

Prayer, Patience, and *Perseverance*

A Biblical Example of Choosing a Leader

1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; 1 Thessalonians

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There are many reasons why a people may find themselves needing to search for a new leader. In our text today we find that there was the need for a replacement for the King of Israel. We also know that God was already preparing the person whom God would choose to become the next King. The nation of Israel was ruled as a *theocracy*, a nation under the leadership of God, and it was important that a person of God's choosing be in that place of leadership. So it is with the church.

It is important to remember that this is God's church. And God is more concerned than any one of us could ever be that this church will call the person whom God is preparing to be the next Pastor. God works, as much as we will allow God to work, in every area of church life, including the calling of a Pastor.

A Search Committee has been nominated and will be voted upon in our time of worshipful business at the close of this worship service. Entrusted to them is the responsibility of searching out, of identifying, and recommending to the congregation that person whom they unanimously believe that God is preparing to be the next pastor of this church.

The Search Committee will be praying faithfully, meeting regularly, and including you, as the congregation, in the process. As a congregation, you will be guided to help determine what you believe is God's vision for the future of this church, and those gifts and skills that you believe are needed in the next Pastor who will help to make that vision a reality.

The first and most important characteristic of a Pastor who leads God's people is that the person know he or she is called by God to ministry. Explaining to someone how one knows that one is called to ministry is a little like trying to explain how you know that you are in love. It's hard to describe, but you know when it happens. Perhaps the prophet Jeremiah described it in a way that can be understood. He said, "If I say, 'I will not remember God or speak anymore in God's name,' then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary of holding it in. I cannot endure it." (Jeremiah 20:9)

When someone comes to me and talks with me about whether or not they have been called by God to the pastoral ministry, I always say to them that if they can do anything else and be satisfied with their work, then they should do something else. Responding to a call to ministry is about being faithful to be the person that God calls one to be. It is about being faithful to fulfill the calling that God has given one.

The person who comes to be your next Pastor must have the theological and practical skills and personality that is needed to lead this congregation. He or she must believe beyond any doubt that this is the place where God would have him or her serve. There is nothing more important than being God's person, in God's place, in God's time.

Throughout all of this process of seeking and discernment there are three things that are of ultimate importance for you as a congregation and for the Search Committee.

THE FIRST IS PRAYER.

Prayer is the **work** of the Christian. Prayer is about listening to God as well as talking to God. Someone has described our prayers as presenting our wish list to God. This might describe our petitions as we lift them up to God as the desires of our heart.

Let me suggest what I also think that prayer is.

- Prayer is not simply a presentation of a list of our wishes and needs to God.
- Prayer is also listening to God's desires for us.
- Prayer is a conversation.

God knows what we need before we ask, but God desires to have a conversation with us. So how might we approach our prayer life? First of all, consider that prayer is a willingness to submit oneself to God. It is our willingness to let God be God, and to trust God to do the right thing at the right time in the right way.

Sometimes we find that our prayer changes us rather than changing God's desire for us.

THE FIRST IMPORTANT THING THAT WE NEED TO DO IS PRAY.

THE SECOND THING OF ULTIMATE IMPORTANCE IS OUR PATIENCE.

Patience is the **attitude, the practice**, of the Christian. Patience is one of those fruits of the Spirit that Christians are supposed to practice: (Galatians 5:22)

- love
- joy
- peace
- patience
- kindness
- goodness
- faithfulness
- gentleness
- self-control

Patience is perhaps the virtue on that list with which we have the most difficulty.

We are pragmatic. We want what we want when we want it. The calling of a Pastor requires that we be patient with the process, patient with the Search Committee, and patient with God. No search process should be hurried. If it is, you may need another Search Committee in about six months. We get into trouble when we try to run ahead of God. God is working in the hearts and minds of this congregation, and at the same time, God is working in the heart and mind of a person that God would have to come and be your Pastor.

PRAYER IS THE WORK OF THE CHRISTIAN

PATIENCE IS THE ATTITUDE OF THE CHRISTIAN

PERSEVERANCE IS THE WALK OF THE CHRISTIAN

Perseverance is the lifestyle that says, "We won't run ahead of God; we will wait on the Lord. We will work until our work is finished. We will keep on keeping on."

We read this morning from the Scripture about the choosing of David to be the next leader of God's people. The Word of God is instructive to us in the process that the Search Committee will follow. God instructed Samuel to begin the process with a time of worship, a time of calling the family of Jesse to a sacrifice.

The Search Committee will be commissioned by you to carry out a sacred task on behalf of this congregation. Samuel was chosen as God's "search committee."

It is important to note that God was the One who gave the direction to Samuel about the person of God's choosing. Your Search Committee comes to this important responsibility being open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

God instructed Samuel that his work in searching for the new leader was to remain a confidential process until the person was revealed by God. The Search Committee will give the congregation frequent updates about where they are in the process, but it will be essential that the Committee keep all of their deliberations about individuals confidential.

This is not to "keep secrets" from the congregation; rather it is to protect the confidentiality of those persons whom they may be considering. We know that there are no "church secrets." Telling "church secrets" is like pouring water through a sieve. Everyone has one friend that they know will keep their "secret" and that person has one friend who will keep the "secret." Do you get the picture? I trust that none of you will attempt to place a member of the Search Committee in a compromising position by asking that they talk about individuals that may be under consideration.

The **congregation** will be very much involved in the search process. You will be asked to participate in surveys. You will be asked to participate in a time of sharing your vision for what you believe God wants the future of this church to be. Over time the needs and the hopes of a congregation change. So does the characteristic of the next permanent or settled Pastor that you will call. We must have your help in the calling of the next Pastor. That cannot happen without your participation.

In the *meantime*, remember that you are not without a Pastor.

You have a Pastor who loves you and cares for you and is attempting to be a shepherd to you and lead you through this time of transition so that you are ready for the permanent Pastor who will come.

In due time the Search Committee will bring a recommendation of a person to the congregation. How long will that take. Only God knows that timeline. I do believe that God already knows whom God has chosen to come. It is up to us to discover that person and be open to calling that person. God's timing is not necessarily ours. Clocks and calendars are human inventions.

Chronos/Chronological time is our human invention. *Kiros*/God's time often requires patience and perseverance.

The recommendation from the Search Committee of a person to be your next Pastor will be a unanimous recommendation. God is not the author of confusion, and the Committee will pray and deliberate until they are in agreement. Then the congregation will have an opportunity to meet with the person, talk with the person, and the person's family if there is one, hear the person preach, and then make the final decision.

We are in a time of transition to the future. The *past* is history. The *present* is just that, a present, a gift, of life and hope and growth for us as a people of God. The *future* holds all of the possibilities that we, along with God, will dare to dream and attempt. During this time of transition there are some constants. Know this: God's love for you is more wonderful than you can imagine.

Having said all of this, let me make some suggestions for our intentional praying as a congregation. There are some **prayer suggestions** enclosed in your bulletin this morning. Please put them in a prominent place, and pray through them daily.

Please take out that prayer sheet and look at it with me now.

- Thank God for the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit who is available and desirous of guiding the Search Committee.
- Pray for the members of the Search Committee that there will be continual openness to perceive the direction of God in their search.
- Pray that members of the Search Committee and members of the congregation will be patient and wait for God's timing in the search process
- Pray that the members of the Search Committee will experience God's wisdom and discernment in their deliberations.
- Pray for the person whom God is already preparing to be the next Pastor of this congregation.

As we come to the close of our service I will ask you now, if this prayer is your desire, to pray that last prayer on the sheet with me.

O Lord, your will for this congregation;

Nothing more,

Nothing less,

Nothing else. Amen.