



## Sermon Outlines

These sermon outlines are suitable to be used by an interim pastor, church consultant, denominational leader, or other individual who would like to preach a sermon series based upon the six commitments outlined in the book. There is an optional seventh sermon outline for the congregation that would like to sign the Congregational Covenant (attached as an Appendix in this document).

Use these outlines as a starting point in your sermon preparation, but feel free to revise them however you see fit to best suit your context. No attribution of the sermons is necessary; make them your own!

In addition, each sermon can be accompanied by a small group discussion using the questions included in the appendix of the book as well as the additional questions available for free download at <https://jasonalowe.com/discussion-questions/>

May God bless you as you seek to help the church during the search!

## Week 1: Be Prepared

**Text:** Deuteronomy 34:1-12

**Main Point:** The church during the search should be prepared to honor the Lord during this season of transition.

### Outline:

**Opening Illustration:** The different seasons of the year have distinct features that make them unique. Temperature changes, sports schedules, and specific holidays all serve as markers that you're in a particular season.

### Transition:

- Right now, your church has entered into a season of transition. As with any season in your church, this season is characterized by specific markers/stages. We will learn about these stages from one of the earliest transitions of leadership in the Bible.

### Understanding the Stages of Transition

#### 1. The season of transition begins with an ending (v. 5a)

- Moses' death signaled the beginning of the season of transition.
- Moses' ministry could not last forever, and neither could your previous pastor.
- NOTE: Exercise discernment when discussing the previous pastor's departure.
  - It's likely that the church responded in one of four ways: (1) sad, (2) mad, (3) glad, (4) indifferent
  - It's likely that the Israelites responded to Moses' death in different ways too.

#### 2. The season of transition ends with a beginning (v. 9)

- When Joshua begins his leadership role, the season of transition is over.
- When your next pastor arrives, your church will experience a lot of firsts.
  - E.g. first time you meet the new pastor and his family, the first time he preaches, the first time he conducts a baptism or the Lord's Supper, the first time he conducts a wedding and a funeral, the first time he conducts a business meeting, etc.
  - Over time, these firsts will become seconds & thirds, & the season of transition will end

#### 3. The season of transition hinges on an understanding. (Deut. 31:1-8)

- Moses explained that the Lord was the one who would go before the Israelites to the Promised Land, regardless of who was in charge. With that understanding, they were told to be strong and courageous.
- Similarly, God is in charge of the search for a new pastor. While there will be unexpected setbacks throughout the process that may surprise you, nothing will surprise the Lord.
  - Understanding this truth will determine how you'll respond when the search doesn't go as you had planned or preferred.

**Conclusion:** Leadership transitions pre-date the establishment of the church, but they are not foreign to the church. Your church has now entered such a season of transition. Regardless of the circumstances of how this season began, God is in control. He will bring your next pastor in His perfect timing. Therefore, with that understanding, you can be prepared to honor the Lord in your attitudes and behaviors during the search, even when surprises come your way.

## Week 2: Be Informed

**Text:** Psalm 23

**Main Point:** The church during the search should understand the biblical roles and qualifications before your next pastor arrives.

### Outline:

**Opening Illustration:** If you've ever forgotten why you walked into a room, you know how frustrating it can be. Perhaps you walked into the storage room to grab a couple of AA batteries. Maybe you walked into the kitchen to pour a glass of water. Maybe you walked into the living room to find your keys. When you forget the reason why you entered the room, chances are high that you won't accomplish your purpose.

**Transition:** Similarly, in order to successfully call your next pastor, you need to have an awareness of what you're looking for in a pastor.

- If you were to look for the word "pastor" in the New Testament, you would find it only once in most English translations in Ephesians 4:11.
- For every other use of the Greek word translated as "pastor" in the New Testament, it is translated as "shepherd".
- Your next pastor will be your spiritual shepherd, serving under the authority of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.
- To understand the roles of a shepherd, let's examine Psalm 23.

### 4 Primary Roles of a Shepherd:

#### 1. A shepherd feeds his sheep (vv. 1-3a)

- One of the main duties of a shepherd is to provide food, shelter, and rest for his sheep.
- "Green pastures and still waters" are places of rest and feeding.
- God feeds us spiritually through His Word (Deut. 8:3)
- God has appointed His under-shepherds to also feed his flock (Jer. 3:15, 2 Tim 3:16-4:2)

#### 2. A shepherd leads his sheep (vv. 2-3)

- Wherever the shepherd goes, the sheep follow him.
- Just as God appoints His under-shepherds to feed His flocks, He also appoints them to lead His flocks (Num. 27:15-17)
- Pastors should lead in a 1 Peter 5:1-4 fashion.

