

Core Behavioral Questions

For Pastoral Candidates

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Introduction: The calling of a pastor is the most monumentally crucial task of a church with a vacant pulpit. You as the Search Team have a God-sized task on your hands which you should take with the utmost seriousness. The man you call to this role will be the man your congregation will look to for leadership, learn from by both listening to him in the pulpit and watching him out of the pulpit, and rely on for competent ministry in the most significant times of their lives. To issue a call to the wrong man for this role can be spiritually fatal. Conversely, should you be faithful in finding God's man for this role, your church will be blessed by your faithfulness.

Thankfully, God has not left us to go through this process blind. His Word speaks clearly as to the qualifications and responsibilities of men who dare presume to shepherd His church. Principally, these qualifications and responsibilities can be found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:1-8, and 1 Peter 5:1-4*. The following suggested outline of behavioral questions is based on these texts, in order to aid you in interviewing candidates regarding the core Biblical qualifications and competencies necessary for one to serve as a faithful pastor. Beyond these core issues, you will also want to ask other questions to determine whether a candidate's own personal ministry vision and philosophy is consistent with the overall mission and direction of your church. In addition, you will want to question the candidate regarding his philosophy of leadership, personal convictions that guide his ministry practice, and educational attainment and ministry experience. MMBA can provide you with these resources as well. But the purpose of this questionnaire is to examine a candidate in light of the most important pastoral qualities; those that are clearly outlined in God's Word.

Why behavioral questions?** Because the best predictor of what a man will do tomorrow is what he did yesterday. Generic positional questions about hypothetical situations rarely allow you a genuine "inside" look into the candidate. When you seek to discover past behaviors, you are uncovering actions that reveal what a man truly believes, and you are also observing how he is likely to conduct himself as pastor of your church.

How to ask behavioral questions:

1. Always stress "what did YOU do?" Ministers are generally humble, at least on the surface, and are very hesitant initially to talk much about their own actions for fear that it will sound like "bragging." Don't let this hesitation deter you from pressing to discover his own personal actions. Tell him that you don't interpret his answers as bragging on himself and assure him that you are simply trying to uncover how God has used him personally to get things done for the Kingdom.
2. Don't be afraid to re-direct the candidate, or ask the question twice in an assertive way. Often, a candidate will try to answer a behavioral question in a hypothetical way. When this happens, don't hesitate to politely, but assertively reply with "that's good to hear, but it really isn't what

we are asking. We want to know if you have any experiences with _____, and how you have done this in the past, not necessarily how you 'would' handle it. Can you help us with that?"

3. Don't be afraid of "dead time." Sometimes a candidate may have to think for a bit in order to give you a satisfactory answer to this type of question. Sometimes his wife may answer the question for him because she remembers something before he does. Don't be anxious when dead time happens, and assure the candidate that it is perfectly OK to take the time necessary to think. Conversely, if the candidate can't think of any way to answer after a couple of minutes, politely move on to the next question.

Suggested Questions for Candidates (categorized by Biblical qualifications for the office)

The Pastor as a Disciplined Man: (1 Timothy 3:2, 3, 6; Titus 1:8)

-“self-controlled, sober-minded, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not a lover of money, not a recent convert”

-1. Tell us about a recent argument/disagreement you had with someone? (church member, family member, spouse, cashier at Wal-Mart, etc.)

-What was the source of the disagreement? What did you say to the person? Was there reconciliation and/or resolution afterward?

-2. Tell us about a time when you had to keep your temper under control.

-Describe a time when someone really “pushed your buttons” and tell us how you dealt with that.

-3. How do you cope with stress? (prayer, alcohol, turning to your spouse, “comfort food,” reading the Scriptures, etc.) Give us an example of a stressful time in your life, and tell us how you managed that stress.

-4. Describe a situation in which you had to settle a disagreement as a neutral party. Did you have a preference as to which “side” would come out on top, and if so, how did you remain neutral?

-5. Tell us about a time when your family finances were really tight.

-What did you do to gain control of the situation?

-Describe how you and your wife handle your family finances. How do you work out differences?

The Pastor as a Family Man: (1 Timothy 3:2, 4-5; Titus 1:6)

-“the husband of one wife, manages his own household well, keeping his children submissive.”

