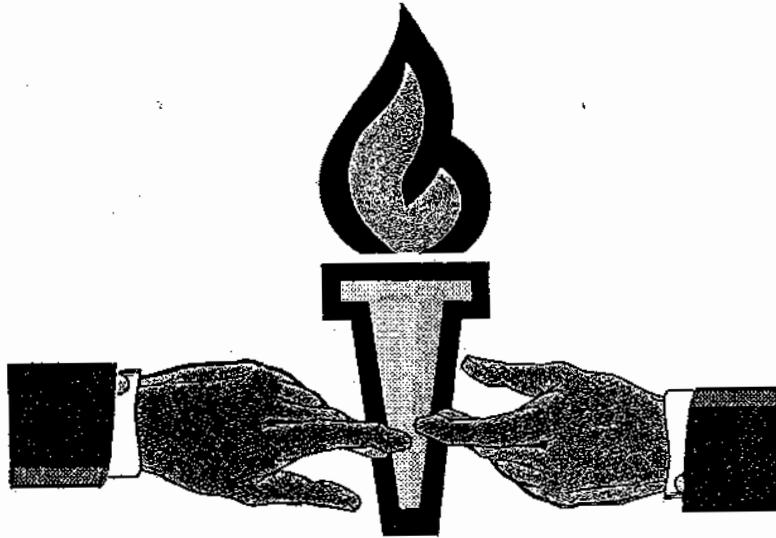


*A Must Reading for Every
Pastor and Church Member*

PASSING THE TORCH



**Changing Church Leadership
In A Changing World**

Donald H. Bowen

**Sonrise Press
Callao, Virginia**

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Dedication

This book is gratefully dedicated to my wife

Ann,

who made the sacrifices and shared every step of our journey,

and to our four children,

Donna, Angela, Jennifer and Jonathan,

who shared the journey and

made the sacrifices along with their mother.

Acknowledgments

Those who believe that the writing of a book is a solo effort apparently have never written one. And no one is more keenly aware of this than I. Some things may be done alone, but the writing of a book does not fit into that category. If I mentioned every person to whom I am indebted, the acknowledgment would be longer than the book. As with the apostle Paul, I am indebted to many people. (Romans 1:14) I am especially indebted to the following:

- ◆ To the members of the Downtown Baptist Church of Alexandria, Virginia, who gave me the privilege of serving as their pastor for thirty wonderful years.
- ◆ To the members of the Pastor Search and Transition Teams of Downtown Baptist Church, whose commitment, dedication and vision is what this book is all about.
- ◆ To Bill Mambert, Molly Wood, Bill Hooke and Wally Krein, all Downtown members, whose suggestions, corrections and red ink made the final product look much better than some of the early drafts.
- ◆ To the dear friends who gave me a computer and printer upon my retirement from the church, even though I had never used one in my life. Without their thoughtfulness this project would never have seen the light of day. They were: Hans and Karen Krein, Wally Krein, Joan Bean and Carl Hammersley.
- ◆ To Dr. Bob Perry whose counsel was so valuable to both the church and me.
- ◆ To the Virginia Baptist Foundation, whose grant helped make the publication of this book a reality and no longer a dream.

I shall forever be grateful to these, as well as all the other Barnabases along the way, who encouraged me with their kind words and the assurance of their prayers.

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FOREWORD

Don Bowen knows who he is, as a child of God, a recipient of God's Grace and Salvation, and as a minister called and gifted by God. He is a man of genuine humility, but with appropriate self-esteem and self-respect. He is a person of wonderful humor and levity, but with a strong commitment to the serious mission of the church. He is a great mentor and role model for many young ministers, as he has proven faithful and effective as a pastor, a husband and a father.

Don Bowen is one of the most transparent persons I have ever known. Those who already know him will read this book and recognize him on page after page. Those who don't know him have my assurance that what you see revealed here is precisely the real Don Bowen. There is no pretense, no exaggeration and no phoniness.

Downtown Baptist Church is an exceptional congregation. You will read the details of the quality of this church in these pages. Many of the things some churches would use to explain their failure to be effective, this church sees as challenges to be taken on and problems to be solved. It is one of the most diverse churches in the country, with many races, cultures and socio-economic groups represented every time the people gather.

Much is written these days about unhealthy church life, congregations in conflict and cynical views about the future of the church. This book tells the story of a healthy church with a healthy pastor making a healthy transition toward the future. This is the good news you had been hoping to read about a church, and it inspires the hope that God can still accomplish wonderful things through a body that is dedicated, relevant and creative.

Having worked with churches of several denominations as consultant and counselor, I have observed that three of the primary skills that determine the effectiveness of a pastor are how the minister "takes hold," how the minister "hangs on," and how the minister "lets go." You will read the story of how Don and Ann were called to Downtown and how they took hold of the opportunities. You will get a sense of how they held on regardless of the sacrifices and costs. But I think the remarkable aspect of this story may be the graceful and classy way Don and Ann let go their responsibilities with the church. Their focus was on the well-being of the church and the empowerment of their successor. The church made numerous and creative expressions of their love and appreciation for the Bowens, but they also launched a warm and embracing reception for

Dale Seley and his family. Each minister fully endorsed the attention given to the other.

You will enjoy and appreciate Don's sermons. He has included in the book many of the messages prepared and delivered during the transition process. Sermons like, "When Moses Dies" and "The Changing of the Guard" reflect Don's skill at preaching that is both biblically based and situationally relevant. His last sermon at Downtown, "The Preacher's Final Question," is a wonderful summary of the wisdom and insight gained from decades of effective life and ministry. The four "top ten lists" given by Don at the end of the book are of far greater value than any of those touted by David Letterman.

This is a book that needed to be written, and I can think of no one better than Don Bowen to write it. I had a small role in the design of the transition process for Don and Ann and for Downtown Baptist Church, but they wrote the saga of a great adventure as pastor and people. And there could be no better person to chronicle that story than the man who lived it through three decades during the last half of the Twentieth Century.

I am proud to know Don Bowen, and I am delighted that many others will now get to know him better through this book.

Bob Perry
Executive Director of Missions
Richmond Baptist Association
Richmond, Virginia

Introduction

I once heard of a church that established some unusual criteria regarding the selection of their next pastor. They did not want anyone who had studied Greek, been to the Holy Land or written a book. I guess they were familiar with some pastors who give undue emphasis to such things once they do them. I have done the first two and this is an attempt at number three.

When I resigned as pastor of the Downtown Baptist Church of Alexandria, Virginia after thirty years, we traveled a non-traditional route to secure my successor. That process and transition went so well, different people encouraged me to tell the Downtown story so as to help other pastors and churches traveling a similar road. In response to their words of encouragement *Passing the Torch* was undertaken.

The road traveled was non-traditional because the church chose to look for my successor while I was still with them. I walked with them all the way down the road, from the election of the committees involved to the arrival and installation of the new pastor. There was a brief period of time when the new pastor and I actually shared ministry in the church. The church welcomed the new pastor and said good-bye to us in a beautiful way. The transition was velvet smooth.

In a day of forced resignations and various church conflicts, what happened at Downtown needs to be shared. That is another reason *Passing the Torch* was written. I would be less than honest if I did not tell you that the effort was a labor of love. I enjoyed telling the story because it gave me the opportunity to relive it as I did so. I have many fond memories of our thirty years at Downtown, but some of my fondest memories are of my last year with the church. That is what this book is all about.

Those involved in the work of the church today realize that outdated methods and business-as-usual approaches will no longer get the job

done. We must be willing to explore new pathways; to travel some non-traditional roads. Passing the Torch is about a church that dared to take some of those risks. I would challenge other churches and pastors to do the same. If your experience comes close to what ours was you will have no regrets. In addition, our Lord will truly be honored through the process just as He was honored through what happened at Downtown.

Don Bowen
Sonrise Knoll
April, 1998

1

A Time For Everything

*“To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven.”
Ecclesiastes 3:1*

If you believe in the leadership of God, you will have little trouble understanding how my wife, Ann, and I began to feel as we neared the conclusion of thirty years of ministry with the Downtown Baptist Church of Alexandria, Virginia. We came to the decision that God was leading us to pass the torch of leadership to someone else. It was not that we wanted to leave or that the people wanted us to go. We simply came to the conclusion that God was nudging us in that direction, and experience had taught us that such nudges must never be ignored.

After more than forty years of ministry, the idea of God's leadership was not something with which we were totally unfamiliar. We had come to Alexandria thirty years before because we felt God was leading us to do so. At that time we were living in Lillington, North Carolina and serving the Lillington Baptist Church. The people in our congregation were loving and caring and always there when needed. That was good. For we went there with one child, a second was born two weeks after arrival, and two others were born during the seven years we spent there. As a young couple with small children, we needed a whole lot of loving and caring in those days.

We had just spent four years in Raleigh where the pace was a little faster and the demands somewhat greater. In Lillington I had time to study, pray and grow as a preacher. Ann had time to care for and nurture the children, thanks to the help of some people who truly did love and care for us.

Living in town was something new for both of us since we had grown up in a rural area of eastern Virginia. We both attended small schools in the days before the consolidated, county-wide schools. We were familiar with rural churches, since we had been raised in that kind of environment. During the last eighteen months of college I had served as student pastor of my home church, the Welcome Grove Baptist Church near Warsaw, Virginia. They were a trusting group of people, since they called me to serve them when I was but nineteen years old!

