

How to Choose a Church: Part 3
Caring Leaders to Follow
1 Timothy 4:6-16

Introduction: *How do we choose a church?* We've all heard the stories: a scandal in another church, a pastor caught in adultery or pilfering money, or a power struggle that ends in the splitting or closing of a church. Perhaps some of us have experienced these things and it has left an indelible mark on how you view churches, pastors, and leadership. I was a young intern with high ideals and desires to enter into full time pastoral ministry when I felt the sting of utter disappointment. We had a youth pastor and elder who was well known on the West coast as a cool youth pastor who had taught, trained, and disciplined scores of young people over decades of ministry. He was THE GUY that the young guys wanted to be like, whose ministry others wanted to emulate, and who seemed to have it all together. Its why there was a little surprise when he declared he was leaving full time ministry for another job in the area, but it allowed everyone to thank him for all he did. Then, in a short time after that announcement, divorced his wife of over 20 years and married a former student who was just out of college (and only a few years older than his son). It was devastating, to the church, students, and me personally. Students left the church and abandoned commitments they had made even months earlier on a mission trip. We interns wondered how something like this could happen, and IF IT COULD, what did that mean about us moving forward. It was the closest I've come to questioning the call of full-time ministry, and shook me to my core.

Courtney Reissig captured what happens to us in an article *When Leaders Fail us:*

"Everyone is great until you get to know them," or so the saying goes. I don't remember the first time I was disappointed by an authority figure, but I've lived long enough to know it won't be the last. The we get to people, the more likely they are to disappoint at some level. The same is true with those who lead us. Whether it is **your husband, your pastor, your boss, or your parent**, the greater the proximity the greater the sin becomes (or at least is revealed to be). My family has a running saying: 'the best of men are men at best' --- meaning, even the ones we admire the most are really only men (or women), human beings with a propensity to commit grave sins, even sins against us. When I am confronted with this sin, my tendency is to retreat. You hurt me, I leave you. It's easier. It works for me. It allows me to distance myself from the pain, rather than face it head on. It frees me from having to forgive the person if I don't have to look him in the eye."¹

Over the last two weeks we have looked at some key areas of evaluation as we look at choosing a church, majoring on Biblical teaching/preaching, how a church is committed to and views truth, and how it magnifies and focuses on Jesus Christ, proclaiming a gospel of both faith and repentance, the beautiful outflow of God's grace in our lives. This morning we'll look at the all important area of **leadership in a church. As leaders go, so goes the _____**, church, home, etc. A church will only rise to the level of its leadership, and God has ordained that there would be stewards in every church in the form of pastors and elders. *Does a church have qualified and faithful leaders to follow* is a question I'd ask of any church. However, as we go through this list of what that would look like, we remember that every leader, shepherd, pastor, and elder is by nature *fallible*, that we all have One Faithful Chief Shepherd in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:4) to which we all follow. So though leaders are not perfect, they must be faithful, though they are sinners they must also model obedience and discipline. Paul spent much time

¹ thegospelcoalition.org/article/when-leaders-fail-us/ Courtney Reissig, September 15, 2014

explaining this to the leaders at Ephesus and to Timothy, we will look this morning at those all important areas of a healthy church.

Leaders that Lead by Example

If there was one word to sum up what characterizes a leader, it would simply be: **example**. Leaders are not talking heads or simply decision makers, they are those that live life **among** those they lead, showing the way forward. That is why a true, Biblical leader must lead in every area of his life, from the church, to his home, to his job to the world around. If Christ is the **Chief Shepherd**, then pastors/elders are **under shepherds**, tangible models of Christlikeness to follow. This type of example is seen in several areas of life:

Teaching (Acts 20:20)

You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, 19 serving the Lord with all **humility** and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I **did not shrink from declaring** to you anything that was **profitable**, and **teaching you** in public and from house to house

The primary tool of a pastor/elder/leader in a church is the ability to **teach**. When Paul spent 3 years in Ephesus, teaching was the instrument used most for instruction, admonition, care, and training. He did this in a formal setting (in the Hall of Tyrannus), corporately, but also *house to house*, meaning he would have taught individuals and families face to face. As we said a few weeks ago, a church's focus on truth will come through in its value of teaching it in all facets, and whether they believe that the **whole of Scripture is profitable**. This also means that the leaders of a church should be well versed in Scripture, must have an ability to both interpret and explain Scripture for the church. Though there are other responsibilities a leader will handle and oversee, a leader in the church that does not teach is like a car without an engine -- it might look like something on the outside but cannot fulfill its purpose.

