

Jim Martin
P.O. Box 291962
Dayton, Ohio 45429

May 2015 "Signs of a Good Pastor"

Dear Friends,

Like many of you, I was raised in church from the time I was an infant. My parents were not "church hoppers" in that we did not switch from attending one church to another. We stayed in the same church the whole time I was growing up. Additionally, our church did not have a lot of pastoral turnover. In fact, we only had three pastors the entire time I attended that church.

When Kathy and I got married, the church we attended never had turnover in the pastor. After attending that church, the Lord led us to another where again, there was only one pastor the whole time we were there. From there, the Lord led me into pastoring.

Not all people have had the same stability in their church experience. Some people have switched churches many times. Other people have seen a new pastor come in to their church almost every two or three years. Quite frankly, I cannot see that such instability is conducive to being spiritually healthy for anyone.

It's my guess that the majority of Christians have sat under the leadership of at least two pastors in their life. This leads to what I believe is a unique question: What qualifies a pastor as being a "good" pastor?

I suspect that if you went to several different churches and asked the members for their definition of a good pastor you would receive a myriad of answers. Likewise, if members of a church were to tell you that their pastor is a good pastor, and you asked them what makes their pastor good, they would give you all kinds of reasons why they consider him good.

In conversations with other Christians I have noticed that many of them define a good pastor according to what they want in a pastor. Then, if the pastor does not meet their definition, he is not a good pastor. I can honestly tell you that I cannot ever remember a Christian sharing with me what scripture defines as a good pastor; their definition is instead based on personal opinion.

One proof that many Christians really don't know the biblical indicators of a good pastor is when they tell new converts something like, "Now that you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, you need to start attending a church that teaches the Bible." What kind of instruction is that? Wouldn't all churches that preach Jesus as the only way to salvation claim that they teach the Bible?

I'm going to share from scripture some key requirements for those serving in the ministry office of pastor (by no means will this be a complete list). It is very possible that some reading this may feel challenged if they have been raised to believe differently. But the truth is, all Christians need a pastor who meets God's requirements, not the expectations of a society, a denomination, a church council or a congregation.

The Authority Over the Pastor

In the Old Testament, the word pastor originates from the Hebrew word רֹאשׁ אֶהֱרָא and it means a herdsman or shepherd; one who tends to flocks. In the New Testament, the word pastor comes from the Greek word ποιμήν which means, a shepherd. In 1 Peter 5:4 Jesus is referred to as the "Chief Shepherd" (archipoimen) which indicates that pastors are under-shepherds to Jesus. In this respect, a pastor is answerable first and foremost to Jesus.

Sadly, there are too many pastors who are forced to answer to elders or a church council. In some cases, it doesn't matter what the Lord would want the pastor to preach, he must first get approval from those who sit in authority over him. This kind of arrangement cannot be supported in any way by scripture.

It is true that scripture declares there is safety in a multitude of counselors. But surrounding oneself with those who offer godly counsel is vastly different from being required to submit to the control of a group of people who may or may not be able to hear God.

The Source of the Sermons

Ephesians 2:19-20 explains that Christians grow and mature through the foundation (teaching) of the Apostles and Prophets, and that Jesus is the cornerstone (source) of what the Apostles and Prophets have taught. Furthermore, Jesus said in John 14:26 and 16:13 that the Holy Spirit would teach us all things and guide us into all truth, speaking only what He hears. Therefore, Jesus is the source for all the doctrine Christians are to be taught. He let the Holy Spirit know what was to be shared with the Apostles and Prophets. The Apostles and Prophets then gave that teaching to us in what we now have as the Bible.

A good pastor will *only* teach what has been revealed in scripture. He will not take scripture out of context, but leave it in order, line upon line and precept upon precept. He will not attempt to redefine the meaning of scripture relative to currently accepted social standards. God does not change and neither does His Word.

Feed the Flock

There are many pastors who are very good at delivering highly energized sermons that rattle the rooftop with enthusiasm. Those kinds of sermons definitely have their place. But a pastor is supposed to feed the flock, or, be an in-depth teacher of God's Word. God said in Jeremiah 23:1-4 that His intention is for pastors to feed the people they oversee. The only way this can be done is if the pastor also has the calling of teacher. In fact, *all* pastors are supposed to have a dual calling of pastor and teacher.

If a pastor's sermons frequently center on salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, then that pastor is probably called to be an evangelist. Let's be honest: most churches that believe in Jesus have very few lost people as members. This means that almost 100% of those who attend each week are already born again. Therefore, why would I, as a Christian, need to hear sermon after sermon explaining that I need to be saved? What I

need is someone to feed me first the milk, then the meat of scripture so that I can continually grow and mature as a Believer.

Who to Serve

In Galatians 1:10 the Apostle Paul wrote, "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, then I should not be the servant of Christ." Contrary to what many Christians seem to believe, a pastor is not called to serve people; he is called to serve God. It is out of his service to God that he will know how to minister to and serve the flock he oversees.

I've heard that when it comes to the pastor, some congregations and church councils have the attitude, "We hired him, and we can fire him!" They may indeed have hired him, but his ministry calling came from God, not the committee or congregation.