Following graduation from college, I felt the need to continue my education in seminary. We left our native Virginia and headed for Wake Forest, North Carolina, home of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. At the end of my first year of seminary I was called as pastor of the New Hope Baptist Church just outside of Raleigh. We remained with the church two years following graduation, arriving in Lillington in the summer of 1960. We left Virginia and went to Raleigh and then left Raleigh and went to Lillington for one reason and for one reason alone -- because we definitely felt God's leading.

After seven years in Lillington we were contacted by representatives of the Downtown Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia. Though native Virginians, we really were not very familiar with Alexandria. We knew it was near Washington, D. C.,

but that's about all. Having grown up in the country, we didn't stray too far from home in those days.

My initial contact with the church was typical of what usually happens in such situations. The pulpit committee wanted to know more about me, my family, my beliefs and my preaching. We were as open and as candid as we could be, answering all of their questions and asking quite a few ourselves.

At the invitation of the committee, we visited Alexandria and met with Downtown's leadership. Even after those meetings we were not sure what God wanted us to do. Raising four small children in a small, county-seat town in eastern North Carolina was one thing. Raising them in the Washington, D.C. area was something else. God was going to have to make His will very clear to us.

And He did. In due time the Pulpit Committee asked permission to present my name to the church as the next possible pastor. They felt God was leading them in that direction. But Ann and I had not gotten the same message. We weren't that sure. However, God has a way of revealing His will, even when we are not eager to hear what He has to say. In a way that was unmistakably clear, He let us know that Alexandria, Virginia, was, indeed, a part of His will for our lives.

Convinced that the time for us to leave Lillington had come, and convinced further that it was His will for us to go to Alexandria, we loaded our family into a station wagon and our household belongings onto a moving van, and headed north. Like Abraham of old, we were really going out without knowing where

we were going. But that was O.K. with us. Dr. Leo Greene, one of my favorite seminary professors, had taught me that “where God’s finger points, His hand provides the way.” We desperately needed to have God provide some ways for us.

For one thing, I was about to begin serving a downtown church in an urban setting with no experience whatsoever in urban ministry. In fact, I was only thirty-two years old and didn’t have a whole lot of experience in any kind of ministry. But God blessed in ways beyond our dreams or imaginations. The church grew and so did we. Our faith at times was stretched to the limits, but we became stronger as a result of those experiences. As a church we began to reach across racial, cultural, economic and educational boundaries in ministry. In due time Downtown Baptist Church became a church known for its diversity. On any given Sunday a homeless person and a congressman from Capitol Hill might worship from the same pew. Some who joined our church in those days actually drove beyond neighborhood churches to share with us. They did so because they believed in and were committed to what we were trying to do.

Being a pastor is never an easy job, given the demands made on the pastor’s time. Pastoring a multi-cultural, multi-racial congregation in the downtown area of a large city compounds that problem somewhat. But God had given me a burden for that kind of ministry and He never released me from that burden. From time to time across nearly thirty years of ministry other churches had inquired as to the possibility of our coming to serve them. For reasons I did not totally understand, God never gave me the freedom to seriously consider any of them. I was convinced that I

was where He wanted me. His time simply had not come for us to leave Alexandria.

Now, all of that was about to change. After twenty-nine years with the church, Ann and I again began to feel that nudge from the Lord to consider a change. For me personally, there were several contributing factors. For one thing, I was sixty-two years old. Though healthy and very active, I felt the church was facing challenges that would require some creative and innovative programs and ministries in the days ahead. I further believed that anyone initiating those programs needed to make at least a three to five year commitment to see them through. I didn't know how my health would be that far down the road.

A second factor for me had to do with my attendance at the first Promise Keepers Rally in Washington in 1996. I heard the testimony of Bill McCartney, founder of Promise Keepers. He told how he resigned as head football coach at the University of Colorado after the team won a national championship. He did so, he explained, because he had spent most of his life pursuing *his* career and dreams. He felt it was time to give some consideration to the dreams of his wife. Though Ann had been the true helpmeet throughout my ministry, she had sacrificed a lot and spent a lot of nights at home alone. Were there ways for us to serve the Lord that would change that? The question was one I could not easily dismiss from my mind.

A third factor had to do with that burden God had placed upon my heart for ministry in the city. He did not release me from it, but He did ease it somewhat by reminding me that He could place that burden on someone else's heart just as He had placed it upon

mine. If He had called us to Down7town, could He not also call someone else to pick up the reins of leadership?

Convinced that He could, and convinced further that His timing had come for us to consider passing the torch to a successor, we still had a couple of missing pieces as far as our puzzle was concerned. When would we actually pass that torch? What was the best way to let the church know about our decision? The decision to leave a church might be easy for some preachers, but we had spent twenty-nine years with these people and had invested the major part of our lives with them. You just don't pull up stakes one day and say "Good-bye."

As we tried to give honest thought and prayer to the matter, God gave us peace as to His time. In the summer of 1997 we would conclude thirty years of ministry with the church. In addition, I would have reached my sixty-third birthday at that time. This seemed to be the time to which God pointed us. The only question remaining was when and how to share our decision with the people. That's when we decided to seek counsel from some folks we loved and deeply respected.

2

“A Multitude Of Counselors”

*“Where there is no counsel the people fail,
But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.”
Proverbs 11:14*

Having arrived at the decision that God’s time for us to pass the torch to a successor was about a year down the road, the question uppermost in our minds had to do with the appropriate manner and time to share this with the congregation. Most churches require the pastor to give at least four weeks notice before his departure. Our situation was somewhat different because I was not going to another church. I was going to retire from the active pastorate as I had known it at Downtown Baptist Church. Simply giving the four weeks notice almost seemed unfair, given the fact that we had shared twenty- nine years with these people. More time was needed to prepare for the transition.

Believing, as the author of Proverbs expressed it, that there is, indeed, “safety in the multitude of counselors,” we decided to seek counsel from some folks we deeply loved and respected. So we called together a representative group of church leaders and shared with them the decision to which we had come; that in about one year we felt we should pass the torch of leadership to someone else. The question on which we needed their counsel and advice had to do once again with timing. When should we share this decision with the congregation? Should we wait until a short time before our departure, as is so often done? Following lengthy discussion, it was the consensus of the group that we should go

ahead and share our decision with the congregation. There were two contributing factors in that decision. First, they felt we should do so because it would be next to impossible to keep the matter a secret for the next ten to twelve months. Second, they felt this would give the church time to begin the process of looking for my successor. We were familiar with situations where this process often took from twelve to twenty-four months. We didn't want to see that happen at Downtown.

Convinced that we had heard from God through the collective wisdom of His people, I asked but one thing of those present that evening; that they not share this information with anyone until we personally had the opportunity to prepare and share our decision with the congregation. Having spent twenty-nine years with these people, we wanted to be honest and didn't want anyone to get some grapevine information. When the people heard anything I wanted them to hear from me -- firsthand!

Finding the time to properly prepare and share this information was not easy. I had some commitments that took me out of town for several weeks. I did not want to inform the congregation and then leave town. When the word got out, I wanted to be there to answer any questions that might arise.

As soon as I had the time, I wrote the first draft of a letter of intent to the congregation of the Downtown Baptist Church. Interestingly enough, that letter was changed very little in the days to come. What I shared with them is as follows:

June 17, 1996

The Church Family
Downtown Baptist Church
212 S. Washington Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Friends in Christ:

Our initial contact with Downtown Baptist Church came 29 years ago through a phone call from E. V. Buschman, chairman of the church's Pulpit Committee. One thing led to another with the end result being the invitation to come and serve as your pastor. Thoroughly convinced that God had expressed His will through that invitation, we moved our then-young family to Alexandria. Little did we realize that the next 29 years of our lives would be spent serving our Lord and His people in a place we have come to love so dearly.

Believing that God has once again revealed His will, this is to inform the church of my intention to resign as pastor in August of 1997. At that time I will reach 63 years of age and we will have completed 30 years of ministry.

Some may wonder why such a lengthy advance notice and I will try to explain as briefly as I can.

In today's world, it is not uncommon for a Baptist church to spend 12, 18 or 24 months looking for a pastor. Wanting to prevent this if at all possible, I shared my "summer of 1997" intentions with the Deacons and the Personnel Committee. We consulted with Dr. Bob Perry, Executive Director of the Mt. Vernon Baptist Association. As a result of all this, the decision was made to proceed with the advance notice. Better to be honest and upfront with everyone than to have people wondering what was going on.

According to Dr. Perry, the "ideal situation" would be to secure a new pastor and even have an overlapping tenure of service. Nothing would please my heart more than to know that God's man was "in place" even before I was "out of place." Begin now to pray for God's leadership and direction in every decision made.

You will note that I did not use the word "retire" in sharing these plans. As long as my health allows I hope I will always be able to serve the Lord. Many opportunities for such service are available in interim pastorates, supply preaching, revival meetings, etc. A lot of "retirees" I know are busier than ever!

