



Church Health Profile

Pastoral Leadership Feature Article

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The healthy church is led by a pastor who demonstrates the calling, character and competence to help this church achieve its God-given purpose and shared vision.

If a church is to be healthy it is critical that there be a good understanding of the position and role of its pastor and that pastor and people be united in their motivation to fulfill God's mandate for their church. A variety of factors may play into how your church views the function of its pastor, but there are underlying principles that apply to all churches and pastors who seek to maximize their potential.

God has a Mission for the Church

The church is God's idea. It is of divine origin, not human. God created the church to be His agent, accomplishing His redemptive purpose in the world as the body of Christ. God's purpose for the church is directly linked to the purpose He had for His Son, Jesus. "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3: 10-11). The church would not be the church without people, but people do not determine the mission of the church, God does.

Healthy churches have a keen understanding of God's mission for the church, and most importantly, God's mission for their local church. The Apostle Paul wrote: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). The church acts on behalf of Christ, as God's agent in the world, to reconcile the world to God.

The church has viewed the fulfillment of its biblical mandate as including five major functions: worship, fellowship, edification, evangelism and service. As the church carries out these functions, it is acting redemptively in the lives of people and in the culture of its age.

God has a *purpose* for the church—to take the gospel into its world so that through its message of salvation people might be reconciled to Him. God has a *plan* for the church—to engage individuals in Kingdom activity through evangelism, discipleship,

fellowship, worship and service. God's purpose and plan involves *pastors* who serve as Christ's under-shepherds (1 Peter 5:1-4) who will give care and leadership to the church.

God Calls Persons to Lead the Church in Fulfilling Its Mission

God is sovereign and can build His church in any way He chooses. Scripture and experience demonstrate that God has chosen to build His church through people who have the capacity to speak in His behalf, share His purpose and vision, inspire others to follow that vision, and equip others for Kingdom ministry. God's purpose for the church includes a plan for its leadership. Each person who is a part of the family of God has a role to play and a responsibility to fill in making the church effective in its ministry. All believers are to minister to others and be agents of reconciliation in the world (Ephesians 4:11-16).

However, God calls some to vocational specialized ministry that is equipping in nature—pastors of local congregations. Pastors are called by God to be the spiritual leaders of the church. They are also to lead the church through empowering and deploying the lay ministers.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament chronicles God's search for and calling of persons who would fill leadership roles ("I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land"—Ezekiel 22:30). God's call to Moses (Exodus 3, 4) and to Gideon (Judges 6) provide examples of how He works to bring people into places of leadership, despite their backgrounds and shortcomings.

The calling of the Apostle Paul (Acts 9) was a hinge-point in his life, forever changing who he was and how he would spend his life. With conviction he testified of God's call—

- "And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher" (2 Tim. 1:11).
- "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1)
- "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (1 Cor. 1:1).
- "I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness" (Col. 1:25)

In a culture preoccupied with careers that will provide personal position, possession and power, the idea of being "called" to a servant oriented vocation may be foreign. Most individuals choose what they want to do to earn a living. The Bible teaches us that while all Christians are called to be God's servants and to use their vocations to minister to others, God calls some to equipping ministries in behalf of the church. People do not choose to become pastors, missionaries or some other form of specialized ministry as a career path. They are called by the Lord. God asks the church to respect those He has called to give leadership (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13) and to care for their temporal needs so they may freely give themselves to ministry (Luke 10:7; 1 Corinthians 9).

God calls many different kinds of people to commit themselves to vocations of specialized Christian service, and He calls them in many different ways. Some people are called through dramatic means, but most people experience their call as a growing

conviction, or compulsion, that grows out of their sincere commitment to know and do the will of God in their lives. Often this takes place at youth camp, camp meeting, missionary convention or revival meeting—times of sincere searching and openness to the voice of God. There is no one way that God calls people into Christian ministry.

Whatever the means, it is important that pastors be confident in their conviction that God has called them. The One who calls is capable of speaking clearly and of confirming unmistakably. Historically, the call of God to vocational ministry has been subjected to five confirming tests by the church:

- The test of “grace.” Have you been saved and entirely sanctified? Do you live a holy life? Is the fruit of the Spirit evident in your life?
- The test of “gifts.” Do you have a reasonable amount of ability to understand, reason, communicate, and provide loving care and leadership to God’s people?
- The test of “fruit.” Are people being helped by your Christian influence? Are you open about your faith? Have you brought anyone closer to the Lord by your witness?
- The test of “an abiding sense of a divine call.” Do you have an inner awareness of God’s leading? Is this awareness dependent upon a highly charged environment to stay alive or is it an unshakable part of your daily life? Are you ready to pay the price to give yourself wholly to the demands of preparation and service which are a part of this call?
- The test of “open doors”. Does the Lord open doors of opportunity for you to use your talents and test your gifts? The Enemy will fight against you, but the Lord will also use open doors of opportunity to validate your call.

God calls people from within the body of Christ to minister to that body and to assist it in reaching others and assimilating them into its fellowship. It seems logical then that He would use the body of Christ to recognize and nurture those who are called to vocations of specialized ministry. God calls. The ones called respond in obedience. And the church confirms, endorses, enables and deploys. Those who are called to minister to the church are always submissive to the collective wisdom of the church.

God Prepares Those He Calls

Effective pastoral leadership requires adequate preparation. This means that those who are called must cooperate fully with the Holy Spirit who is working within them so they are thoroughly prepared in heart, head and hand (spirit, mind and skill). They want to be right, think right, believe right, and do things right. Preparation for ministry combines the work of God and the work of those called as they learn, develop, apply and discipline themselves. As Paul instructed Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Pastoral ministry is sometimes difficult and demanding. The work itself may be demanding, but add to it the expectations of people of a congregation, the downstream current of culture, the depleting effect of spiritual warfare, and the limitations of a pastor’s humanity. It takes great courage and stamina to be a pastor. It takes a person who is ready to preach the truth when the truth is not popular—to give time to the insignificant—to be patient with the slow—to give leadership to those who want to move ahead (and to those who prefer staying where they are).

