

When is it Time to Leave?

Part One

(Ecclesiastes 3:1, 11, 17) To every *thing there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: He hath made every *thing* beautiful in his time: for *there is* a time there for every purpose and for every work.

In the last few years the question of when is it time to leave a church or pastorate has been asked many times from both pastors and church members. Just recently in the last few weeks I talked with a pastor who has been pastor of the same church for over forty years about this subject. I told him that I would be writing on it soon since there are a lot of questions concerning this subject. I pray that this will be helpful and an insight to those who are thinking about leaving.

I don't claim to have all the right answers for people who are asking (is it time to leave) but there are Biblical principles and some guidelines that can be helpful. Please don't take these and run with them to make excuses to leave a church or pastorate for just any reason. Leaving a church or a pastorate is a very serious decision that shouldn't be taken lightly. But there are times that God will move folks to another ministry or church that is best suited for them and His work for all involved. There are times that leaving is more harmful than staying and sometimes staying is more detrimental than leaving. The staying or leaving should be according to the best understanding of God's will for an individual, family or church.

Before considering leaving a church, ministry or the pastorate one should make sure their walk with the Lord is very close and that their motives are genuine in discerning the will of God for their lives. Just because someone doesn't like the way things are going or is upset with others is not a valid reason for leaving a church or pastorate. It may be that the Lord wants to use these things to grow you or someone else in the church. If there is the leading of the Lord to leave, it will be done in a right way Biblically and in a good spirit to honor the Lord and His church.

Sometimes it's just obvious that the timing is right and the doors are opening in the will of God to leave. Then again there are times when it's not so clear and one will need to wait until they get the green light from the Lord to move in the direction that He is showing them. When is it time to leave? This should be done very prayerfully and carefully with as much clear guidance from the Lord as possible. This should include prayer, Scripture, counseling from a trusted pastor or spirit-filled friend that will be honest and upfront with you. To share what you need to here and not what you want to hear for the reasons you're wanting to leave. Is there a time to leave? Just make sure that it's God's timing and will and not your discontentment that is your motive.

May the Lord bless your week and use you to be a blessing to someone else.

Bro. Mickey
SCM

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Part Two

What's best Staying or Leaving?

(1 Cor. 10:31) Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

(Colo. 1:18) And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence.

I am all for members and pastors staying in their churches and working through their problems and the difficulties that may arise (will arise) in the ministry. Many times members and pastors leave too soon and don't give the Lord time to work in and through the circumstances that are motivating them to leave. Leaving a ministry or church too soon can hinder the spiritual growth of an individual as well as the church also.

After saying this, there is also a time that staying can hinder the growth of both the member and the church. If a member or a pastor is unwilling to heed to the word of God and properly submit to the Holy Spirit and the counsel of godly men, then staying may be getting in the way of the church's mission. The church is bigger than the individual whether a member or a pastor, it's what's best for the cause of Christ and His church.

The bigger picture is that whatever we do, (stay or leave) that we make certain we will glorify God (1Cor.10:31) and make sure that Jesus has the preeminence "first place" in our lives and church. To many times decisions are made in a rush or in the heat of the moment not considering the Lord or His church and how it will affect others. To stay or leave will have consequences not on just the one that stays or leaves but on the church as a whole. And it will also have an affect on the church that one may go to after leaving either in or out of the will of God. What's best for the church and the family is important.

Some questions to ask yourself about staying or leaving;

- What is the will of God for me and the church to stay or leave?
- Will staying or leaving be done to the Lord's pleasing and will He have first place in this?
- Am I being led by the Holy Spirit to stay or leave?
- Am I following Biblical principles for staying or leaving?
- Are my motives correct in staying or leaving?
- Is there something that God is trying to teach me through staying or leaving?
- How will staying or leaving affect others in my family, church family or outsiders?
- What's best for God's work and others staying or leaving?
- Will I and others grow in our spiritual walk with the Lord by staying or leaving?
- Am I honest with the Lord and others and myself also about staying or leaving?

There is a saying that when in doubt, don't. But if you're sure, by faith proceed ahead. May the Lord help us to do what's best for God's ministry and others whether it is staying or leaving. God bless and have a great week in the Lord!

Bro. Mickey - SCM

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Part Three

When is it clear that leaving is right?

There are some clear principles in the word of God that tells us when it's time to leave a church or pastorate. Again I would stress that these things should not be misapplied but prayerfully and carefully considered in leaving. There are always certain situations that would need to take time and have the input of trusted, wise and spiritual friends. These few guidelines are not inclusive but are to help in knowing what is right and clear concerning leaving. There are always the positive and negative elements in leaving.