You need to realize that this decision was made with no pressure from any person or group. It was a decision to which Ann and I came over a year ago. We thought it only fair to share it first with those we have come to care so much about. To answer any questions, a special "congregational gathering" will be held this coming Sunday, June 23, at 6:00 p.m. to help explain and interpret all of this. In the meantime, pray for God's leadership and direction in all areas. It has been a personal privilege to serve as your pastor for the past 29 years. My prayer is that this last year will be the most fruitful and enjoyable of all

Yours and His,

Proverbs 3:5-6.

The response of the people was one of mixed emotions. Most expressed sadness that we would be leaving, but at the same time, they understood and were glad that Ann and I would have a little more time together in the days to come. They knew we had shared our lives with them for twenty-nine years. They didn't feel it was right to hold on to us when we felt God leading in another direction. They were glad for us and whatever the Lord might have in store for us in the days to come.

With the cards now on the table, we decided the time for additional counsel had come. Dr. Robert Perry, Executive Director for the Mt. Vernon Baptist Association, was one familiar with our situation. He was a wise and godly man who understood well local churches and the needs of their pastors. We had already received some wise counsel from him and believed that he would be able to help us again. We trusted his judgment and knew he would suggest what he felt was best for the church and its departing pastor.

Dr. Perry shared with us a plan he had developed for another church where the pastor was leaving after a long tenure. The ideal situation, he advised, would be for the church to proceed with the replacement process, secure a successor, and if possible, actually have a time of overlap in ministry. The new minister would fade in as I faded out. He was honest enough to warn us that such a plan required an unusual church and two unusual ministers. I saw no problem. Downtown, I knew, was an unusual church. I, too, had been accused by some of being unusual, and I knew it would take an unusual person to come to Downtown. I felt comfortable with the proposal. With God's help, the church would try to find my replacement while I was still around.

Dr. Perry's plan was unique in that it called for two committees instead of the usual pulpit committee: a Transition and a Pastor Search Committee. Each would have a clearly-defined task. The Transition Committee would monitor and manage the process from beginning to end. The Pastor Search Committee would seek and recommend to the church the person they felt was God's choice as the next pastor.

Believing that the two-team plan was, indeed, a workable one as far as the church was concerned, we presented it to the church, and it was accepted with slight modification. The church decided to call them teams instead of committees. The task ahead was a joint effort that would require the support and involvement of the entire church body. The team concept seemed to be a more fitting one for Downtown Baptist Church.

When Ann and I needed help as far as our decision was concerned, we turned to and received the same from trusted friends. When the church needed help with the decisions facing them, they turned to and received help from those with expertise and wisdom in these areas. When the congregation needed help in working out some of the details, they shared ideas and thoughts in a mature and orderly fashion. Collective wisdom seemed to work well. In all of this God had once again fulfilled His promise. In the multitude of counselors there was, indeed, safety. The next step was to select those to serve on these important committees. With little experience over the past thirty years, the church felt it needed to be *very* careful in this process.

3

Choosing The Teams

*“And the Lord spoke to Moses saying,
Send them to spy out the land of Canaan which I am giving to
the children of Israel;
From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man,
everyone a leader among them.”
Numbers 13:1-2*

Churches with a congregational form of government usually put the staff selection process in the hands of the people. This can be risky, since people can misread a situation or be unduly swayed by influential leaders. But it also can be a healthy and growing process because it tends to give people ownership and a sense of involvement. Also, generally speaking, when you put something in the hands of a group of sincere, intelligent people doing their best and seeking God’s will, you will rarely go wrong, and will wind up with good decisions and actions.

This is precisely how it turned out at Downtown Baptist Church. Dr. Perry’s two-team approach was presented to the congregation, with a plan for choosing those who would serve on each team. Every effort was made to show the importance of these two bodies and that in a real sense the future of the church was in their hands. Clearly, this was not a time for church politics or factionalism, but one calling for spiritual maturity and reason. Personal goals and agendas must be set aside.

Since the Pastor Search Team would be the one to eventually recommend a new pastor to the church, extra effort was made to make sure its membership was representative of the church as a whole. Among other things, members of the team needed to reflect the diversity of the congregation. It should not be all Deacons, all men, all Sunday School teachers, or all anything. It must be a team whose members represented and reflected Downtown Baptist Church.

To ensure that representative make-up, we used a two-step selection process. The first step involved a church-wide nomination. Every member of the congregation was given the opportunity to nominate the persons of their choice. From the twenty top nominees, the four people receiving the largest number of votes automatically became members of the Pastor Search Team. A special committee was appointed to fill the remaining five slots from the next sixteen persons on the original list.

The result of all this was that the church ended up with a nine-member team that was truly representative of the church. All who were nominated agreed to serve, even though most of them had never served on such a group before. They seemed to feel God was calling them through the voices of His people.

The same spirit prevailed when it came to the selection of the Transition Team. Although this team didn't need to be as representative as the Pastor Search Team, it did need people without any axes to grind or personal agendas to fill. It needed people who had a heart for the church and a mind for the orderly process. Again, the members chosen met those criteria.

In all of my years of ministry I don't recall working with two groups more determined to seek, find and do the will of God. Although the task before them was a new one for most of them, they went about it in an orderly and professional manner. At no time was there the slightest hint of a personal agenda or anything else. They were determined to do the job they felt called to do, and from the beginning were determined to find and do the will of God.

One of the first steps taken was one that involved both teams. They needed to know what the church really wanted in a new pastor and the best way to get this information was in a realistic congregational survey. The Pastor Search Team would develop the survey. The Transition Team would administer it and catalogue the results.

In a very deliberate manner the Pastor Search Team developed the kind of survey they felt would provide them the information they would need in choosing a pastor. They received excellent help from Dr. Robert Wayne's *Guidebook for Pastor Search Committees*. Since the team was looking for more than yes or no answers, they developed a survey that gave the congregation opportunity to express their true feelings and opinions; to share what they *really* felt and thought. (See sample.) To make sure they received the best response, they asked the Transition Team to take the survey on a Sunday morning when most of the people would be present.

With ample publicity, the survey was taken. Copies were shared in advance with the congregation to give the people adequate time to think about their answers. There was a good

response and the information shared became a valuable tool for the Pastor Search team in the days ahead. From the answers, it was evident that the people had given serious thought to their responses. I truly believe that churches choosing a pastor would do well to develop and take a similar survey. It may not answer all of the questions raised, but it will provide members of the congregation opportunity to express themselves as far as the selection of a new pastor is concerned. And this, I believe, is a very important link in the chain.

Having recognized the value of a good survey, the Pastor Search Team and the church also realized that any survey should be a guideline and not a plumbline. At all times, there must be the freedom to follow the leadership of God's Spirit, regardless of survey results. Otherwise we rule out that leadership.

With the survey taken, the Pastor Search Team was now ready to get on with the business of actually seeking and finding God's choice for a pastor. They were fully aware of the huge task they faced; one that would require the very best each of them was able to bring to it. They had heard the horror stories told by other committees, and wanted to avoid those at all costs.

CHURCHWIDE SURVEY

Prepared and Presented

by the

Pastor Search Team

and the

Transition Team

Downtown Baptist Church

Alexandria, Virginia

Pastor Selection Team Questionnaire

This questionnaire is an effort to help your Pastor Selection Team understand the desires of the congregation as they search for a new pastor. Your prayerful response to the following questions is desired:

I. PASTORAL FUNCTION

1. Consider this list of typical activities of a pastor. In thinking of our church's pastor, our church needs, and its programs, on which of the activities should our pastor ideally spend the most time and the least time?

- (1) Preparing sermons
- (2) Visiting church members
- (3) Counseling, advising individuals
- (4) Attending meetings of functions of the church
- (5) Visiting prospective church members
- (6) Management of staff and administration
- (7) Denominational service (Association, state, SBC)
- (8) Personal evangelism, soul winning
- (9) Personal care and family concerns
- (10) Personal Prayer and devotion

Mark response to question #1 here

On which three should the pastor spend the **most** time?

On which three should the pastor spend the **least** time?

2. How important to you is each pastoral function below? Mark "1" if you think it is extremely important, "3" if you think it is unimportant; "2" if you estimate it is in between.

Mark one choice for each of the following items		1	2	3
1	Teaches and works directly with adults in adult religious education classes and/or special seminar series			
2	Participates in community programs and organizations (such as school boards, PTA, other community projects)			
3	Ministers to the sick, dying and bereaved			
4	Leads public worship			
5	Works with congregational boards and committees			
6	Oversees church office activities, church publications, correspondence, church records, etc			
7	Accepts invitations to speak to community and civic groups, special community occasions or on radio or television			
8	Tries to maintain harmony and resolve conflict among church members concerning church programs, finances, elections, etc.			
9	Visits prospects and new members			
10	Works well with children, presents children's sermons, visits children's departments of Sunday School			
11	Cooperates with social service and charitable programs; assists victims of neglect			
12	Teaches and works directly with young people in classes, Vacation Bible School, and/or fellowships			
13	Conducts weddings, does pre-marital counseling			
14	Conducts funerals and follow-up visitation			
15	Leads financial drives and budget promotion			
16	Counsels with individuals about their spiritual development, religious life, and beliefs			
17	Participates in denominational activities and conferences			
18	Keeps the congregation informed about denominational programs			
19	Helps to plan church budget and manage church finances			
20	Leads the congregation in setting objectives & planning overall church strategy & programs			
21	Involves capable people in church activities, recruits, trains, and assists lay leadership			
22	Visits regularly in homes of the congregation			
23	Counsels people facing major decisions of life, such as divorce, job change, personal crises			

II. PERSONAL PROFILE

Assuming that the candidates functional abilities seem favorable, what would you like in our next pastor?