-1. Tell us how you balance the demands of ministry with the needs of your family.

-2. Tell us about a recent fight you had with your wife. How did you resolve the conflict?

- 3. Tell us about a recent conflict that involved your child(ren) [if applicable]. How did you resolve this conflict?
- 4. How does your wife demonstrate her love for you? [*answers may vary and include gifts, verbal affirmation, sexual fulfillment, acts of service, etc.*]
- 5. [for the wife] How does your husband demonstrate his love for you? [*answers may vary and include gifts, verbal affirmation, sexual fulfillment, romantic gestures, acts of service, provider for the home, etc.*]
- 6. [for the wife] We know that the command for wives to “submit” to their husbands is expressed differently in each home. How do you express this concept in your own home?
- 7. We know that loving your wife like Christ loved the church is expressed differently in each home. How is this expressed in your home?
- 8. Describe for us how you and your wife develop spiritually together. (read the Scriptures and pray together? Spiritual conversations?)
- 9. Describe for us the boundaries that are set up in your marriage to separate personal life from work. Who sets those boundaries? How are these boundaries respected?
- 10. Describe for us the boundaries that you set up to protect yourself from moral failure. (policies on meeting with the opposite sex, internet filtering and/or monitoring, etc.)
- 11. Tell us about a recent family outing that involved your children.

The Pastor as a Sociable Man: (1 Timothy 3:2-3, 7; Titus 1:6-7)

“above reproach, respectable, hospitable, not quarrelsome, well thought of by outsiders.”

- 1. Give us some examples of ways you have become involved in your community in order to build a good reputation for yourself. How about for your church?
- 2. Describe a time when your character and/or integrity was questioned. How did you respond?
 - Who came to your defense when this happened?
 - How were you able to present yourself as being above the charges?
- 3. Tell us about a time when you were personally attacked by a church member and/or outsider.
- 4. Tell us about a time when there was an issue in the church you felt was worth fighting over. What was the issue? How did you introduce the situation to the leaders and/or congregation? What was the outcome?

-5. Tell us about a relationship you currently have with an unbeliever that was not developed as a direct result of your position in ministry. How did you meet them? How have you moved conversations with them toward sharing the Gospel?

-6. Describe the last time you shared the Gospel with an unbeliever.

-7. How do you and your wife go about building relationships when moving to a new area? Give us examples from your current place of service.

The Pastor as a Bible Man: (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9; 2 Timothy 4:1-5)

“able to teach, able to give instruction, preach the Word, reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching.”

-1. Describe briefly for us your normal sermon preparation routine.

-2. Give examples of how you allow the Scriptures to set the agenda for what you will preach.

-3. In preparing messages from God’s Word, how have you been able to prepare so as to avoid “hobby horses” or opinions not necessarily supported by the text? Give us a couple of examples.

-4. Describe for us how you apply the meaning of the text to the lives of the people. Give us a few recent examples of this.

-5. Without violating confidentiality, describe and give examples of how you have used the Scriptures as you counseled individually with people.

-6. Tell us how you go about teaching the Bible to your wife and children.

-7. Give examples of how you have presented Christ through Biblical preaching.

The Pastor as Shepherd and Overseer: (1 Peter 5:1-4)

“shepherd the flock of God...exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you, not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

-1. What process do you use to help people discover their gifts, and equip them to serve? Tell us about the last time you did this.

-2. How do you determine what to delegate to other people versus what you should do yourself? Give an example of this.

-3. Tell us about a time when you gave someone a role or responsibility and they failed. What were your errors in judgment and what did you learn from the experience?

-4. Give us your best example of developing a team? How did you develop this team and what was accomplished?

-5. Tell us about a time when you put forth some of your strongest effort. Why was it so important to you to do well?

-6. Describe a time when you moved someone from very little involvement to active involvement. How did you specifically get that person involved?

-7. Tell us about your experience in getting people with a different viewpoint or position than your own to take ownership of a project.

*Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV) Copyright ©2001 by Crossway Bibles, a Ministry of Good News Publishers.

**The concept of the behavioral interview, as well as some of the sample interview questions in this document, are taken from *Interviewing and Selecting Church Planters* by Charles Ridley and Robert Logan, and *The Assessor's Guidebook* published by the North American Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA.