

Church Decisions - What Does God Want?

Determining the right thing to do . . .

It is imperative that significant church decisions be finalized through a passionate and healthy team. Building a servant-leader team involves time, resolve and a clear focus. The temptation in small and newly organized churches is to accept the first warm bodies offering to lead. It is better to have no men on a leadership team than the wrong men. It is healthier for the body that a Pastor bears the challenge of leadership alone for a time than to have the wrong men participating. Servant-leadership must be a priority to build a healthy body.

Important decisions yield profound and lasting consequences and are most operative when there is input and ownership by the team. Choices as to what pens and pencils should be purchased, or where fuel should be acquired can be left to those who are directly responsible, always considering the principles of accountability and good stewardship. Effective decisions dealing with the focus, vision and direction of a church must be developed over time. The input of those who have the passion to see God at work is imperative. If there are no passionate servant-leaders, it is better to wait until God brings the right men into place.

On the other hand, it is better that a pastor bear the challenge of leadership alone for a time than to have the wrong men in leadership. The tendency in many small or newly organized churches is to enlist the first warm bodies who show an interest. The development of a leadership team is one of the most important decisions that can be made. The health of the body is at stake. The men God wants should be the focus.

Whether we like it or not, God holds men ultimately responsible for the direction of both the home and the church. Men are to lead. That certainly does not mean that women are incapable of leadership. There are ladies who are far more capable and more in touch with God than men, but when men fail to lead in a church, that church has failed God. A church without men in leadership is not merely on the decline, it is doomed. The vitality of a church hinges upon developing godly men as leaders, modeling the life of Christ.

Here are some suggested steps in making important ministry decisions. Most often, the process is much more important than the product or final decision. It is through the process that hearts can be knit together in deeper unity. It is through the process that we can deepen our relationship with the Lord, learning to trust Him more. It is through the process that we learn more about the insight written in the pages of Scripture. We want the answer now. God wants us to determine the right answer to difficult situations, not the expedient answer.

How should the decision-making process be handled? What is the best way to handle disagreements within the leadership team? If the pastor has one idea, another leader thinks his own idea should be followed, another leader has yet a different thought and yet another group believes their idea should be considered, how is the right decision determined?

It is essential from the beginning of the decision-making process that everyone set aside their own personal agenda. This is easy to say, but difficult to do. Only the arrogant believes that his answer is the correct and only answer. That attitude leads only to chaos. The most important question to ask is not what does the pastor want, not what does this leader want, or that leader want or what does that group think we should do, but "What does God want?" Since most of us think that what we want is certainly what God wants, or He wouldn't have given us the idea, we tend to circumvent this key question.

It seems a basic and simplistic question. Certainly everyone involved presupposes this as foundational. The reality is that all too often this question is ignored. Everyone must set aside personal agendas and truly seek God's wisdom and direction. The "What does God want" question must be asked repeatedly.

See: 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9 - qualifications for elders

Bible.org - "Qualifications for the Evaluation of Elders and Deacons" by J. Hampton Keathley III **About:** J. Hampton Keathley III, Th.M. graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary in 1966 and pastored for 28 years. In August of 2001 he was diagnosed with lung cancer and on August 29th, 2002 he went home to be with the Lord. Hampton wrote many articles for the Biblical Studies Foundation and taught New Testament Greek at Moody Bible Institute, Northwest Extension for External Studies in Spokane, Washington.

How is this accomplished? Consider the following:

1. SEEK WISDOM FROM SCRIPTURE. This should be basic in determining direction for a church leadership team, but it is often overlooked. Foolish choices can be avoided by first committing to make decisions based upon Scripture. Certainly God will not indicate through Scripture what color the siding should be on the church building, but it would be better to give away the funds for a project such as this than to allow the enemy to use this to create conflict.

- **PRECEDENT** - Has this exact situation been recorded in Scripture with a specific course of action? (Example: Matthew 18)
- **PATTERN** - Is there a situation that is similar in Scripture with a follow-up plan recorded?

- **PRINCIPLE** - Does the action or decision being considered align with Scriptural principles? Does the situation being dealt with involve the clear agreement or violation of a Scriptural standard?

REFLECT ON THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES:

- **Principle of Clarity:** God is not the author of confusion. Nothing good or godly can come from decisions made in the fog of confusion.
1 Corinthians 14:33 "For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints,"
 The context of this verse involves public corporate worship. The principle certainly would carry over into private leadership meetings. When confusion rules, the enemy wins. When there is no peace in the decision-making process, God's Spirit is being ignored. When a decision is of God, there is peace and certainty within the leadership team.
- **Principle of Unity:** If God is directing, there will be oneness of mind and spirit. There will be a clear consensus and certainty. If there is uncertainty, wait for God's timing and direction. Does the decision HAVE to be determined immediately? God works in the waiting process. As in preparing a good pot of chili, time and the proper heat enhance the flavor. "Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10 The Hebrew idea of "being still" does not mean we are to do nothing. The imagery involves that of dropping the arms. We are to cease from trying to work situations out on our own and wait on God to make clear our next action steps.

Napoleon Hill has stated that the "first, last and only cause of the demise of any human organization is lack of harmony, lack of unity." Cancer begins with one cell out of harmony with the rest of the body. So too is a man who demands his own agenda at the cost of pursuing what God desires.