1. AGE/EXPERIENCE: Select one from each category

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Age should not be a factor | <input type="checkbox"/> Years of experience is not a factor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 30 | <input type="checkbox"/> 0-5 years experience |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 30-39 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 years experience |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 40-49 | <input type="checkbox"/> 11-15 years experience |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 50-59 | <input type="checkbox"/> 16-20 years experience |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 60-up | <input type="checkbox"/> 21 or more years experience |

2. EDUCATION: What preference, if any do you have regarding the formal education beyond high school? Check one.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Formal education should not be a factor | <input type="checkbox"/> At least a Bachelor's Degree from college |
| <input type="checkbox"/> At least a Masters Degree from Seminary | <input type="checkbox"/> Doctor of Ministry or Ph.D. from Seminary |

3. What is your particular preference for our new pastor regarding marital status?

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Married __Yes __No | <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced __Yes __No | <input type="checkbox"/> Remarried __Yes __No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single __Yes __No | <input type="checkbox"/> Should not matter | |

4. In light of the present issues in the Southern Baptist Convention, do you prefer that our new pastor be:

1. Fundamentalist __ 2. Conservation __ 3. Moderate __ 4. Liberal __ 5. No Opinion __

5. What style preaching do you like best? (Check all that apply)

1. Evangelistic __ 2. Scholarly __ 3. Topical __ 4. Expository __ 5. No Preference __

III. GENERAL COMMENTS

1. Do you have any other suggestions you would like to make to the Pastor Selection Team concerning the new pastor or any other issue?

2. Do you know someone you would like to recommend to the Pastor Selection Team as our next pastor?

Candidate(s) _____

3. It would help your committee to understand and evaluate this survey if you would answer the following:

Your age bracket: (Check one)

- Youth 15-20 21-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 60 and up

Involvement: (Check all that apply)

- Sunday School Member Church Member Regular Visitor Other

Note: This form will be filled out during the Sunday School hour on Sunday, November 17. If you cannot be present but would like to share your input, please fill out this form and mail or bring it to the church office. The deadline for returning your survey is Sunday, November 24. For your convenience, our Fax number is 703/549-6465.

Thank you and pray for those involved in the pastor selection process.

4

Doing Things Decently And In Order

“For God is not the author of confusion but of peace ...”

“Let all things be done decently and in order.”

1 Corinthians 14:33, 40

Every church member should have the opportunity serve on a Pastor Search Team at least once to better understand the time, effort, energy and sacrifice that go into such a task. Downtown Baptist Church was very fortunate in that their Pastor Search Team was not only representative, but responsible and made up of people with gifts in so many areas. Officially, there were seven members of the committee with two alternates. The committee decided early on that the alternates should be involved in the entire process. This, I believe was a wise decision, since both alternates had volunteered to serve in that capacity even though they were high on the list in the nomination process. Their unselfishness reflected the sacrificial spirit that would prevail within the committee in the days to come.

When the team was elected, the church did not designate a chairman or any of the other officers. They felt that the members of the team should decide such matters. They did so and chose the following:

- ◆ Chairman: A competent and respected retired Army colonel who was now in a second career.

- ◆ Vice-chairman: Another second career man with credentials similar to those of the chairman.
- ◆ Secretary: An executive with the local airport authority

Other members of the team were as follows:

- ◆ A retired school teacher who had been a member of the church many years.
- ◆ A young mother who left a highly-paid political position in government to be at home with her child.
- ◆ A self-employed business man who had been very successful in private industry.
- ◆ A woman who held a senior executive position with the Federal government.
- ◆ A scientist with a Ph.D., who also held a senior executive position with the government.

In other words, these were not “yes” people unafraid to express an opinion. Everyone of them was experienced and competent, strong in their faith, unselfish in manner, submissive to the will of the body, and open to the leadership of God.

As retiring pastor, I offered to be a resource person to the committee as long as they felt I might be needed. I also made it clear that I was willing to step aside any time they wished me to do so. The team invited me to meet with them, feeling that I might be of some help to them in the early stages of their proceedings. I

was glad they did so for one reason above all others. I saw first-hand how God worked in the hearts and lives of those who made up the team. I saw how individual members of a group can become an objective and unified body with a single purpose. At no time did they abandon their individual ideas or opinions, but they did come to the place where the consensus was more important than individual wills. Truly, they became one in the Spirit.

The team decided to follow the traditional route as they pursued the task before them. They contacted seminaries and Baptist state conventions as they solicited resumes. They asked the congregation for any suggestions or nominees they might have and treated them just like all the others they received. They were determined to leave no stone unturned as they searched for the person God had in store for them. From the very beginning they were convinced God already had that person chosen. It was their responsibility to find out who *God's choice* was.

In due time the resumes began to come in. They ultimately would total one hundred and thirty-five. With the weekly arrival of more resumes, the more aware team members became of the superhuman task before them. How would they ever know when God's choice appeared before them?

The chairman was determined to do things decently and in order. He used his military background and expertise as he approached the assignment before them and led the committee to develop a matrix to be used in narrowing the long list. Team members would be given about twenty resumes at a time, would prayerfully evaluate each one, and then rank their choices. When

they came together for their meetings, they would list their choices on the matrix. It was amazing to me to see how there came to be such a meeting of minds. From time to time someone would list a high choice with which no one else agreed. Most of the time their conclusions were similar. This was encouraging to them, for it showed them that God can reveal His will through the collective wisdom of His people.

This process was time consuming. Meeting every week, it took several months to evaluate all of the resumes. They were determined, however, not to rush. The task at hand was too important for a rush job.

To keep themselves on track and the congregation informed, the team used a flow chart shared by Dr. Perry. This was posted in a prominent place and proved to be a valuable tool to team and congregation alike.

The team also tried to keep the congregation informed in other ways. There were periodic articles in the church newsletter and regular reports to the congregation during the business sessions of the church. They wanted the congregation to realize that some things must be kept confidential, but that they would do their best to keep everyone informed. The congregation seemed comfortable with this, especially in the early part of the process. As we got closer to the summer of '97, they wanted to know if the process was on schedule.

Keeping the congregation informed, I believe, is an important step in the process. Most congregations are very trusting of those to whom they assign responsibilities. The one thing they don't

want is surprises. They don't want to feel that anyone is trying to sneak something in or to pull something over on them. The Pastor Search Team leaned over backwards to avoid such impressions. That, I believe, was one of the reasons the nominee of their choice would be received so favorably. The people felt they were receiving a report from a group of people who had been honest with them all the way along.

Although I repeated my offer to step aside any time the team wished me to do so, they asked me to remain with them. In the latter stages I mostly sat and observed and never tried to influence or sway them in any particular way. I was familiar with some other horror stories, stories of pastors who tried to hand-pick their successor and I wasn't about to become involved in anything like that.

After untold hours in the process, the team ended up with a short-list of six names of possible candidates. All looked good on paper. Which one would eventually rise to the top as their candidate of choice?

The team also decided that they would not travel all over the country to hear candidates preach. There were reasons for such a decision. For one thing, modern technology allows us to do things that don't require a lot of travel or face-to-face meetings. Second, they realized there was more to being a pastor than preaching a sermon. There would be a time and place for that.

Through prearranged conference calls, the team interviewed each candidate on the short list. Most interviews lasted from one to two hours. Before each interview, committee members were