#### 3. A shepherd protects his sheep (v. 4)

- Just as God protects his sheep, pastors are also called to protect their flock from division (Eph. 4:1-3), sin (Gal. 6:1), and false teaching (Acts 20:28-31).

#### 4. A shepherd comforts his sheep (v. 4)

- Just as God is the God of all comfort (2 Cor. 1), pastors are called to comfort the flock.

**Conclusion:** While you may have preferences for other roles that your pastor should fill, he is faithful in the eyes of God if he feeds, leads, protects, and comforts the flock of your church. If he carries out these four tasks on a regular basis, he will be faithful, and your church will be blessed.

## Week 3: Be Humble

**Text:** Philippians 2:1-4

**Main Point:** The church during the search should humbly put the needs and preferences of your fellow church members above your own.

### Outline:

**Opening Illustration:** One observation that is universally true in every church is that they are all different. Some churches are large, while others are small. Some have contemporary worship, while others have traditional or blended worship. Some churches are happy to see you, while others are only happy to see you if you're not sitting in their seat. Some churches are growing, while many others are declining.

**Transition:** Similarly, no two churches go about searching for a new pastor exactly the same way.

- While your church needs a biblically qualified pastor (1 Tim. 3:1-7) that fulfills the four roles of a shepherd (Psalm 23), many churches are quick to add other requirements to the list.
- In some churches, the list becomes so large that Jesus wouldn't qualify as their pastor!
- While it's common for church members to think about what they should look for in a pastor, those church members often never consider what a potential pastor is looking for in a church.
- However, that's exactly the question the Apostle Paul answers in Philippians 2:1-4.

### 2 Characteristics Every Pastor Wants to Find in Their New Church:

#### Characteristic #1: Unity (vv. 1-2)

- Paul begins with a series of "if statements" in v. 1, which are meant to be rhetorical in nature.
  - If you are a Christian, then those statements should be true for you, just like they should have been true for the Philippians.
- Since those things were true, Paul called on his fellow believers in verse 2 to "complete his joy" by being unified.
- Unity was Paul's desire for the church, and it was also Jesus' desire (John 17:20-21).
- Unity is difficult to maintain in a church due to our sinful and selfish desires, and will only be accomplished when the second characteristic is also present.

#### Characteristic #2: Humility (vv. 3-4)

- Humility is a prerequisite to unity. If a church isn't characterized by humility, it also won't be characterized by unity.
- Pride and selfishness are the root of all conflict (James 4:1-3).
- Most churches don't fight over doctrinal differences, but over preferences.
- Paul teaches that there is a better way. By following the example of Jesus (Phil. 2:5-8), the church during the search can humbly put the needs and preferences of fellow church members above their own.

**Conclusion:** While it's ok to have preferences for your next pastor, you cannot allow those preferences to become demands. If you do so, it will be very difficult to honor the Lord or complete your next pastor's joy after he arrives. Therefore, make the commitment to be humble today.

## Week 4: Be Prayerful

**Text:** Matthew 26:36-39 (primary), multiple secondary texts

**Main Point:** The church during the search should intentionally and fervently pray throughout the pastor search process.

### Outline:

**Opening Illustration:** Prayer is the secret weapon during the pastor search process. Unfortunately, while church members know that they *should* pray during this season, prayer often gets crowded out because of so many other demands on our time. We tell ourselves, “I’ll pray later” or “I’ll pray tomorrow.” Without consciously noticing the trend, one day without praying turns into two, and two days turns into four, and four days into a week, and a week into a month, and so on. Before long, we can’t remember the last time we spent significant time in prayer.

**Transition:** While prayer is critical in the life of a church at all times, it’s especially critical during the pastor search season.

- The enemy sees this period as an opportunity for attack (Acts 20:28).
- Prayer is an act of spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:18).
- The church during the search should not just talk *about* prayer but should strive to spend significant time *in* prayer.

### 3 Biblical Reasons to Pray During the Search

#### 1. Prayer was a priority for Jesus.

- Jesus’ earthly ministry was characterized by a two-pronged approach of words and works (see Matthew 4:23).
- When Jesus was not engaged in one of these two activities, he was often engaged in prayer (Lk 5:15-16). He made it a priority.
- Jesus prayed in the morning (Mk 1:35), middle of the day (Mt 14:22-23), and at night (Lk 6:12).
- In addition to praying alone, Jesus prayed with others (Lk 9:28) and for others (Lk 22:31-32).