Some Christians also believe that the pastor should be involved with every area of responsibility in the church (cleaning, cutting grass, planning events, etc.). However, the Apostles properly corrected that thinking in Acts 6:1-4,

¹And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. ²Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. ³Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. ⁴But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word

A pastor's top priority is his spiritual walk with God. In fulfilling his calling of pastor, he must give himself to prayer and the ministry of the Word of God. This does not in any way imply neglecting family or people in the church; it is about having priorities in order.

A pastor's responsibility does not include trying to keep church members happy. Rather, he is to deliver the Word of God without compromise, even if some people don't like it.

Church Growth

During a time of prayer some years back I told the Lord I wanted to see our church grow. He responded with a question: "Why? Why do you want to see your church grow?" It caused me to stop and rethink my reasons for wanting to see our church grow. As time went on, He explained to me that it is not a pastor's responsibility to make a church grow. This is in stark contrast to what many church members think. Often times, before a person is "hired" to be a church's pastor, people in the church want to know what he is going to do to make the church to grow.

Many churches want their pastor to attend such things as "church growth seminars" to find out what can be done to bring in more people. However, the greatest church growth seminar a pastor could attend is on his knees before God, seeking His plan for the church. The Lord told me, "You are not called to build a church. You are called to build My Kingdom and to teach those who will receive it." Good instructions for all pastors.

Along with this, it is not a pastor's responsibility to chase after every person who gets offended and leaves the church. In Luke 19:10, Jesus said He came to seek and save the lost. But then, in John chapter six, Jesus preached a sermon that offended many people. Instead of those people approaching Him and asking for greater clarification, they simply got upset and left. John 6:66 says that they "walked no more with Him." Not only did Jesus not chase after them to try and get them to come back, He turned to the 12 Apostles and asked, "Will ye also go away?"

I am telling you, one of the greatest traps Satan has laid for any pastor is that of convincing him to go after every person who leaves the church and try to get them to return. Like it or not, some Christians are more like stubborn billy goats than they are gentle lambs and sheep. Yes, there may be times when it is the right thing for a pastor to contact someone who has left. But even if a pastor runs after a John 6:66 "departed disciple," unless that person has dealt with the offense he has allowed to enter his heart, his return to the church will be short-lived, his attitude will be like a virus infecting other people, or both.

So many Christians have misunderstood and misapplied the parable about the ninety and nine (Luke 15:4-7), while missing the principle revealed in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32).

Faithfulness and Stability

Far too many pastors approach the church they are shepherding like it is a secular job. There have actually been pastors who traded churches because they became bored where they were. Other pastors see their present church as training ground for a bigger church. Then there are pastors who leave their present church because a larger church has offered them better pay and benefits. Oh, and yes, these moves are usually always qualified with something like, "The Lord led me..."

There is one reason and one reason alone that a pastor can justify leaving a church: The Lord has truly told him to go elsewhere. Do you honestly believe that the Apostle Paul left a church for any of the reasons mentioned above? Church growth, church location, the size of a congregation and financial compensation should never be the deciding factors for a pastor to accept or leave a pastorate.

If God has truly led a pastor to a particular church, then he must stay there no matter what until God leads him elsewhere. A congregation needs consistency and stability in leadership. Small churches are just as important to God as large churches, and the members of a small church are just as critical to His Kingdom plan as are the members of a mega-church. It is congregational abuse when a pastor leaves a church because he thinks the grass is greener on the other side.

The Holy Spirit is to be the "cloud by day and fire by night" to a pastor. Just like the children of Israel stayed in a place until the cloud and fire moved, a pastor must stay where he is until the Lord says it's time to move. In Philippians 4:11, the Apostle Paul shared that he had learned to be content no matter what his situation. Every pastor needs to learn the same. This kind of contentment is not based on natural circumstances

or placated emotions. It comes from intimate fellowship with Jesus and in capturing His heart for the church where a pastor is serving God.

What I have shared in this letter is but a sample of the standards God has established for all pastors. The position of pastor is a ministry calling that originates with God, not from the desires of an individual. Attending a seminary may provide information, but it cannot produce spiritual equipping. Moreover, graduating from a seminary, Bible college or Christian university does *not* mean the individual is called to be a pastor. To paraphrase from Jesus' words in Matthew 6:33, seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and the knowledge you need to discover your ministry calling will be added unto you.

If more Christians demanded that their pastor adhere to the standards in God's Word, it is possible we would have far fewer churches than now exist; but the churches that remain would be shepherded by those who are after God's own heart.

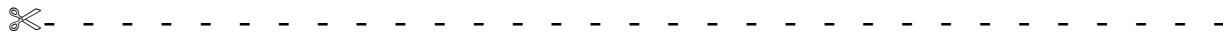
You are the delight of God's heart and He only wants the best for you.

In His Grace,

Jim

SPECIAL MP3 CD OFFER

My letter this month flows perfectly with a series I taught titled "The 23rd Psalm Shepherd." The series came about when one day in prayer the Lord told me to read the 23rd Psalm. However, He said to read it not as though it is speaking prophetically of Jesus, but as though it is explaining responsibilities of pastors. This 16-part series will be very eye-opening for many Christians. I truly believe that all Believers - and especially pastors - need to hear this series.



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JIM MARTIN MINISTRIES
P.O. Box 291962 • Dayton, Ohio 45429 • USA
www.jmmgrace.com • PastorJimGCC@gmail.com