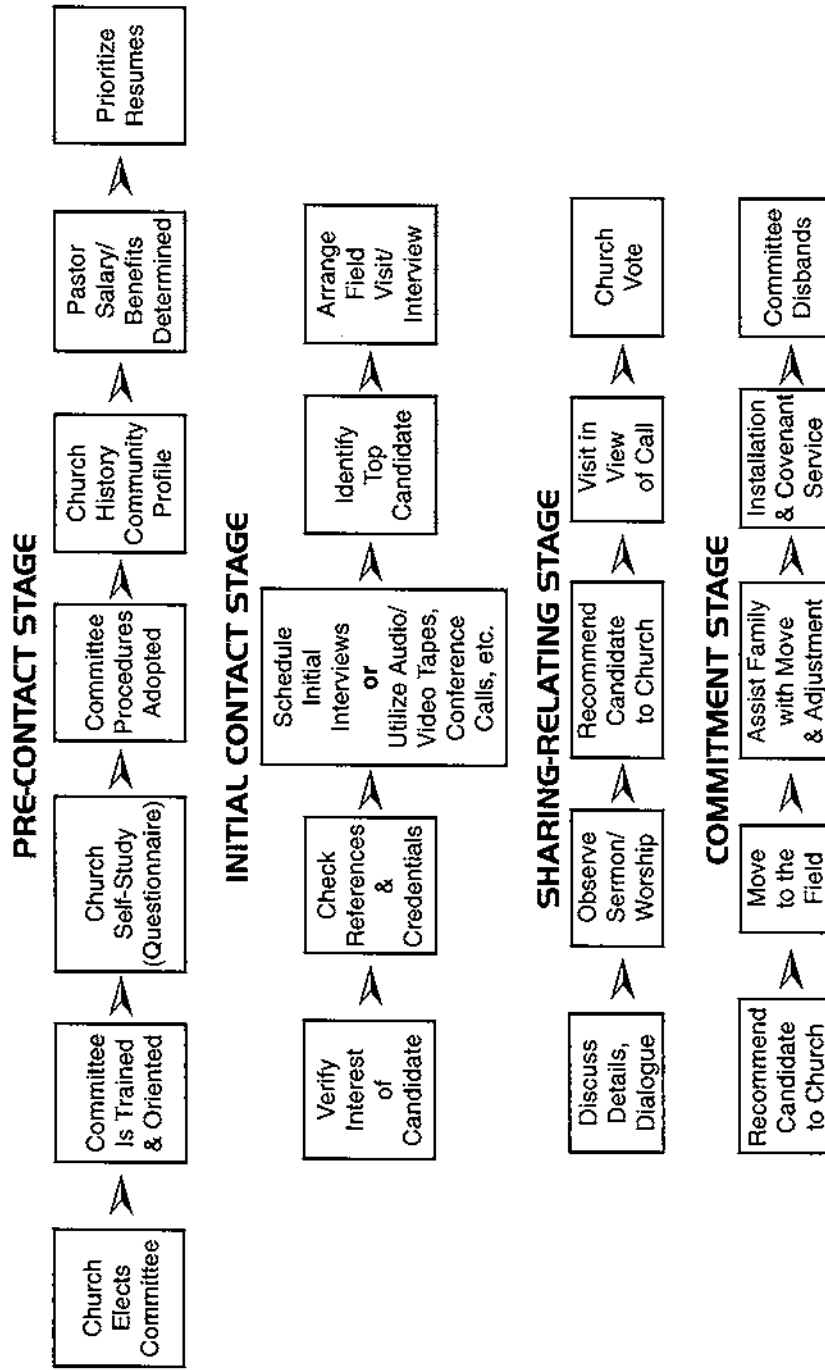
assigned specific questions to ask. This was not a shoot from the lip time where everyone asked whatever happened to pop into their minds. The interviews were deliberate and therefore quite fruitful.

Because the team was so deliberate in their approach, it took several weeks to interview all of the candidates. The time, however, was not wasted. For one thing it provided the team opportunity to talk with potential candidates for the first time. For months they had been shuffling papers while reading resumes. At last some of the resumes were beginning to take on life.

That was the good news. The bad news was that they received negative responses from every candidate, and it looked like they would soon be back to square one. Or did God have something totally different in mind? That's what they were about to find out.

FLOW CHART TO MONITOR PROGRESS

This is the flow chart (actual size was larger) that was conspicuously posted to keep the congregation informed. Progress was graphically highlighted as the selection process progressed.



5

Jesse's Other Son

*“And Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Are all the young men here?’
Then he said, ‘There remains yet the youngest,
and there he is, keeping the sheep.’”*

1 Samuel 16:11

The biblical story of the choosing and anointing of David as God’s successor to King Saul is a beautiful story and a good illustration of the way God led our team. God revealed to the prophet Samuel that he, Samuel, would find Saul’s successor among the sons of Jesse. Acting on what knowledge he had, Samuel went to Bethlehem to the home of Jesse and asked that all seven of his sons be brought before him. One by one they were marched in. Each time God said to him, “The Lord has not chosen this one.”

After the seven sons had appeared before him, none of whom received a positive response from God, Samuel asked Jesse if he had any other sons. Jesse said he did have one other, the youngest of them all, but that he was taking care of the sheep. Samuel asked that he too be brought in. In response to the request, young David appeared before him. He was “ruddy, with bright eyes and good looking.” As soon as Samuel laid eyes on David he knew he had laid eyes on God’s man. “Arise, and anoint him,” God said to Samuel, “for this is the one!”

What happened with the Pastor Search Team of the Downtown Baptist Church was not quite that dramatic, but almost. Very late in the game, as they were in the process of preparing their short list, another resume surfaced -- number one hundred and thirty-six. It did not come from a seminary or a Baptist state convention

office. It was requested of the individual involved after a series of rather unusual events. One of our Downtown families had family members in Charlotte, North Carolina who were members of a Baptist church there. When visiting with family in Charlotte, they attended the church and were especially impressed with one of the associate pastors. His name was shared during a casual conversation. Since we had former Downtown members in the Charlotte church, we inquired further and decided to request the associate pastor's resume.

As soon as the team members saw the resume something happened among them. With the majority, all other choices immediately became second choices. They were reading things they had not read on any of the other resumes. The format itself was different. It was not cold and statistical as were so many of the others. After reading the resume you felt as if you knew the person who had written it. The committee wanted to know more about number one hundred and thirty-six.

The initial response from "Jesse's other son" was not favorable. He was an associate minister on the staff of a large church in Charlotte, North Carolina. The church had just completed a new \$14 million complex and they were preparing to move into their new facilities. He had been with the church for ten years and was happy in his job situation. Besides, they had a teenage daughter who would be a junior in high school in the fall. This was not a good time to think about moving. He asked that his name be removed from consideration by the team.

Up to this point the team had received other negative responses, but they felt comfortable with them. Such was not the case as far as this "other son" was concerned. They knew they had received *his* response. They weren't quite sure they had gotten *God's* response on the matter. So convinced, they decided to ask if they might at least have an interview with him by way of a

conference call. He could remain in his living room in Charlotte and talk with them.

Interestingly enough, he agreed to the interview even though he told them he was still in a negative mode. The interview went well, extremely well. After it was over, the team was more convinced than ever that “Jesse’s other son” was indeed God’s choice for Downtown Baptist Church. Some of the members were so sure of this they stopped thinking about any of the others. As a body, they seemed to be waiting for God to do whatever He needed to do.

The team decided that the candidate needed to come to Alexandria to see Downtown Baptist Church for himself. No picture or profile does it justice. One must see it to really understand what the church is all about. Without any public notice, the candidate and his family were invited to Alexandria for a weekend. They would see the community and visit the church on Sunday so as to experience the services, but the congregation would not be informed of their presence. The time for public announcements had not yet arrived.

The family came for their weekend visit. They visited Sunday School and the worship service. They saw the church for what it was. No effort was made to present a false picture. Anyone coming to Downtown needed to know who and what Downtown was.

By the time the family arrived back in Charlotte they were convinced that God had revealed and confirmed His will. They were *not* to go to Alexandria! And that was the message relayed to a disappointed Pastor Search Team. However, the team was not so easily convinced. Too many things had happened to convince them that “Jesse’s other son” was God’s choice for the church. They would pray and wait on God. The time they spent doing so proved to be one of the most valuable things they did. For one

thing, it taught them that no time is lost for those who wait upon God.

This time of waiting also gave God chance to work in the heart of the candidate. In all honesty, there was no logical reason that he should uproot his family and bring them to Alexandria. He was happily involved in a great church in North Carolina with a future brighter than ever before. Why should he even consider a change at this time?

There was, of course, but one correct answer to that question -- because God said to do so! Though there was no logical reason for them to come to Alexandria, there was a not-so-logical reason to do so -- because God revealed this as His will for them!

And those who want to be used by God must be obedient to Him. "Jesse's other son" was willing to pursue the matter further until God closed the door one way or another.

Having received this encouraging word from the candidate of their choice, the next step was to invite the family back to Alexandria for a full-fledged show and tell. They would come, meet with a lot of people, be present for a town hall meeting of the church and the candidate would preach during the worship service. One week later the church would vote on the recommendation of the Pastor Search Team -- that the Rev. Dale Seley of Charlotte, North Carolina, be extended the call to become the fifth pastor of Downtown Baptist Church!

To prepare the congregation for the vote they were about to take, a special congregational meeting was called by the Pastor Search Team. They wanted the opportunity to share their personal testimonies as to how they had individually arrived at their decisions.

That meeting was called and all nine members of the team were present. The church responded in like fashion with a large group of the people present. One by one the members of the Pastor Search Team shared their personal testimonies, not one of whom had been told in advance what he or she needed to say. They were simply to open their hearts and share what was there. What the people expected to hear, I do not know. What they heard was nine people sharing how, through the evident leadership of God, they had come to their respective decisions. Some confessed that the nominee had not always been their first choice. God, however, had revealed otherwise. The team was unanimously presenting Pastor Seley as their nominee!

In over 40 years of ministry I have attended and participated in many church meetings. I have experienced high and moving moments in worship. I have felt God's presence at other times. I had never been in a meeting, however, where I sensed more the evident presence of God's Spirit than I felt in that testimonial meeting. I was so convinced that I asked at the conclusion that we not distract from the spirit of the hour with lengthy questions or discussion. I asked that we pray, go home and digest what we had experienced. And that's what we did.

One week following the visit of Pastor Seley, the church was given the opportunity to express their own opinions in a congregational vote. Their vote overwhelmingly reflected the decision to which the Pastor Search Committee had already come - - the congregation also wanted "Jesse's other son" to be their pastor! With their vote, Rev. Dale Seley became the pastor-elect of Downtown Baptist Church.