#### 2. Prayer was a problem for Jesus’ disciples. (Mt. 26:36-46)

- While prayer was a priority for Jesus, it was often problematic for His disciples.
- When we’re not praying, we are more susceptible to temptation.

#### 3. Prayer can be powerful for Jesus’ church. (Acts 4:29-31)

- There’s a dramatic turnaround from Matthew 26 to Acts 4. The disciples, who once could not even stay awake to pray, are now praying with such confidence they began to turn the world upside down!
- There was great power in prayer in the early church; there can be great power in this church.

**Conclusion:** Earlier, we read in Luke 6 that Jesus prayed all night long on occasion, but we didn’t read why he prayed all night on this occasion (Read Luke 6:12-13). He prayed all night long in order to choose His apostles. If it was necessary for the Son of God to pray all night long before selecting those who would lead His church, how much more do we need to do so today?

## Week 5: Be Patient

**Text:** Galatians 5:22-23, James 5:7-11

**Main Point:** The church during the search should patiently trust in the Lord's perfect timing as you wait for your next pastor.

### Outline:

**Opening Illustration:** Some Christians don't like to pray for patience because they're afraid that God might give it to them. Even though patience is a fruit of the Spirit, some church members still have no desire to be patient. In our fast-food, on-demand culture, we don't like to be patient. We don't like to wait. We want things done, and we want them done now.

**Transition:** If you have a hard time being patient, you will likely have a hard time during the search.

- Studies show that the average pastor search takes 12-18 months as pastor search committees work through the five phases of the pastor search process.
- Today, let's learn together what the Bible says about patience and how you can become an agent of godly patience for your church during the search.

### How to Become an Agent of Godly Patience

#### 1. Experience God's patience yourself. (Galatians 5:22-23)

- When most people think of patience, they think of waiting on something. While there's truth to that understanding, Paul refers to spiritual fruit of patience in a very specific way: to have the ability, even when provoked, not to lose your temper.
- In other words, Paul speaks of patience in respect to other people. That's exactly the way God has been patient with us.
  - Whenever God's people sinned in the Old Testament (e.g. Adam & Eve, Cain, David, etc.), He could have wiped them out instantly. But He did not do so because His merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
  - In other words, God is patient with His people.

#### 2. Extend godly patience to others. (James 5:7-9)

- If God is patient toward you, He expects you to be patient toward others. James 5:9 provides an example of what this looks like.
- Instead of grumbling or complaining against others, let us bless and encourage others.

#### 3. Exercise godly patience in your circumstances. (James 5:10-11)

- Instead of addressing patience toward other people, James shifts his attention in v. 11 to patience in difficult circumstances
- Both types of patience will be required during the search.

**Conclusion:** During the search for a new pastor, you have a choice to make. You can be patient, or not. You can trust the Lord with your circumstances, or not. You can trust that God will send your next pastor in His perfect timing, or not. At the end of the day, the choice is yours. Being patient is not easy or enjoyable, but through the power of the Holy Spirit living in you, it is possible! Invite the Spirit to produce overflowing patience in your church during the search.

## Week 6: Be Productive

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

**Main Point:** The church during the search should continue to bear fruit even while you don't have a pastor.

### Outline:

**Opening Illustration:** Each February, a new group of high school students begin to develop a condition known as Senioritis. If you're unfamiliar with the term, it takes place during a high school senior's final semester and it is characterized by decline in motivation and academic performance. In other words, as students see the finish line, they tend to slack off in their high school academic pursuits.

**Transition:** Similarly, there is a predictable tendency for church members to slack off in their church commitments during an interim period as well.

- However, the church is still the church even when you don't have a pastor, and the mission of the church still applies.
- Therefore, you need to commit to be productive, and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 explains why.

### How to Be Productive Without a Pastor

#### 1. Understand the mindset of a productive church (vv. 12-13)

- This passage is simple: the church is one body, but with many members!
  - There is *unity* in our mission, but *diversity* in the gifts/roles of the church.

#### 2. Understand the mindsets of a counterproductive church. (vv. 15-25)

- Mindset #1: "They Don't Need Me" (vv. 15-20)
  - Some in the Corinthian church felt that their spiritual gifts were inferior to others
  - Characteristics of this mindset:
    - 1. Jealousy and envy regarding spiritual gifts
    - 2. Dissatisfaction with your own spiritual gifts
    - 3. Lack of service in the church.
- Mindset #2: "I Don't Need Them" (vv. 21-25)
  - If the mindset lacked confidence, this mindset has too much confidence.
  - Characteristics of this mindset:
    - 1. Looking down on the spiritual gifts of others
    - 2. Believing you can do a better job than others
    - 3. Thinking that you don't need any help

**Conclusion:** The church needs every part of the body working together to accomplish its mission, especially when you don't have a pastor!

