a local church body? How best would you go about fulfilling those duties at this fellowship?

One's answer to this question shows you a lot about what they believe about the role of senior pastor. Also, I would note this answer and hold any pastor selected to his answer. Many pastors give the right answers come interview time, and do something else as the pressures of the office bear down on them. They focus more on politics and preaching than discipling, prayer and spiritual development.

Paint a word picture for us of your concept of God. What are the attributes or stories from the life of Christ that have meant the most to you? Please explain why you selected these?

Who Jesus is to the candidate will help you know how the person views God. And since our identity comes from God, this tells you a lot about the person being interviewed. I would look for "religious" answers and probe until you strike something with a personal connection to it.

Who are the people that have influenced your spiritual journey the most?

We all have influences even if we won't admit it. Our influences shape our world view and experiences. Knowing where the candidate gets his training will help you understand a bit of how he thinks.

Who is actively discipling you now and how would you stay connected with people to hold you accountable if you became our senior pastor?

We cannot be good fathers without first having been sons. If the candidate does not have men who have lead him, how can he lead? I would be particularly suspicious of any candidate without anyone actively discipling him over the last year or so. This even holds true for a senior pastor with years of experience.

What is the biblical model for authority and church governance that you follow? How should a fellowship make controversial decisions and what should be done in the event of a conflict?

This gets at the heart of his theory on who should lead and how much control the pastor has. Many pastors are control freaks. Thus, this is a key for any senior leader to answer.

Since Jesus called us to make disciples, what do you view are your special gifts to fulfill that mission in this local body?

Making disciples and raising up leaders is one of the key responsibilities for any senior pastor. His skills and abilities in this area are critical. Most people focus first on a candidate's preaching. I would focus more on his ability to inspire and disciple people.

What specifically has the Holy Spirit told you about this job and/or local fellowship?

If the candidate looks at you with a blank stare to this question, run. God should be speaking to the person about the call to be a head pastor and impressing him with at least some vision for the future. While we don't always hear perfectly from God, we should at least have faith that we are walking in the steps that God has ordained for us.

What are your greatest concerns about coming here?

The candidate will likely try to side step this question to keep from offending anyone. Tell the person he can be candid because you will ask him to write down his answer and put it in a sealed envelope that will only be opened if he gets the job. But then you will work with him to help deal with his concerns as the Lord allows.

What are your expectations from the congregation?

If the guy answers too softly on this question, the guy is probably not the right match. A man with too few expectations will preach milk toast sermons and inspire minimal adherence to true discipleship.

What is your attitude toward spiritual gifts in the church?

I would give the candidate some scenarios and see how he would respond. This will tell you a lot about how free the pastor would be in letting the Spirit move in a service. It also will tell you if he would have the gall to stand up to counterfeit spirits.

What is the last thing that you regret having said?

A man without regrets is not being honest or else he does not see his faults. Look for anyone who acts too pious on this question. A broken heart God will not deny. You want a leader who will admit when he was wrong and take steps to correct sins and errors.

What has been your greatest mistake as a leader in the past?

Except Jesus, we have all made mistakes. His failures in the past will help you know areas that you would need to help him with if you hire him.

What has been your greatest disappointment as a Christian?

Look for signs of woundedness here. Seek to pray with the man and help restore him and encourage him. Also, note his answer for “baggage” that he might bring with him to the job. Even after “giving things over to God”, we frequently pick back up old baggage and carry it with us when we go to a new place.

What are your best characteristics and personal skills?

Every person has talents. Every church has needs. You should see if his talents fit where you have need. This would not be the most important criteria because God will supply the talent if He has called a man to a position of leadership. I look at Moses, Peter and David as examples of this truth.

Why have you left other churches in the past?

Why he left may let you know why he would leave again. A candidate's church history is a must to know. If they won't tell you about it, I would not offer a candidate the job without firm confirmation from God otherwise.

What typical responsibilities of a head pastor position would you rather delegate to someone else?

If he doesn't want to delegate anything, he probably thinks too highly of his abilities and does not understand his weaknesses. A good leader knows the area where he needs help and seeks it out. This will also let you know areas where other leaders would need to help to assist the leader in being the best pastor that he can be.

When was the last time that you did something that required you to step out completely on faith?

A man who does nothing on faith alone has done nothing that requires God to act. The thing that amazed Jesus was the men who had great faith. We cannot please God without faith. Neither can our leaders. A church will only go so far if it relies on man's ability. We will never complete God's will without God's help and intervention. Faith is the critical element that will help the pastor do the God thing when the "good thing" seems like the most sure thing.