The vote to call a pastor is much like a dam across a river. No "water" can go downstream until that vote is taken. The Seleys, for example, owned a home in Charlotte, but they could not sell it until they received word of an affirmative vote from the church in Alexandria. And they could not buy a home in Alexandria until

they sold the one in Charlotte. Since we were now in mid-June, some things needed to happen and happen fast if everything was going to be in place by the summer of '97.

In the weeks that followed I believe that God simply confirmed some things that had already taken place. The Seleys' house in North Carolina sold in a remarkably brief period of time. Some would even say in such a brief period of time it appeared to be a miracle. They looked for and found a house in the Alexandria area, one that made it possible for their daughter Carla to attend the high school of her choice. There remained one other problem - - Mary Susan Seley's employment. She was a teacher and needed to be employed as soon as possible. When the schools opened in September she was under contract to teach in one of the neighborhood schools! God had once again come through.

All of this meant that the new pastor and his family would be on the scene sometime in August. More than a year before, we had set the month of August as the month of overlap for the new minister and myself. We missed our target by two weeks, since the Seley family actually moved to Alexandria in mid-August. This, I believe, was but further confirmation of God's leadership and blessing. All the pieces of the puzzle were falling perfectly into place.

6

Preparing The Church For Transition

*“After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord,
it came to pass that the Lord spoke to Joshua ... saying:
‘Moses My servant is dead, Now therefore arise,
go over this Jordan ...’”*

Joshua 1:1

The letter of intent with which we notified the congregation of our plans for the future was dated June 17, 1996. The vote to call the new pastor was taken on June 15, 1997 -- exactly one year later. Although the people knew a year in advance of our pending departure, I did not spend the year making constant reference to it. If it came up in a discussion, others brought it up. This was not an oversight on my part, but by deliberate design. I did not want to play on the people's emotions. I went about my job as normally as possible.

But the summer of '97 was now upon us. The calling and arrival of a new pastor was no longer a matter of speculation. It was about to become actual fact. Having ignored the fact of our departure for almost a year, I decided it was now time for me to do what I could to help prepare the church for transition. I had a little over a month to do so. How would I go about it?

I decided the church needed to hear some things from me as the outgoing pastor; things that would help prepare them for the arrival of the new pastor. One of the best forums for accomplishing this, I felt, was in sermons and informal

discussions. I preached several sermons with this goal in mind and led a series of Sunday evening discussions on the same topic.

One of the first sermons I preached was designed to help the church deal with upcoming change. I entitled it, "**When Moses Dies,**" a message based on the transition that followed the death of Moses when the mantle of leadership fell upon the broad shoulders of his successor, Joshua. (Joshua 1:1-9) In the message I shared some rather basic principles regarding change. They were:

- 1) **Life for all of us is filled with change.** We can resist it and be miserable; endure it and be half-happy; or accept it as a part of life and make the most of it. I encouraged them to do the latter.
- 2) **When life's changes come they nearly always bring uncertainty and even anxiety.** It's quite normal to feel these emotions, we simply must not let them dominate our thinking.
- 3) **The changes of life come, but God's work goes on.** It happened that way when Moses died and Joshua assumed command. And it happened because the work was not Moses' or Joshua's, but God's.
- 4) **In the midst of change God assures us of His presence.** He made that crystal-clear to Joshua following the death of Moses.
- 5) **Change is the time for faith and courage on the part of God's people.** That's how the people responded following

the death of Moses. As they had heeded Moses, even so did they promise to heed Joshua.

I assured the people that I wasn't Moses and I didn't think I was dead, but that we all would do well to learn the lessons and apply the principles as set forth when Moses died.

I followed that message with a second sermon entitled, "**The Changing of the Guard.**" Everyone in our community was very familiar with the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. Most of all, they were familiar with how the guard was changed in a velvet-smooth manner. That was the kind of transition we needed. I, once again tried to point out the principles evident in that transition:

- 1) **The guards change, but the One in charge doesn't.** At Arlington, there was an officer somewhere behind the scenes. For us, our Commanding Officer was the Lord Himself! Pastors would change; the One in charge would remain the same.
- 2) **The guards may change, but the task as assigned remains.** The guards at the tomb change constantly; the task assigned never does. They are always to guard the tomb! The same is true of the arrival of a new pastor. The task of the church remains the same -- to carry out the Great Commission!
- 3) **The greatest danger facing the guards at the Tomb is distractions;** e.g., children getting under the ropes, sweat getting in the eyes, a pretty or handsome face in the crowd.

With the arrival of a new pastor we too faced the danger of being distracted; for example, by comparing pastors; by being loyal to a certain person instead of to the Lord; and by having a negative spirit.

I challenged the people to profit from what happens at Arlington Cemetery every day as they change the guard.

The messages, I believe, were well received. The people seemed to appreciate the fact that I was doing everything I could to ensure a smooth and orderly transition. We too could change the guard in a velvet-smooth manner.

In addition to the sermons on Sunday morning, I led a series of Sunday evening discussions which I felt were even more profitable because I was able to deal with some very practical matters in such a setting. The titles of the first three sessions were as follows:

(1) Profile of the Ideal Pastor

or

If I Could Choose My Successor, What Would He Look Like

(2) Profile of the Ideal Church

or

*The Kind of Church I Would Like to Turn Over to My
Successor*

(3) Profile of the Ideal Church Member

or

*The Kind of Church Member Every Pastor Deserves
(And Would Like to Have)*

After thirty years with these people, I felt free to share anything I wanted with them. What I said also seemed to be well-received. A complete outline of those first three sessions are herewith included.

The beautiful part of this complete endeavor was that I was there to walk with the people as they traveled the road before them. For some of them, especially some of the senior members, the road could be one of uncertainty. I had been their pastor for thirty years, during which time I had lived through many of their crises, joys and sorrows, and buried many of their loved ones. There was, indeed, a tie that bound us and that was not easily broken. I tried in every way I knew to make the entire process as painless as possible. From what some said to me along the way, I do believe I was able to be helpful.

For more than a year these people had been aware of our personal plans for the summer of '97 and that we were rapidly moving toward that magic date. The many different pieces of the puzzle were almost into place. We had but a few remaining pieces to go before the entire puzzle was complete. The hour had arrived to do this.

(1) Profile Of The Ideal Pastor
or
If I Could Choose My Successor,
What Would He look Like?

THE IDEAL PASTOR IS ONE WHO:

1) Truly Knows and Walks With God

It may seem a little awkward to say that any pastor should “truly know God,” but the evidence demands that such a statement be made, for we sometimes hear of preachers being converted after they have been preaching for some years. Some seem to know a lot about God, but do not seem to know Him in a personal way.

But knowing God personally is only part of the requirement. The pastor must also be one who walks with and has intimate fellowship with Him. Only those who walk with God will have a message from God to share with the people. Enoch was such a man and the scriptures single him out as a man who “walked with God.” (Genesis 5:22)

2) Has A Clear Sense of A Divine Call

People enter the ministry for different reasons, but only one reason will truly suffice -- a call from God! Amos experienced such a call and expressed it this way: “The Lord took me as I followed the sheep” (Amos 7:15). Isaiah had his temple vision (Isaiah 6:1-9) and Paul had his Damascus Road experience (Acts 9:1-9). Both were taken, as was Amos. And life was never the same thereafter. The minister without this call from God will often quit when the going gets tough. The preacher must know, as the old spiritual suggests, that the “Lord has laid His hand on me.”

3) Believes, Lives, Preaches and Teaches the Word of God

The preacher must believe that the Bible is, indeed, the Word of God and must live a life consistent with its message. The preacher must

practice what is preached or there will be no one to preach to. In addition, the truth of that Word must be proclaimed. The newscaster can *inform* the people of world events. The preacher needs to *proclaim* the Word of God. Styles and methods may vary, but the message must be biblically based. This is God's ordained method for saving a lost world. (1 Corinthians 1:21)

4) *Is Devoted To The Family*

Regardless of the honors received, the minister who fails to be a godly spouse or parent has failed in a most important aspect of the ministry. Regrettably, families are often sacrificed on the altar of ministerial success. Family must be a priority in the life of the ideal pastor.

5) *Understands the Biblical Role of Pastoral Leadership*

The biblical example most often used in describing the pastor is the example of the **shepherd**. Our Lord used this example in reference to Himself and we would do well to follow His example (John 10:1-18). Some pastors become dictators instead of shepherds and their churches often suffer the consequences. The shepherd-pastor fulfills the biblical role.

6) *Has the Heart of A Shepherd... the Vision of A Prophet ... the Spirit of A Servant*

The **shepherd-pastor** would do well to read Psalm 23 and see what it says about the relationship of the shepherd to the sheep. The **prophet-pastor** would do well to read the Old Testament prophets and hear how they called their people to righteousness. The **servant-pastor** would do well to linger long at the feet of Jesus for He showed us what servanthood was all about.

7) *Is Willing to Be Both Prophet and Priest*

As a **prophet**, the pastor speaks out against the evils of the day, even those that are popular and acceptable. As **priest**, the pastor will sit with the people as did Ezekiel (Ezekiel 3:15) so as to feel their hurts

and their pains. Only as a pastor is willing to be a priest among the people will that pastor be a prophet to the people.

8) *Realizes the Importance of Being a Prepared Messenger*

A long time ago I was told that the prepared messenger is more important than the prepared message. I have come to see the truth of this. The most eloquent sermon in the world is but “sounding brass and tinkling cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1) if the pastor’s own heart is not right with God.