Faith to Imitate (Hebrews 13:7)

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. **Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith**

If teaching is imperative to leadership, modeling a life that strives to live up to the that teaching is equally important. **Thomas Brooks** said that leading by example is the best and most powerful rhetoric, and "a preacher's life should be a commentary upon his doctrine." If teaching the truth taps the nail into the piece of wood, living out that truth helps drive that same nail deep, sinking Biblical truth down from the mind to the heart. If God's Word truly transforms (Rom. 12:1-2), those that study and teach should be constantly transformed in both thinking and life. Paul could confidently say "Imitate me as I am an imitator of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1) since his life was one of constantly and consistently one that sought to glorify God in all areas. The proof of leadership is always in the pudding. Leaders lives will ALWAYS be known if they are lived among the people they are serving, and a leader of a church should live a life that others would want to follow, and if they did follow, would become more and more like Jesus.

Humility (1 Peter 5:3-5)

not domineering over those in your charge, **but being examples to the flock**.⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. **Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another**, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble

Leadership and humility can seem to be antithetical, but that is only how the world sees it (Matt. 20:25-26). Humility may be the foundational quality that must be there for shepherd leaders in the church. Humility is a mindset that sees others as having a surpassing value greater than yourself. The goal of the humble leader is to see the people he is leading succeed, grow, and mature rather than view people as instruments to serve his needs or agenda. Its fascinating that Peter wrote these words under the inspiration of the Spirit since he was FAR from humility when his chest puffed and nose went up in declaring that ALL the other disciples would fail, but HE WOULD NEVER FALL AWAY (Matt. 26:33). Self reliance, self-dependency, and an over-inflated view of strength caused pride to flow. But through failure, Peter learned humility. He was brought low but did not stay low. In fact, humility did not mean he stopped being outspoken (see Acts 2 at Pentecost), but now saw his life through the lens of pleasing the Lord and serving others, and completely understood what Jesus taught when He stooped to wash the disciples feet. This illustration Jesus gave the night before He died became the definition of humility for Peter: ***to dress or clothe oneself with humility toward one another.*** Humility allows the leader to lead from the front without making it all about him, since he knows he is radically and completely dependant on God for any success or work.

Maturity to Emulate (1 Timothy 4:12)

Let no one despise you for your youth, but **set the believers an example** in *speech*, in *conduct*, in *love*, in *faith*, in *purity*

Finally, there are specific areas of maturity an elder/leader should display in his life. Note that it is NOT a matter of age, since age alone does not qualify. Timothy was relatively young, and often generations have a hard time following successive ones. So Timothy could not point to age or experience, but had to prove himself through time tested character. The life worthy of emulation is one of sobriety and serious of discipline and hard work. Notice also that this list of **5 areas of life** encapsulate and touch every part of life and encompasses every part. **Speech** is important since what comes out of a person's mouth reveals his heart (Matt. 12:34). Our speech should be gracious, seasoned with salt (Col. 4:6), answering each person with wisdom, thinking and listening before trying to fix the problem. Words should be used for thanksgiving and building up rather than tearing down, or crude joking (Eph. 5:4).

Conduct is the general course of life, which should display holiness (1 Pet. 1:15). He is a man of integrity and honesty, who will take pleasure in doing what is right because it is right, even if it costs him reputation or economically.

Love of God would be expected, and that love would manifest itself in the relentless of others. There is a willingness to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). The choice to act out of love rather than emotion or desire alone should be modeled, where we serve out of volition more than "feel like it".

Faith has to do with faithfulness, one that models consistency in all areas, and **purity** has to do with fidelity in marriage, in speech, in thought and deed.

Admittedly, this is a huge list and it should be. We can easily lower the bar, lower the standard, and throw our hands up and say "***who can actually do this? Paul could not possibly mean that there would be people who can live this way?!***" The reality is that the bar set for leaders IS and SHOULD BE high. But lets be honest as well, this is a list that EVERY believer should be maturing toward. Dads and moms what would happen to your parenting if you were a righteous example in each of these areas? Wouldn't your kids not only know what the standard was, but know that it was possible to attain? My kids are at an age that I am keenly aware that they are not only mirroring what I say (you should hear my youngest talk smack during our Marbles games!) but the attitudes and effort that I display. That is not only **sobering but IT IS EXACTLY THE WAY ITS SUPPOSED TO BE!** Our kids learn more by what is *caught than taught*, and that should be true in the church as well.

Principle #3 – Do leaders model a life worthy of following? As you get to know them more and more, as their lives are on display, are you able to respect and follow them? What is their reputation in town? As the leaders go, so goes the church.