Psalm 133:1

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in **unity!**"

A contrasting statement of this verse would be, Observe how bad and unpleasant it is when men who call themselves brothers dwell in disunity.

Ephesians 4:1-6 Unity in the Body of Christ "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

Proverbs 6:16-19 - Pursue Unity

"There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers."

2. PRAY. It is imperative that leadership not merely talk about how vital it is to pray, but to actually spend significant time in prayer. All too often there is more time spent in discussing prayer than actually praying. We learn to pray effectively and biblically by spending time in prayer and in God's Word.

James 5:16

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

1. Make things right with each other.
2. Make things right with God. Say the same thing God says about my sin;
1 John 1:9
3. Purity produces power with God and men.
 - Persistent prayer must be a priority.
 - The focus of prayer in these matters must be to seek God's agenda not any human plan. Certainly God gives us ideas, but we must be willing to modify our thoughts if it becomes obvious that God is redirecting. A godly leadership team can bring balance when determined to accomplish God's agenda.
 - Take time individually for specific prayer, seeking God's clear direction and inner peace that only the Holy Spirit can bring.
 - Schedule times of specific extended group prayer seeking God's peace in both timing and action.

3. SEEK GODLY COUNSEL. Find a godly mentor who has gone through similar situations. Be willing to admit the need for assistance and direction.

Proverbs 11:13-15 "Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered. Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety."

James 1:5 "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."

James 3:17 "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

4. MAKE DECISIONS BASED ON CERTAINTY AND UNITY. If a clear sense of peace is not recognized, God is either redirecting or prompting a time delay.

If consensus cannot be reached, a second question must be asked. The answer to that second question must be passionately, persistently pursued. "What

is God directing us to do?" It would be wise to set a designated time period to wait on God pending clear direction. Whether it be weeks or months, it would be best to determine the length of this waiting period in advance of the decision-making process. When there is uncertainty, the decision may be correct, but the timing may not be of the Lord. Lack of consensus is a clear indicator that God is redirecting. See: Ephesians 4:1-4

Decisions should not be made until all the leadership is convinced they have God's clear direction. There must be 100% commitment to this step in the process. Unity and certainty are foundational to knowing and doing God's will.

Should there be a vote? Nowhere in Scripture was a vote taken to determine what should be done. It is not necessarily wrong to "vote," but most often what man thinks becomes more important than what God knows. Voting tends to generate campaigning for different opinions and creates opposing sides. With few exceptions in Scripture, when the majority decision was followed, chaos ensued. The Israelites time and time again thought they knew better than God and demanded meat, demanded their leader, demanded their way. Seeking what God wanted for them was an afterthought if a thought at all. The majority ruled.

Voting tends to divide. Voting leads to disharmony. If 60% of a group votes for a decision and 40% votes against the idea, a significant portion of the 40% will be upset, frustrated and confused. Often such disunity leads to even more division. The larger the "voting" base, the greater is the potential for more confusion and misunderstanding. Here's a challenge: find "voting" as a means of determining the will of God in Scripture. Oneness of spirit as evidenced by one mind and one heart must be the goal. Biblical consensus must be the motivating factor in determining God's direction.

There may be times when it becomes obvious that one in leadership is clearly attempting to impose his will and agenda upon the body. This must be dealt with as God directs. Speaking the truth in love is godly and healthy (Ephesians 4:15). Pride is destructive and must not be tolerated in heart of leaders. Humility and a servant attitude coupled with actions must be evident in the lives of leaders. An arrogant, controlling man attracts chaos and confusion. True biblical leadership involves serving, not "ruling." A man who does not have a servant's heart must never be placed in a position of leadership in a local church. There is no place for an attitude of "lording it over" others in the heart of a church leader. Leaders in the church are to model qualities of a humble "servant," not an arrogant "boss."

Servant-leaders do have responsibility and influence in the decision-making process. At times, serving does involve making decisions. The insight and

opinions of recognized leaders, who demonstrate spiritual maturity and service to others should be sought.

Hebrews 13:17 "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."

Leaders must be painfully honest and be aware that their influence can be used selfishly to simply get their own way. Too many churches have adopted a corporate model of leadership and neglected Scripture. Many churches in America have based leadership qualifications on whether or not a man has personal business sense and has been successful in the corporate world. This has created an atmosphere in the church that the board rules; these men are in charge.

Want a good sense of the heart of a leader? Interview his wife and children. Interview his neighbors. If prospective leaders knew this was going to take place, the potential leadership pool would undoubtedly be self-limiting. Many would disqualify themselves, as well they should.

A godly leader must first learn to be a godly follower. Leadership that affects eternity is based upon "followership." Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Learning to follow Christ requires an obedient heart. One can obey outwardly without love as the stimulus. Guilt and duty are strong motivating factors. It is possible to obey without love, but one cannot love without obeying. Effective servant-leaders must first learn to be godly followers.

Most church conflicts would be avoided if there was more attention paid to the selection of servant-leaders and the determination to keep asking, "God, What and who do You want?" God always wants what's best for us and for His church. How can we go wrong when we are determined to do what He wants?

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10817 E. 16th Avenue * Spokane Valley, WA 99206

509.995.6777 * ghippe@integrity.com

www.eaglesummitministry.org