

July 16, 2017

Church Planting  
*Pastoral Leadership*  
Acts 20:36-38

**Opening words:** Here is the Good News for today! The perfect pastor has been found. Here are his characteristics:

1. He can please everyone
2. He preaches exactly 20 minutes and then sits down.
3. He condemns sin, but never steps on anybody's toes.
4. He works from 8 in the morning to 10 at night, doing everything from preaching sermons to sweeping.
5. He makes \$400 per week, gives \$100 a week to the church, drives a late model car, buys lots of books, wears fine clothes, and has a nice family.
6. He always stands ready to contribute to every other good cause, too, and to help panhandlers who drop by the church on their way to somewhere.
7. He is 36 years old, and has been preaching 40 years.
8. He is tall on the short side, heavy-set in a thin sort of way, and handsome.
9. He has eyes of blue or brown (to fit the occasion), and wears his hair parted in the middle - left side, dark and straight; right side, brown and wavy.
10. He has a burning desire to work with the youth, and spends all his time with the senior citizens.
11. He smiles all the time while keeping a straight face, because he has a keen sense of humor that finds him seriously dedicated.
12. He makes 15 calls a day on church members, spends all his time evangelizing non-members, and is always found in his study if he is needed.

What qualities do you look for in a perfect pastor?

This is sermon number fifty in my sermon series, *Church Planting*. You remember my task. During the summer months, I am preaching through the Book of Acts. Why make a major time commitment to the Book of Acts? Because, Acts is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who created the church originally and it will be the Holy Spirit who must revive the church again. Our scripture reading for today is Acts 20:36-38. This week's message is called *Pastoral Leadership*.

**Acts 20:36-38** When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. <sup>37</sup> They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. <sup>38</sup> What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

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Pope Francis said, *"The people of God want pastors, not clergy acting like bureaucrats or government officials."* I agree with that quote. If you agree with that quote say, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves today at the very end of the twentieth chapter of Acts. Paul's time in Ephesus has come to an end. The great evangelist is on his way to Jerusalem. Prior to our reading, Acts 20:31, we learn that Paul had been with the Ephesians for three years. It wasn't just three years. It was three significant years. The bond between Paul and the Ephesians was strong. They had experienced so much together. When the day of Paul's exit arrived, emotions ran high. He knelt with his people and they prayed one last time. Verse 37 says it clearly. Everyone was crying and kisses were exchanged. What made the scene unbearable was the fact they would never be together again in this world. With one final act of devotion, the Ephesians accompany Paul to his ship and slowly he sails out of sight. This story illustrates for us that Paul was an excellent pastor. Throughout the history of the church, this scene is played out time and time again, every time a well-loved pastor leaves for a new chapter in his or her life. Have you ever had to say, "Good-bye" to a pastor you loved? It is a hard thing to do.

When I first moved to this area I was impressed by the number of long-term pastors, who spent their careers here. I think that fact is a testimony about this area and the people of this area. Gifted clergy wanted to stay here because this is a good place. The names of those long-term pastors are forged into this community's history. The pastors may be long gone, but their memories remain. The pastors may be long gone, but in the hearts of many, they are still the pastor of their church. If I give you the name of that church, you can name the well-loved pastor. Let me give you a few examples. Who do you think of when I say Christ United Presbyterian Church? Who do you think of when I say Boardman United Methodist Church? Who do you think of when I say Austintown Community Church? Who do you think of when I say Trinity United Methodist Church? Each one of these ministers was different, yet each one was the same. Each was an excellent pastor. That leads us to an interesting question. What qualities do you look for in a pastor?

In a survey, the people at Thom Rainer Ministries asked that question. They tell us people look for ten qualities in a pastor. This is their list:

1. **Love of Congregation** – Studies tell us many pastoral limitations are overlooked if the congregation feels loved.
2. **Effective Preaching** – People are hungry for Biblical truth.
3. **Strong Character** – There is no substitute for moral behavior.
4. **Good Work Ethic** – No church wants a lazy pastor.
5. **Casts a Vision** – People want to feel that their church can make a positive difference in their community.
6. **Demonstrates Healthy Leadership** - Churches want servant leadership, not a dictator.
7. **Joyous** – No church wants a pastor who brings their own dark cloud.

8. **Does not Yield to Critics** – Churches want a pastor with a backbone who supports that majority, not small groups or cliques.
9. **Transparent** – There should be no church secrets.
10. **Models Evangelism** – Churches want a pastor who is passionate about Jesus! Let me add, if you aren't passionate about Jesus, then get out of the ministry.

That list is impressive, but it can really be distilled to three qualities. Those were the qualities Paul possessed. No wonder the people grieved when he left them. Each one can be found in the previous reading, verses 13-35. It is these three things that I want to look at today. Each one is equally important. Each one is mandatory if you want to be an effective pastor. They are the qualities you want in a pastor. If you are ready to look at three qualities of an effective pastor, say, **"Amen!"** I am going to try to be very practical.

**First, pastors must live a holy lifestyle.** In other words, you must be living a life that is pleasing to God. We all know the truth. Society holds clergy to a higher standard than the average person. When the pastor fails to live a holy lifestyle, they bring disgrace not just on themselves, but they bring disgrace on the whole church. Have you ever known a pastor who failed to maintain a holy lifestyle?