Leaders that Lead by Loving Care (1 Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28)

There are metaphors and analogies that are used to describe leadership: *coaching, networker, one who inspires, strategist, etc.* Each of these carries worthy connotations to sum up what a leader is and does, but the one indelible metaphor the Bible gives is that of a **shepherd**. We may think that is such an ancient word that does not translate today, but it has spanned thousands of years, from the OT (see King David as a shepherd or the leaders of Israel as shepherds - Ezekiel 34), to the NT. It is an apt description, since a shepherd would lead the sheep from the front, would feed them, protect them, bring them back when they wandered, and live among them. This is why Paul charged the elders at the church of Ephesus:

"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for (literally "shepherd) the church of God, which He obtained with his own blood."
Acts 20:28

Physical Care

To shepherd the flock, it meant caring for physical needs, particularly those who could not take care of themselves. The main group of concern for the early church were widows, particularly those who would not get re-married or did not have family to take care of them. Paul spent a good chunk of 1 Timothy 5 dealing with parameters and procedures of caring for widows. There is an expectation that the church come along those who are in physical need. This is NOT the job of elders alone, since Acts 6 reminds us that the apostles appointed highly qualified people to help with the widows of the church so they could play their role, but it does mean that leadership should somehow **structure the church to care for its own.**

Spiritual Care

But it is not the body alone but the soul that an elder/leader is concerned with. In the church at Ephesus over a 3 year period, Paul not only spent time teaching, but also weeping for them as he admonished them. The goal of any church and pastor should be the **maturation of the members there**, helping each person become **mature in Christ** (Col. 1:28). Spiritual care is difficult since often the results are not immediately seen and the call is to believe by faith, not necessarily DO something. I've often said that I cannot make anyone DO anything, but can simply point them to the ONE that can change them, who loves them, and helps them. But this type of maturity comes at the cost of **warning, teaching, admonishing, encouraging, helping, and equipping**, and often this is not the most popular. It means that an elder leader must have clarity as to where the church is going and where individuals are going, calling them to trust Christ more.

Principle #4 – Do Leaders care for member's body and soul? Shepherding God's church is the ultimate stewardship, since we all know that every person who's a believer in a church has been purchased by the blood of Christ. The question of choosing a church should be one of leadership. Is there a clear structure of leadership? Is that structure Biblical? What are the qualifications of those leaders? Do they have a clear path of where they are taking the church?

Leaders that Lead by Mobilizing & Sending

Finally, when evaluating what church to commit to, we must remember the purpose of the church and how God has gifted the church to accomplish that purpose. The church has been given shepherds and teachers to **equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ** (Eph. 4:11-12). This means that the *church is always moving somewhere, always maturing, growing, and sending*. The one thing a church should never be is **stagnant**. Stagnancy would breed death. This has very little to do with **size** but everything to do with direction. Maturing believers will inevitably lead to evangelism, discipleship, and being sent out. Maturing believers should create more leaders, greater servants, and a dynamic of worship. Leaders in a church that **do not reproduce themselves with new leaders** are not healthy leaders. Leadership in a church should never be a bottleneck but rather a continuous cycle of faithfulness, investment, entrusting, and support. We see this clearly at the **church at Ephesus**:

Equipping to Send (Acts 19:9-10)

After speaking in synagogues for 3 months and being rejected for 3 months, Paul moved on:

*But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, **reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus**. This continued for **two years** so that **ALL the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks**.*

How did all the residents of Asia hear the word of the Lord? Did they all come to Paul's classes? Not at all, since it is clear that those who were trained went out from there to other cities (like those listed in Revelation 1-2). Leaders see the church not merely as a landing zone but a launching point where saints can be trained in God's Word through teaching and example to go wherever God calls them.

Entrusting to Perpetuate (2 Tim. 2:2)

*"and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses **entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also**"*

This is how healthy churches perpetuate. Leaders training leaders. Teachers (both men and women) training other teachers, giving opportunities to learn, fail, and grow along the way.

Principle #5 – Is there modeling & expectation to serve and make disciples? Is the church a place that you can get trained? Discipleship is difficult and structures alone won't do it. A Biblical church is one that has character qualified leaders who entrust leadership to others training, equipping, and sending.

Unfortunately we can cite far too many negative examples of leadership in our lives and church experience, but I will also conclude by saying I'm here today as a pastor, husband, and father because of the examples in my life, starting with my dad. I've been blessed with great examples and models, from Dan Smouse who walked us through the failure of our youth pastor, to Scott Vinson who walked me through college years, to men who walk along side me today. We want to be a part of churches that have qualified leaders and **WE WANT TO BE A CHURCH** who where qualified leaders are produced. A church will only go as far and wide as the leaders are able to go. This is why it is imperative to choose a church with caring, loving, qualified leaders.