The Positives:

1. When God has clearly told you. (Isa.30:21) This will of course include the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart and confirming it through God's word. God is not the author of confusion (1Cor.14:33).
2. When God call's you to a new church or ministry. This will be confirmed by those who are already serving with you and agree that your move is in the right direction. Please note that not everyone will agree simply because they don't what you to go. (Acts13:1-3)
3. When God says your ministry is fulfilled in a certain church or ministry. This is not to say that one cannot be used in a church or ministry, but they are prepared to go forward to the next place that God can use them more. (Acts12:25)

The Negatives:

1. When there are differences that cannot be resolved. I know that we should always get things right before leaving but the realities are that some just can't agree - (Amos3:3). Good people can disagree agreeably but just can't work together and should part with a right spirit considering one another and the church.
2. When there are clear doctrinal violations of scripture. (1Tim.4:16) People, churches and pastors change their position on many things over time. This is clear doctrinal violations, it doesn't mean personal preferences that one thinks that everyone else should have and they're all wrong if they don't have yours.
3. When trust and loyalty can't be given to the church or pastor. If a member can't trust and be loyal to their church and pastor, then they need to either make sure that they themselves or others are right with God. Trust and loyalty is earned by members, church and pastor. These can be broken and if not resolved there can be no building of relationships with others whether its member, church or pastor. (Ps.118:8-9)

There are many things that can cause people to leave a church, but I would caution them to prayerfully and carefully consider their motive and God's leading from His word and the Holy Spirit. It's better to take more time, than to rush ahead and make a mistake that can hinder you as well as others. God bless and have a week of serving the Lord.

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Part Four

When is it clear that leaving is wrong?

In reality members and pastors leave more for the wrong reasons than for the right reasons. Many times their leaving is done in a rush or in the heat of the moment from some situation that has been escalating between them and others in the church. One or both of them will not submit to scripture which clearly tells them what to do in love toward one another. There are ways of disagreeing without being hurtful toward others and the church as a whole. Again God is not the author of confusion in His church, but of peace – (1Cor.14:33).

As a matter of fact many churches are filled with immature and carnal believers that are not filled with the Holy Spirit, but are walking and fulfilling the lust of the flesh (1Cor.3:1-3). Adding to this some pastors are also living more in the flesh than the Spirit or may be discouraged, unforgiving and holding some bitterness towards others in the church. The devil doesn't care how he causes division in the church, be it the pastor or church member, just as long as the church gets distracted, discouraged and defeated.

We need to constantly remind ourselves that our real enemies are the world, the flesh and the devil, not our brethren in the Lord. Petty things between believers should be worked out, in a spirit of love and grace according to the scriptures. There are clear guidelines in the word of God that tell us that leaving a relationship with a fellowship of believers is wrong. Keep in mind that these are not all inclusive to address every situation that comes between church members, but hope they will help in knowing that we need to take leaving seriously. When is leaving clearly wrong?

- When God has clearly said not to leave – (Ps.27:14 / Ps.46:10) Sometimes staying and waiting on the Lord is the hardest but yet the safest thing to do.
- When you know that it isn't the will of God – (John7:17 / Rom.12:2 / Eph.6:6) Many times a leaving is just contrary to the plain will of God in the scriptures.
- When you can't forgive someone – (Eph.4:32 / Col.3:13). We may not always agree, but through Christ we can always forgive each other by His grace.
- When there is resentment and bitterness – (Job21:25 / Eph.4:31 / Acts8:23 / Heb.12:15) If one leaves with a bitter spirit they will infect the next church.
- When the motive is unconfessed sin in your life or in the life of others – (Pro.28:13 / 1John1:9) No one profits by leaving because of unconfessed sin.
- When feelings over rule our faith of what is right – (James 4:17) A lot of people are moved by their feelings instead of the word of God, let faith not feelings move you to do the right thing according to scripture. Live by faith, not how you feel.

Just as there are clear signs for leaving, there are also clear guidelines for not leaving and if not heeded can bring hurt and harm to everyone involved. In staying or leaving the Lord should be honored and get the glory for working all things together for good in each life. May God bless your week and pray for the Lord's will not our will to be done- (Luke11:2).

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When is it Time to Leave?

Part Five

When is it time for the pastor to leave?

(Acts 13:25) “And as John fulfilled his course,”

(Acts 13:36) For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption:

(Acts 20:24) But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

Is there a time for a pastor to leave his church, which is in the will of God and is to the best advantage for everyone involved? Is there a time for the pastor not to leave? If a pastor leaves and it's not God's will it could be hurtful for everyone involved? Let me say upfront that I've seen both and in no way can tell a pastor when or when not to leave his church, that is between him and the Lord. Pastors are to be led of the Holy Spirit and the word of God to be sure that the Lord is guiding them to stay or leave.

There is however some questions of personal integrity and honesty that a pastor may need to answer with the thought of staying or leaving. Here are four things to ponder if a pastor is just getting the itch or the Lord is truly leading to make a change.

1. Am I still qualified for pastoring? Life changes and so do pastors and their families, if one can't meet the qualification of a pastor then one needs to be honest with the Lord, himself, and others.
2. Is my ministry fulfilled in this church? Many have left too soon because of conflict or discouragement over how the church is doing. Sometimes staying is a part of God's plan to grow the pastor as well as the church.
3. Is my age or health hindering the church? There are many that can pastor up into their later years (whatever that is) and can do the ministry with a clear mind and a healthy body. But there have been some that should have considered the church and not their own personal desires. I've seen pastors in wheel chairs, living in nursing homes, in a hospital bed with hospice care, having to lay down during the morning service to rest. Sometimes it's just obvious that this is not helping the church.
4. What is my motive for staying or leaving? Is it for getting a larger ministry, better salary, a larger city, and better benefits? Nothing wrong with any of these if they are in the will of God and a church can accommodate them. It's sad but some pastors decide to stay or leave on a financial basis.

Sometimes we let what's best for me, instead of God's will and what's best for the church, to decide for us whether we stay or leave a pastorate. May God's will be our choice when it's time to leave. Many pastors just need to grow where they're planted.

Bro. Mickey

SCM