It is one of those painful stories. In our own community, a pastor was found with pornography on his computer. Let me be more exact. A pastor was found with pornography on his office computer in the church building. I guess, he didn't want his wife to find out about his sexual addiction. This was the second time he was caught, so the church dismissed him quietly. However, it wasn't done in silence. If I heard about it, then others heard about it too. Not only did he ruin his career and damage his marriage, he damaged the reputation of his church. Those ugly stories can live in a community for a long time. Have you ever known a pastor who failed to maintain a holy lifestyle? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

**Second, pastors must care about their people.** I have said it countless times through the years, life is hard! Every day we play the part of Old Testament Job. Every day we hear about bad things happening to good people. The list of hardships never seems to end. Pastors cannot eliminate the hardships, but pastors can care for people during their hardships. That is vital. My father used to wonder why I ran up so much mileage on my car. I would say, "Dad, if I could get the sick and institutionalized to come to me, I wouldn't need a car at all". Have you ever known a pastor who didn't care when you were in need?

Several years ago, a newly retired friend called me. He is a minister and he was in an odd situation. He had preached his last sermon, so he was no longer responsible for his church's pastoral care. Yet, the new pastor hadn't arrived yet. In those vacant days, a man in the church was scheduled to have surgery. He asked me if he should go and pray with the man before the operation. I encouraged him to go. Later, I saw him and

asked him if he went. He said he did. He said, when the patient saw him walk in his room, the man simply said, "Thank you. I knew you would be here for me". He said that was the greatest compliment he had ever received. Pastoral care is never exciting, but it is indispensable. Real pastors know the power of kindness. Have you ever had a pastor who didn't seem to care when you were in need? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

**Third, pastors prepare their people for eternity.** Pastors care for people while they are in this world, but they also prepare people for eternity. This is the truth. One hundred years from now each one of us will be dead. The hardships of this world will be nothing more than a memory. One hundred years from now we are going to be in heaven. Are you sure you are going to heaven when you die? If you question the fact you are going to heaven, then your pastor has failed. You may have heard me say this in the past. We are saved by grace and by grace alone. Jesus is your only hope of salvation. Have you ever had a pastor who didn't try to prepare you for eternity?

One of the finest preachers I have ever heard was Tyrone Gordon. At the time, he was the Senior Pastor of the St. Luke "Community" United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas. When he graduated from seminary, he was assigned a church in Kansas. He admitted he was impressed with his education, so every week he would tell people about famous theologians. There was Barth, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer, Thomas Aquinas and Augustine. He thought people wanted to hear what those men had to say. He was wrong! One day a woman came up to him and said, "I'm sure those were some fine men. However, the only fine man we want to hear about is Jesus. We only come to church to hear about Jesus." I believe, that is why everyone comes to church. If you come to church to hear about Jesus, say, **"Amen!"** Jesus is the only one who will prepare you for eternity.

One of the few committees I serve on in this district is the District Superintendancy Committee. It serves the same role as the Staff-Parish Relations Committee within the local church. Generally speaking, we are the bridge between the Mahoning Valley District and the East Ohio Annual Conference. It is a great committee to serve on because we don't meet very often. This year, we were a little busier than normal. After eight years, Dan Bryant rotated out of the District office and was reappointed to the Lakewood United Methodist Church on the west side of Cleveland. In the spring, we met with our Resident Bishop Tracey Malone and the Bishop's Assistant, Gary George, to help fill the vacancy. The Bishop and Gary were very gracious that day. We met in the district office and she asked the committee what qualities we would like in our new District Superintendent. One by one everyone had a chance to talk. I was one of the first ones to speak. I said, I just want a District Superintendent who wants to be in the Mahoning Valley. We have had too many District Superintendents who served here but their heart was in Cleveland. Someone else said, they wanted a DS who related well to young people. Someone else said, they wanted a DS who related to senior citizens. Someone else said, they wanted a DS who understood the system and all the forms.

Someone else said, they wanted a DS who worried more about people and not about forms. Someone else said, they wanted a theologically conservatively DS but not too conservative. Someone else said, they were open to a female DS, as long as she didn't look like a man. However, she couldn't be too attractive because her husband had a wandering eye. The list went on and on. Everything we said was recorded. I drove home from that meeting frustrated because all our words became like white noise. Many words were spoken but not much was heard. I asked myself the question again.

What qualities did I want in a new District Superintendent? Do you know what I want my District Superintendent to be? I want my District Superintendent to be my pastor. I want to respect my District Superintendent for the person they are, a person of high moral standards. I want my District Superintendent to care about me. There is nothing easy about my job. It is lonely and I need to know someone cares about me, not just what I can do for them. I want someone who has done this job. I want a District Superintendent who can feed my soul. I really don't care what the Bishop said. I only want to know what Jesus said. I want my District Superintendent to be my pastor. Do you know what I believe?

You want me to be your pastor! You don't want a manager. You don't want an administrator. You don't want an entertainer. You don't just want me to be your friend. You want me to be your pastor, which means I'm going to have a holy lifestyle. I pray my personal life will never bring shame to this church. You want me to care about you and worry about you. You want me to pray with you and for you in your darkest hour. You want me to be someone who is preparing you for eternity. We never tire of hearing about Jesus! Do you remember what Pope Francis said? "*The people of God want pastors, not clergy acting like bureaucrats or government officials.*" He is absolutely right! And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"