Pastors must be willing to be on call twenty-four hours a day and yet have time for self, family and friends. They must endure criticism and praise, not letting either one destroy a healthy sense of self-worth. They must seek to achieve great things for God and still keep personal ambition sanctified.

Pastors must be adequately prepared if they are to effectively manage themselves and provide leadership to the church. They cannot be persons who are given to try to find the easiest way to achieve “success” nor can they settle easily for mediocrity. Effective pastors are committed to the study of the *Word* of God and the *world* of God, so that the Word can be understood by the world.

Effective ministry requires the development of both natural and spiritual gifts. Each person is granted a certain level of natural ability that should be developed and refined for use by the Lord. Beyond that, God provides spiritual gifts that will enhance a person’s ability to minister effectively. These gifts should be discovered and put to use as motivating forces in a person’s service to the church. Gifts that are neglected or abused may be diminished and lost.

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers (1 Timothy 4 12-16).

Pastors cannot be effective in their ministry if they rely on natural ability alone. They must rely on their spiritual giftedness and on the anointing, empowering work of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:28).

The spiritual character of a pastor-leader is supported by abilities, skills and spiritual gifts. Those who are called understand the need to be the best they can be. Responding positively to the vocational call of God to ministry implies willingness to prepare for that ministry and the preparation is ongoing.

Cultures change. Knowledge increases. Technology expands. Expectations of congregations grow. Opportunities become available. Unless pastors are committed to a lifetime of growth as persons and professionals, they will find they are prepared to minister in a world that no longer exists. Local churches need to support their pastor’s need for continuing growth by granting sufficient time for his/her involvement in learning activities and by providing budgetary support for that involvement.

God Chooses Person of Spiritual Character to be Leaders of His Church

Pastors are to be spiritual leaders of the church. That does not necessarily mean they are more “holy” than anyone else, but it does mean that spirituality is a primary characteristic. God places high value on the moral, ethical and spiritual character of church leaders. Competency is important, but character is of greater importance.

Effective pastors are more concerned about being servants than being served; more concerned about helping others find abundant life than about making an abundant living; more interested in being holy and humble than in being pampered and promoted. While being competent is important, and being charismatic is often desired by our culture, being a person of spiritual character is of highest importance.

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well (1 Timothy 3:1-12).

A person's spiritual character is the result of participating in the "means of grace" and cultivating spiritual disciplines. Prayer, fasting, Bible reading, meditation, solitude, worship (personal and public), communion, Christian fellowship, and personal accountability all contribute to the development of pastors, as well as lay persons. Sermon preparation and sermon delivery alone will not provide the kind of spiritual nurture needed to develop godly character in a pastor. Pastors must be conscientious in their work habits, but churches also need to understand that not all of what a pastor needs to do can be neatly placed on a time card.

The power of the gospel and the validity of the preacher's message is diminished when the character of the messenger is questioned. Pastors must be models of the message they preach and examples of how God wants believers to live.

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:2-3).

An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it (Titus 1:6-9).

It is mandated of all pastors that they live “so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (Titus 2:10). Healthy churches are led by pastors whose lives give support to their messages and attract people to the teachings of Christ rather than detract from those teachings.

God Provides a Vision for His Church to the Leaders of His Church

The vision of a church must be God-given, Spirit-led and Christ-exalting. Catching that vision begins with a hunger to know God and to partner with Him in what He wants to do in you and in your church. God only shares His vision with those He trusts—those who have the character and capacity to lead His people in expanding the reach of His Kingdom.

Vision for a church usually comes through its pastor—the person anointed by God and appointed by the Church to give leadership to a particular local congregation. Whatever the origin, the vision must be shared between pastor and people if it is to transform the church. People will only follow a leader they know loves them; a leader they trust; and a leader they believe knows where God wants them to go and is willing to lead them there. David McKenna says: “A biblical leader has a God-given vision that engages our commitment, a Christ-like character that earns our trust, and a Spirit-guided agenda that mobilizes our energies.”

In his book, Visioneering, Andy Stanley writes, “Visions are born in the soul of a man or woman who is consumed with the tension between what is and what could be.” Healthy churches are led by pastors who have a hunger to see what God wants the local church to be and is consumed by the desire to help it fulfill that purpose. Such pastors have the capacity to see clearly and assess honestly where their churches are and they have an unquenchable passion to lead others to what could be. They have an appreciation for what has been, but a holy discontent with things as they are in light of what they could be. Without a vision for a more desirable future, both a people and a ministry perish.

Effective pastors must be able to communicate God’s vision for the church in ways that others can see and accept. Unless others can understand and accept a new future as being more desirable than what they presently experience, they will not follow. God’s vision must be a shared vision that becomes the passion of both pastor and people. Pastors must rely upon the power, motivation and timing of the Lord in the process of coming to a shared vision. Healthy churches result from pastor and people moving in the same direction according to the plan and purpose of God.

If the church is to have a vibrant future, it is critical that it has pastors who can lead the church into effective, vibrant ministry. They must be called by God; gifted and anointed by God; known to be people of character and integrity; believe they know where God wants their church to go; and have the capacity to motivate people of the church to help fulfill the God-given mission for their church. Moving forward requires change, which is difficult for some people. In healthy churches, pastors lead change wisely and people support the process of change because it will help them fulfill their vision.