9) *Is Able to Relate To and Identify with Everyone*

This was a trademark of our Lord. He could relate to the big-wigs of His day, but was able to identify with those who were down and out as well. The pastor who is effective in ministry must be able to do the same. No person or group must be beyond the pastor’s circle of love or ministry.

10) *Has A Concern for Those Outside the Church*

Missions and evangelism must be a priority in the pastor’s life if ministry is to be effective. While serving the church, the pastor must always have a world view. Without it the church will become self-centered and visionless. And that’s a mark of death! (Proverbs 29:18)

(2) Profile Of The Ideal Church
or
**The Kind of Church I Would Like to
Turn Over to My Successor**

THE IDEAL CHURCH IS THE CHURCH WHERE:

1) *Jesus Christ Is Truly Lord of All*

We often say the church is the Lord's, but this is not always the case. Some pastors think the church belongs to them, as do some deacon bodies. When Jesus is truly Lord we will seek His will, not our own. Years ago a delivery man came to Downtown and asked to see the one who "ran the church." I told him the Lord ran it, and asked if he wanted to see Him? He replied, "No, I just want to deliver these flowers." We would do well to ask, "Who really runs the church?" An honest answer might surprise some.

2) *The Members are Really Tuned In to God*

To do God's will, those who make up the church must be tuned in to God. This means they must talk to, listen to and hear from God. Only as they do so will the Lord be honored and His will done. Care must be exercised for there are other voices to be heard and they are not from God. A tuned in church will hear from God!

3) *The Church Is Open To and Reaches Out To Everyone*

Most churches would say they are open to everyone, but they make no effort to reach out to everyone. Churches sometimes practice selective evangelism where the focus of their outreach is to those like themselves. To be biblical, outreach must be all-inclusive.

4) *The Members Are Participators and Not Spectators*

Modern Christianity has become a spectator sport where many sit on the sidelines to watch the professionals do their thing. Such an approach will never produce a healthy church. For the body (the

church) to be healthy, every part of the body must function according to its designed purpose. (1 Corinthians 12:12-31)

5) *Spiritual Gifts Are Deployed In Kingdom Service*

This is simply a step beyond number four. In the ideal church the members express ministry through the use of their spiritual gifts. Service is expressed in the area of one's spiritual gifts, not in an area where one is ungifted and therefore out of place. Thanks to the efforts of some, we do seem to be making some progress in this area, but most churches still have a long way to go.

6) *The Members Disagree Without Becoming Disagreeable*

Because churches are made up of individual members with varying opinions and ideas, there will be ample opportunities for disagreement. It is a sign of spiritual maturity when those members do so without becoming disagreeable in the process.

7) *The Members Are Receptive To the New and the Untried*

Few things hinder a church more than an unwillingness to try new methods for doing kingdom work. Ralph Neighbor spoke prophetically when he said, "The seven last words of the church are, 'We've never done it this way before.'" One of the most difficult things to do in a church is to abandon outdated ideas and programs when they are no longer effective. We let things die, but don't want to bury them.

8) *The Great Commission Is Taken Seriously*

Most churches quote the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), but far too few take it as seriously as they should. If they did, it would be reflected in a greater emphasis on missions and evangelism. As with the early disciples, we too must "go, make disciples, baptize and teach." This is not optional; it is a mandate!

9) *KOINONIA Is More Than A Greek Word*

KOINONIA is the beautiful Greek word for fellowship, but it means more than pot-luck dinners in the fellowship hall. It

describes the church where the members truly care for one another and express it. KOINONIA was expressed in the early church where they “had all things common.” (Acts 2:43) The modern church needs what they had!

10) The Main Thing Remains the Main Thing

Some years ago someone gave me a plaque with this inscription:

“The Main Thing Is To Make Sure
That The Main Thing Is
The Main Thing”

Many churches lose effectiveness because they lose sight of the main thing. They get sidetracked on secondary issues and fail to keep first things first. In the ideal church, the main thing remains the main thing!

(3) Profile Of The Ideal Church Member
or
The Kind of Church Member Every Pastor Deserves
(And Would Like To Have)

THE IDEAL CHURCH MEMBER IS ONE WHO:

1) *Is Loyal To Jesus As Lord of Life*

Some church members are loyal to the pastor, but when the pastor leaves the loyalty disappears. When our loyalty is to Jesus as Lord we will remain constant and committed, "in season and out of season." (2 Timothy 4:2)

2) *Takes Commitment to the Church Seriously*

If some church members were as unfaithful at work as they are at church they would be fired before the end of the month. Attendance and participation are optional with so many. They will attend if nothing else is on the agenda. Church is not taken seriously.

3) *Is Receptive To The Leadership Of God*

Some church members seem to have their own agendas and the will of God is but an afterthought. Individual plans preclude God's plans and make His leadership impossible. The ideal church member is open to and receptive to the leadership of God.

4) *Is Open-Minded To New Ideas/New Ways*

The message we share is constant and remains unchanged; the methods for sharing it constantly change. We see this in music, teaching styles and even in preaching styles. Those who are close-minded to new ideas or methods often hinder the church in its mission.

5) *Seeks the Well-Being Of the Body Above All Else*

The apostle Paul spent a lot of time talking about the way the different parts of the body (the church) were dependent upon one

another. (1 Corinthians 12:12-31) For the sake of the body personal desires and agendas must be set aside. The Bible says nothing about Lone Ranger Christians.

6) *Refuses To Be A Party To Things That Disrupt*

Though I wish it were otherwise, the church is not immune to politics. Carnal church members use political methods to further their causes; to have their way. Those who lead in these efforts try to recruit others -- especially influential leaders -- for their cause. The ideal church member refuses to be a party to such efforts.

7) *Has A Positive Attitude/Outlook*

We don't have to be immoral to hinder the work of God. Negative church members will accomplish the same purpose. The bad thing about negativism is that it is contagious. One negative church member can hinder the Lord's work in more ways than we can even imagine. The ideal church member is positive in attitude and outlook. That too is contagious.

8) *Allows Others To Make Mistakes or Fail*

Because the church is made up of human beings, there always will be mistakes and failures. Some, it seems, are unable to overlook or forget mistakes made by others. Like the Pharisees of old, they can see the specks in the eyes of others, but are unable to see the beams in their own eyes. (Matthew 7:3) They never forget the mistakes of others and never see their own. The ideal church member allows others to make mistakes, especially those in leadership roles.

9) *Supports and Prays for the Pastor*

Church members and pastors do not always agree on everything. But disagreement should not prevent church members from supporting and praying for their pastor. If more of this were done, maybe there would be fewer areas of disagreement.

10) *Is Childlike, But Never Childish*

Our Lord told us about the children in the marketplace who were childish in their behavior. If they didn't have their way, they would take their little red wagons and go home. (cf. Matthew 11:16-17) That's being childish. Paul challenged his readers to become mature. (Ephesians 4:14-15) To be childlike is to be Christlike. To be childish is to be immature. The ideal church member is childlike in behavior and attitude, never childish.

7

The Torch Is Passed

*“And it came to pass ... that Elijah went
with Elisha from Gilgal.”*
“... and Elijah went up into heaven by a whirlwind.”
*“And Elisha saw it ... (and) he also took up
the mantle of Elisha...”*
2 Kings 2:1, 11, 13

When we arrived in Alexandria in the summer of 1967, I doubt that we thought very much about how long we would be there. I doubt that the members of the church gave a whole lot of thought to the matter either. I further doubt that any of us thought we would still be there thirty years later. The journey that began on the first Sunday in August, 1967 was about to come to a close. On Sunday, August 17, 1997, the Rev. Dale Seley was installed as the fifth pastor of Downtown Baptist Church.

The installation service was unique in that I, the retiring pastor, was there to lead it. I presided and preached a sermon with a two-fold challenge. In the first part of the message I placed a challenge before the church. I charged the people to:

- 1) **Love their pastor.** They were capable of doing that for they had loved us for 30 years.
- 2) **Listen to their pastor.** They needed to hear and to heed what he had to say to them. They would become a better people if they did so.

- 3) **Lift-up the pastor.** They could do so by praying for, encouraging and following him.

Having charged the church, I then placed a charge before the new pastor. Borrowing from what Paul said to young Timothy in 2 Timothy 4, I charged him to:

- 1) **Preach the Word.** That needs to be done for it alone is the “power of God unto salvation.” (Romans 1:16)
- 2) **Fulfill your ministry.** Borrowing from Kenneth Taylor’s paraphrase, I explained the meaning of Paul’s words: “To leave nothing undone that you ought to do.”
- 3) **Be diligent and faithful.** We all need to do so because the Lord Himself is our judge in these matters. (2 Tim. 4:1)

Having had my say, I stepped aside and Pastor Dale Seley stepped to the pulpit to respond to the challenge. With his arrival at the pulpit the torch was officially passed. After thirty years and seventeen days, I was no longer the pastor of the Downtown Baptist Church. We, of course, didn’t leave town that afternoon for there were still some very important things on the agenda. From that point on, however, things would be different. The time had come for me to begin fading out as Pastor Seley faded in.

