

When Should A Preacher Leave Or Should He Stay



INTRODUCTION :

A. This is a subject that is not directly addressed in the scriptures.

1. Thus, it is a matter of opinion.
2. What is true for one person may not be true for another.
3. What is true at one time or place may not be true at another.

B. Every preacher struggles with this decision at one time or another.

1. When one is asked to leave, the decision is made for him.
2. However, most often when one has to make the decision he will be ominously alone.
3. Thus, it is wise to give it some thought and set some criteria ahead of time.

Therefore, this discussion will review a few simple considerations basic to the decision.

I. Always be open to consider the possibility of the need to move.

- A. It is wise to do an annual review of one's work and include possibly moving in it.
- B. Establish quantifiable criteria for the review, not subjective evaluations.
- C. Do not approach the review being predisposed in either direction.

II. Never leave a work "in a sweat", i.e., in the heat of controversy or as a reaction.

- A. Always allow a cooling off period before making any major decision.
- B. Any move should be preceded by months of forethought, prayer and counsel.
- C. If you feel you must leave, resolve the issues first and make peace before departing.

III. Never go to a place with a view toward staying there for life.

- A. Very few men can remain sufficiently effective over a lifetime in the same place.
- B. Stay long enough to be effective.
 - 1. It takes a couple years just to learn the congregation well enough to know their needs.
 - 2. It takes years to become established in the community well enough to be effective.
- C. Don't move until you are half way through your second consecutive ineffective year.
 - 1. No work is effective that consistently has no numerical growth over time. (fruit)
 - 2. Internal growth must be observable and measureable, not just a subjective feeling.

IV. Be analytical when deciding whether or not to accept a ministry position.

- A. Lay the foundation for the decision by being open and frank when interviewing.
- B. Before accepting a pulpit, make sure your skill-set meshes with their needs.
 - 1. A position may be an excellent opportunity, but one to which a preacher is not suited.
 - 2. When beginning a work, if one realizes he has made a mistake, he should move then.
 - 3. If growth or circumstances create an incompatibility between skill-set and need, move.
- C. NEVER choose a spiritual work based upon physical considerations.
 - 1. The man of God does not choose a work based upon the salary.
 - 2. One does not move to a city just because it is a "nice place to live."
 - 3. Preacher's don't choose a work based upon the church's facility.

V. The man of God must always remember that he is a bondservant.

- A. The Master's goals and His desires always trump those of the servant.
- B. The Master has a work for every one of His servants and has given him the skills for it.
 - 1. Each servant has a different function in the kingdom. There is a right place for you.
 - 2. Thus, it is important for the preacher to be where he is convinced God wants him to be.
- C. The preacher is the primary instrument of numerical growth just as the elders are the primary instruments of spiritual growth.

VI. The preacher should always be seeking to work himself out of a job.

- A. Even if the preacher is exactly the right man when he arrives, if he is successful, he will not be the right man a few years down the road.
- B. Study and experience produces growth in the preacher so he often outgrows the congregation, especially in his early years.
 - 1. All faithful ministers of the gospel grow, but not all congregations grow.
 - 2. A preacher who just memorizes old arguments and reinforces what he already knows does not grow and the congregation where he preaches also does not grow.
- C. There will come a time when a conscientious preacher will realize he has done all he can for the congregation.
 - 1. Remember : The objective of the preacher is not to build for himself or to secure his personal future.
 - 2. It is important for the preacher to be willing to recognize his success and move on.
 - 3. Personal considerations are often in conflict with what is best for the kingdom.

VII. Sometimes the preacher just knows it's time to move on.

- A. When the preacher feels deep down within himself that it is time to move, he should.
 - 1. Don't make such a decision quickly; it may just be a case of the blues.
 - 2. Satan is never inactive; the feeling may be from him. (Pray, Pray, Pray)
- B. Even when the preacher knows he should go, it is hard for him to accept it.
 - 1. There is sometimes a feeling of failure which is hard on the preacher's ego.
 - a. Do not feel bad about having an ego. A healthy ego is essential to success.
 - b. Typically, as most public figures, preachers have a larger than average ego.
 - 2. Even when one knows he really should go, it is a hard decision to make.
- C. It's hard for a preacher to maintain his zeal for the work when he feels he should have left, but has not had the fortitude to make the decision.

VIII. The preacher must be very cautious who he confides in while struggling to make the decision.

- A. It is hard to find someone he knows who will be honest and fair with Him.

1. Wives tend to think in terms of family and seldom want to be uprooted.
 2. Friends will not want the one they love to move away.
 3. Preachers don't like to see other preachers leave. (That is sometimes self interest.)
- B.** The preacher must know the elders very well before he risks discussing with them the possibility of his making a move.
1. Some elders are wise and good counselors, but many are not.
 2. Many have such a negative response that a move becomes the only option.

IX. If a preacher decides to move, he must make sure his move does not give Satan a victory. (*real or perceived*)

- A.** It is normal for some members of any congregation to dislike their preacher.
1. The preacher must live with that reality; it is not a reason to move.
(*If a preacher does not have a thick skin, he needs to do something else.*)
 2. The ministry is not a popularity contest or an ego trip; it can be an unpopular work.
 3. The preacher cannot abandon his post in the face of most common opposition.
- B.** When troublemakers think they have run the preacher off, they are emboldened.
1. Thus, the preacher leaving can compound the problems within a congregation.
 2. Love will not allow a preacher to hurt a congregation regardless of personal feelings.
- C.** Likewise, staying can sometimes give Satan a victory.

X. The preacher should plan his departure well.

- A.** He must NEVER spring his departure on the congregation and leave quickly.
1. The preacher serves the owner of the universal church, not just a congregation.
 2. The congregation needs time to organize for life after the preacher.
- B.** A preacher should always work to make the result of his leaving as positive as possible.
1. He must make every effort to insure that his departure does not cause any to stumble.
 2. He must be considerate of those who do not want him to leave and benevolent toward those who rejoice at his departure.

C. The preacher must never throw a hand grenade over his shoulder as he exits.

1. He should view his departure as a teaching opportunity. (*Not set everyone straight.*)
2. The preacher's departure is his final sermon and can be his most effective lesson.

X. When the preacher leaves he must not look back. (*Remember Lot's wife.*)

(*One who can't walk away should not leave.*)

A. The ex-preacher should keep contact to a minimum. Let them move on.

1. This is especially important during the early months.
2. If contact is made it should be infrequent and only social.

B. After leaving, the preacher must keep his nose out of the congregation's problems.

1. Some will call the ex-preacher for advice trying to draw him into disputes.
2. Ex-preachers should refuse to listen to complaints, especially about the new preacher.

C. Let the new preacher do his job.

1. Don't try to "educate" the new preacher about the problems of the past.
2. Be helpful if called, but only if called by the new preacher.

D. When moving, it is best to move out of the area. (Church splitters sin.)

XI. The preacher is a servant of God. When fired he must act like one.

A. Leave without causing discord.

B. Be loving enough to set a lasting example.

C. Whatever the cause, when the congregation will not respond positively to the preacher, for all practical purposes, they have fired the preacher so he should leave.

Conclusion

There comes a time in the life of every preacher when he must wrestle with the lonely decision whether to go or to stay with a particular congregation. There are no hard and fast rules to guide him in this decision, but a realization that he is a bondservant of God and an application of the principles of love (godliness) will make the decision easier. When coupled with much pray, it is our sincere desire that the above considerations will be helpful in your meditations.