

## FINDING THE RIGHT PASTOR FOR YOUR CHURCH: IDEAS FOR SEARCH COMMITTEES

by Bill Bruster

You have just been asked to do the impossible – find a pastor whom everyone in your church will believe is God’s greatest gift to your congregation. The people who will like your new pastor will give him all the credit, and the people who don’t will give you all the blame. Good luck.

Your task has been complicated by the turmoil in Baptist life. Everyone in your congregation is pressuring you to find a preacher who is “my kind of Baptist.” Many outside your church will be pressuring you to call their good friend who is “my kind of Baptist.”

I was invited to meet with the pulpit committee of a church in a small town in Central Texas. I noticed that their Sunday School attendance the previous Sunday was 98. The committee chair showed me letters from two out-of-state seminary presidents who had prayed, and God told each of them to recommend a recent graduate from their school. The chair also told me of a phone call from a prominent Texas pastor who had prayed and God had told him that a new graduate of his school was “God’s Man” for their church. The chair of the committee knew that God had not wanted three different people for their church.

I know of one prominent Southern Baptist pastor who makes a video tape of himself recommending “God’s Man” to pastorless churches and sends the video to pulpit committee chairpersons. At least he is taking advantage of modern technology. Every church of every size is being targeted and pressured to call “my kind of Baptist.”

Forces within and powers without will be bearing down on you and your committee as you go about your work of trying to find the one whom God wants to lead your church. It is not the purpose of this writing to recommend anyone to you, but to give you a tool that will help you find the person you believe God wants to lead your church.

**Begin by focusing on the needs of your church.** What strengths should the new pastor bring to your congregation? A worthwhile procedure is to review your former pastor’s strengths and weaknesses. A pastor’s work is basically divided into four areas, delineated in the following chart:

1. Teacher/Equipper	2. Proclaimer/Evangelist
3. Administrator/Organizer	4. Shepherd/Caregiver

Now rate your former pastor’s strengths.

Which area represents his/her strengths?

In which quadrant was he/she weakest?

Have each committee member rate your former pastor 1 through 4, with 1 representing his/her greatest area of strength and 4 his/her least strength. Then discuss why each one of you rated your former pastor as you did until there is a general consensus about your former pastor’s

greatest and least strengths. Every pastor has his/her strengths and weaknesses. God does not create all pastors equal or any pastor with equal strengths.

Once you have reached agreement, list your former pastor's strengths and weaknesses on the board in a column. In an adjacent column, write the strengths most important to your church in a new pastor. Your chart might look something like this:

Former Pastor	New Pastor
1. Administrator/Organizer	1. Shepherd/Caregiver
2. Proclaimer/Evangelist	2. Teacher/Equipper
3. Teacher/Equipper	3. Proclaimer/Evangelist
4. Shepherd/Caregiver	4. Administrator/Organizer

The second column is very important. It will help you focus on the strengths for which you are looking in a new pastor.

**A second consideration in finding a pastor is the issue of leadership style.** What kind of leadership style is most effective in your church? In his book, *Ministers as Leaders*, Bob Dale describes four leadership styles: the catalyst, the commander, the encourager, and the hermit. Bob describes the catalyst as a strong leader who gets results by involving people. A commander rules by fear, emphasizing goals more than relationships. The encourager stresses relationships more than goals. The hermit leads by withdrawing. Other writers have listed different categories of leaders.

For the sake of simplicity, let's examine two broad categories of leaders – fundamentalist and moderate. Some moderate pastors lead like a fundamentalist, and some fundamentalists lead like a moderate. However, the best leaders are those whose leadership style grows out of their theology. If one's style is not consistent with his or her theology, trouble lies ahead. Realizing I am painting with a broad brush, let's look at the general characteristics of a fundamentalist leader and those of a moderate leader:

Fundamentalist Leader	Moderate Leader
Dictatorial	Democratic
Ruler of the church	Servant leader
Rigid	Flexible
Intolerant of diversity	Encourages diversity
Focused on the past	Focused on the future
Takes Scripture literally	Interprets Scripture
Controlling	Sharing

You might not agree with my list, so make your own. Get your committee to add to or subtract from my list. After you have made your lists, decide on the kind of pastor you want – a fundamentalist or a moderate. Put this chart on a chalkboard:

Fundamentalist	Fence-Sitter	Moderate
(Characteristics of the fundamentalist leader)	(Characteristics of the leader who has not decided who he/she is)	(Characteristics of the moderate leader)

You will discover how difficult it is to list the characteristics of someone in the middle – someone who has not declared whether he/she is a fundamentalist or a moderate. Your church is autonomous. You have the right and the responsibility to call a person who is right for your congregation. You might need a fundamentalist-style leader or a moderate-style leader. That is for you to decide.

The big temptation for a pulpit committee is to get an “unknown” – someone from the center circle – a person who has not decided what kind of leader he/she is. If you get an “unknown,” you may get a person your church needs, or you may not; you probably won’t know for several years. How can a person lead your church if he/she has not decided who he/she is or chosen the leadership style that is most effective for him/her and more consistent with his/her gifts and theology?

Decide what kind of leader you are looking for, and go after someone who fits your profile. Be careful about going after someone who will say anything you want to hear in order to convince you that he/she fits your profile.

**A third major issue with which your committee will need to deal is the raw ability found in a true leader.** We have just talked about leadership style but, if a person does not possess the raw ability to lead, the style will be irrelevant. We have talked about the four quadrants of work in which a pastor does his/her job. But even more important are the abilities a pastor brings to the task of leading your church. To accomplish the work required by the pastorate, a person must bring personal relations skills, character, leadership abilities, and technical skills (preaching, witnessing, teaching, counseling, etc.). List these four on a board, and have your committee rate the skills that they think are the most important. Many people will rate them in this order:

1. Technical skills
2. Relational skills
3. Leadership abilities
4. Character

I rate them in *this* order:

1. Character
2. Leadership abilities
3. Relational skills
4. Technical skills

Let me explain my rationale. If a pastor does not have character, it does not matter what other skills may be present. If your pastor has no character, no one will follow, relate to, or listen to this person. Character is the most important asset a pastor brings to your congregation. Most committees don't deal with the character issue, because it is so difficult to determine another person's character. Make sure you do a credit check. Call people who are *not* on the candidate's list of references, and ask character questions.

Leadership is 90% of what a pastor does. It will be difficult for your pastor if he/she cannot lead. Without a leader, your church will make little progress. If your pastor doesn't lead, someone else will. A leader is one who knows what to do next, knows why that is important, and knows how to gather the resources to do it. Make sure your candidate is a leader.

Relational skills are important. If your pastor has character, is a good leader, and possesses great technical skills, but alienates everyone, what have you gained? Are you comfortable with the candidate? Is he/she easy to talk to? Does the person have a history of good relationships? Who are their best friends, and how long have they been friends? Relational skills are important.

I don't want to diminish the importance of technical skills, but many of the technical skills are learned skills. All skills are, to an extent, a gift from God, but all of our gifts can be improved. And no matter what our gifts, if we don't have character, can't lead, and can't relate, our technical skills are of little value.

Let me suggest that your committee use these "raw materials" as a way of measuring pastoral candidates. If you get "hung up" or find your committee divided between two candidates, you might want to rate each on a 1-to-10 scale, according to the raw materials they bring to your church. The candidate who "scores" the highest might be the one you pursue further.

Serving on a pulpit committee is a new experience for most people. You may feel overwhelmed and underqualified at the beginning, and that is all right. Yours is an awesome responsibility but also a wonderful privilege. Your church is praying for you. God is wanting to lead you. I pray that this tool will be one of His instruments in helping your committee find the right pastor for God's church.