## Week 7: Commitment Sunday

**Text:** Nehemiah 9:38

**Main Point:** The church during the search should commit to fulfilling your individual roles while you wait for your next pastor.

### Outline:

**Opening Illustration:** Formal ceremonies add a degree of gravity to significant moments in our lives. Baby dedications, high school graduations, and presidential inaugurations each become more significant in our hearts and minds because of the ceremonies that accompany them.

**Transition:** The past six weeks have been a significant moment in the life of this church.

- You have been challenged and encouraged to make six commitments in order to honor the Lord in your attitudes and behaviors while you wait for your next pastor.
- While it would be easy to move on to the next sermon series or Bible study without any further consideration of these commitments, doing so would likely diminish the importance of this moment.
- Therefore, let's consider how to give this moment the attention it deserves by making these commitments formally and publicly, much like we find the Israelites doing in Nehemiah 9:38.

### How to Make the Most Out of This Moment

#### 1. We commit ourselves to the Lord.

- After a great season of worship over the course of several weeks, the leaders, Levites, and priests initiated a binding agreement to remain faithful to the Lord, just as He had remained faithful to them.
- Similarly, God has been faithful to this church throughout its history, and He will continue to do so during the search and beyond.
- Any commitment you make today is ultimately a commitment between you and the Lord.

#### 2. We commit ourselves to each other.

- The commitments that the Israelites made did not just affect them individually. Their faithfulness to their commitments would also impact those around them either positively or negatively.
- Similarly, if you keep these commitments during the search, your church will be blessed. However, if you fail to keep these commitments, your church will suffer the consequences.
- Therefore, any commitments made today are made to your fellow members of this local body.

#### 3. We commit ourselves to the search process.

- God used Ezra, Nehemiah, and many others to bring the Israelites to this moment of rededication and commitment.
- Similarly, God will use every part of the search process to prepare your church for the future.
- While you may not know exactly how the process will unfold, you can trust that God is in control.

**Conclusion:** The leaders added a degree of gravity to their recommitment by making a public binding agreement in writing. You have the opportunity today to do so as well. Will you publicly commit to honoring the Lord in your attitudes and behaviors while you wait for your next pastor?



## The Church During the Search Congregational Covenant

*To be used by the congregation at the conclusion of studying The Church During the Search.  
It can be read responsively during the worship service or signed privately.*

As a member of our church during the search:

- I will strive to prepare myself to expect the unexpected during the pastor search process. I will make every effort to worship the Lord, even when I don't know who will be preaching on Sunday. I will strive to serve in the church when things don't go as planned or when I don't hear any updates. I will prepare myself for the ups and downs of the pastor search process, trusting that God is working out His plan for our church in His timing.
- I will strive to be better informed about the biblical roles of a pastor to feed, lead, protect, and comfort his flock during the pastor search process. I will seek to become well acquainted with the biblical qualifications for a pastor, and I will seek to take opportunities to encourage those entrusted with the responsibility to identify our next pastor. I look forward to supporting my next pastor as he faithfully strives to fulfill the biblical roles as my spiritual shepherd.
- I will strive to be humble during the pastor search process, working diligently to place the needs and interests of other church members above my own. I will strive to avoid allowing my desires to become demands, either of the Pastor Search Committee or of my next pastor and his family. I will seek to disarm any land mines before my next pastor arrives. I will honor the past, but I will also make every effort to look to the future and support the current and future ministry endeavors of my church.
- I will strive to be prayerful during the pastor search process. I will strive to pray that my church will make these six commitments during the search. I will strive to pray for the Pastor Search Committee as they faithfully and sacrificially go about their work. I will make every effort to pray for my next pastor to sense God's leading to our church. I will strive to pray that his family will be able to make a smooth transition to our church as well.
- I will strive to be patient during the pastor search process. I recognize that while the average pastor search process lasts for 12-18 months, our process could take longer. I will seek to trust in God's timing, and I will make every effort to refrain from placing any additional pressure on the Pastor Search Committee if they fail to present a pastor candidate on my preferred timetable.
- I will strive to be productive during the pastor search process, recognizing that the church is still the church even while we don't have a pastor. I will continue to cultivate a growing relationship with the Lord through my practice of the personal spiritual disciplines. I will seek to use my spiritual gifts to serve the Lord and His church, and I will make every effort to avoid slacking off in any of my current church commitments. I will also faithfully seek to share the gospel as God gives me the opportunity with those outside the church.

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*Sign and Date*