Some may question the wisdom of an arrangement where the outgoing and incoming pastors are both present at the same time. As I look back on the situation, I believe the presence of both of us in those concluding weeks had a stabilizing effect on the congregation. It did something for the people to see the both of us,

the old and the new, standing side by side, assuring the people by our presence that the torch could be passed in an orderly fashion.

With the torch passed to my successor, there remained but one final item on the agenda -- **CELEBRATION!** In our fondest dreams we could hardly imagine how wonderful it would be.



Lines In Pleasant Places

*“The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places;
Yes, I have a good inheritance.”*

Psalm 16:6

With the new pastor now on board, the work of the Transition Team took on greater importance. Months prior to our actual departure they had to lock in some dates for events they wanted to have. Not knowing at the time when the new pastor would arrive or when we would leave, they decided to have a farewell banquet for us on Saturday, August 23. The following Sunday, August 24, would be our farewell Sunday when I would preach my final sermon as the pastor of the church. When those dates were set we had no way of knowing how perfectly this would all fall into place.

As these dates approached, a lot of people worked feverishly behind the scenes. I was aware that meetings were being held and plans were being made, but I was not aware of the details. In all honesty, I really didn't want to know.

During our years in Alexandria, the church and I tried to be a part of the community. We believed that we were to bloom where we were planted, and that God had planted us in the downtown area of the city. We had participated in community events, hosted community prayer breakfasts and tried to reach out to the community of which we were a part. I was a friend to City Council, having had the invocation at their meetings on numerous occasions.

Aware of all of this, friends at the church contacted the city officials to make them aware of our coming departure from the city. Council decided to issue an official proclamation in recognition of our thirty years of ministry in the community. Ann and I were invited to the regular meeting on June 24, 1997, at which time the proclamation was read and a copy given to us. The local *Gazette Packet* sent a reporter for an interview and a lengthy article came out in the paper shortly after that.

I still do not know who was responsible for these things happening. I just know I was humbled by the whole thing. I was also deeply grateful to those who helped bring it to pass.

Another surprise came a few days later when I was contacted by the chaplain's office of the U.S. House of Representatives wanting to know if I could deliver the invocation to open the session on July 31, 1997. It was an unusual request in that such things are usually planned months in advance. Only later did I find out the details.

Congressman Roger Wicker of Mississippi had visited our church on the previous Sunday evening, at which time he found out about our upcoming departure. His visit was not a total surprise since he had visited on previous occasions. Once back in his office, Congressman Wicker contacted Congressman James Moran, who represented our area of Virginia. Congressman Moran contacted the chaplain's office, and thus the invitation. The honor was one we least expected.

The Transition Team was responsible for everything having to do with the transition between the new pastor and myself. Although I met with them a few times early in the process, I did not spend much time with them, since much of what they did had to do with our departure. As with the Pastor Search Team, the Transition Team comprised some very capable people. I didn't know what they were going to do, but I did know that whatever they did would be done well. The crown jewel in the effort was the farewell banquet on Saturday evening, August 23.

Arrangements were made to have the banquet at the local Ramada Inn, one of the few places they felt would have ample seating for the event. I must admit I wasn't quite as optimistic as they were. Going first class, they mailed out beautifully embossed invitations to the members and friends of Downtown Baptist Church. The response, once again, was very humbling for my family and me. We had former staff and church members who came hundreds of miles, business leaders in the community, friends from other churches, a member of the State Legislature and the local City Council, including the Mayor -- they were all there. Members of our families were honored guests. Once again I was humbled by the whole thing.

The evening included some official presentations to my wife and me. The Deacons presented us with an engraved proclamation declaring me Pastor Emeritus of the church. The Transition Team had prepared a Book of Letters from friends and acquaintances across the years. A beautiful Book of Remembrance contained pictures of people and events. Kind words were shared by Mrs. Patsy Ticer, a member of the Virginia State Legislature and former mayor of Alexandria, by Mayor Kerry Donley and by Dr. Robert

Perry, now former Executive Director of the Mt. Vernon Baptist Association. The loudest applause came following the comments of our son Jonathan, who spoke as the official family representative. To top off the evening, the church presented us with a beautiful piece of furniture for our retirement home and a most generous retirement check. The Transition Team had worked hard to make the entire evening a first-class event and I don't believe anyone was disappointed. We shall always be indebted to them and the entire church for such an expression of love.

The following Sunday, August 24, 1997, was our official Farewell Sunday. Pastor Dale Seley would preside and I would preach my last sermon as pastor. The church was filled to capacity. I made out fine until two of our grandchildren, Sarah and Bethany McKinney, sang; something they had done on numerous occasions, since they were both members of Downtown. This occasion, however, was quite different and it became a very emotional moment for me. When the time came for the sermon I walked to the pulpit and preached on the topic, "**The Preacher's Final Question.**" I had few problems because I never looked in the direction where Ann, my children and their spouses, grandchildren, brothers and sister-in-law were all sitting. The Lord added His own crown jewel to that service when six people joined the church. What a way to conclude a thirty-year ministry. My cup truly ran over!

Following the service there was a beautiful reception for our family. As on other occasions, the Transition Team and those who assisted them went all out to make this extra special, in spite of the fact that they had just produced a similar reception for Pastor Seley on his arrival the week before.

Although the official events were over, we still had one Sunday remaining with the church. Pastor Seley and I decided we wanted it to be upbeat and celebrative in nature. We had a baptismal service for several candidates and a parent-child dedication service for babies born in recent months. We concluded the hour with a communion service with Pastor Seley and myself jointly leading it. For me, this too was one of the high moments of recent weeks. I was glad for everything done for us, but I was especially glad to know that the new pastor was on board before I left. That was an answer to prayer; a dream come true.

Some friends had been kind enough to invite us to lunch following that service. After lunch we returned to our apartment, loaded a few remaining belongings in the car and left Alexandria -- thirty years and thirty-one days after we arrived. As we drove across the Woodrow Wilson Bridge I breathed a prayer of thanksgiving. I was grateful to God that the torch had, indeed, been passed in a velvet-smooth manner.

9

“The Preacher’s Final Question”

Exodus 3:1-13

*(My final sermon as pastor of Downtown Baptist Church,
preached on August 24, 1997)*

Our journey began over 30 years ago, on the first Sunday in August 1967. Add that up and it amounts to 1,560 Sundays. Multiply that by two, which is the average number of times I’ve preached each Sunday, and you come up with 3,120 sermons. If each sermon averages 30 minutes in length, that amounts to 1,560 hours of preaching. If you made one continuous sermon out of that it would be *65 days* long!

Needless to say, that’s a lot of preaching and that’s a lot of listening. And some of you have heard most of that 65-day sermon. My only hope is that you have enjoyed and profited from listening as much as I have enjoyed sharing with you.

But all of that is now history. We come today to my last official sermon as pastor of the Downtown Baptist Church. On the surface you might think this would be the easiest sermon of all. Indeed, I found the exact opposite to be true. I found it to be one of the most difficult of all.

For one thing, what more could I possibly say to you that I have not already said? If I haven’t gotten the message across the

first 3,000 times, I doubt seriously that I'll be able to get the message across today.

In all honesty, I found myself wrestling with the very same question Moses wrestled with at the burning bush a long time ago. As he stood barefooted before God and that bush afire, God told him He wanted him to go back to Egypt as the deliverer of His people. Moses, you will recall, was hesitant about undertaking such a superhuman task. Among other things, he wanted to know what he would say should the people ask who sent him back to Egypt. "If they ask me your name," Moses asked, "what shall I say to them?" (Exodus 3:13) That's the very same question I've been wrestling with over these recent weeks. When I come to my final sermon, what am I going to say to you?

One thing for sure, I don't want to waste your time or mine rehashing some of the emotionally draining experiences we've shared over these past 30 years. So the question remains: On this final Sunday, what shall I say to you?

A strong believer in the biblical example, I decided to see what others had said on the occasion of their farewell. As I looked into this, I was amazed and blessed by the things others said on similar occasions. I could not possibly tell you about all of them, unless you want another 65-day sermon, so I have chosen a few that are representative. Hopefully, the Lord will have a word for all of us at some point or other.

Life Includes Choices -- Make the Right Ones

First of all, I want you to consider the farewell words of the very same man who raised the question at the burning bush. I am talking, of course, about God's man, Moses. At the age of eighty, he returned to Egypt and God used him in a mighty way to deliver the people. Once out of Egypt, they headed toward the Promised Land. They got to the doorsteps but neither Moses nor any of the other adults ever entered. Moses didn't make it because of his disobedience, and the people didn't make it because of their lack of faith.

But Moses did spend forty years of his life with the people, most of the time wandering aimlessly in the desert. As that period came to an end, Moses called the people together for some final words of wisdom. Those words you will find recorded in the closing chapters of the book of Deuteronomy. I would call your attention to a summarizing statement as found in verse 19 of chapter 30:

"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life that both you and your descendants may live." (Deuteronomy 30:19)

The full impact of these words doesn't come through until you realize they were spoken by a man one hundred and twenty years old. Forty of those years he spent in Egypt as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter; forty he spent in Midian tending sheep for his father-in-law; and forty he spent in the wilderness leading a crowd of grumbling, complaining people.

But all of that was now behind him. Moses was about to die and a new generation under Joshua's leadership was about to enter the Promised Land. Wanting to leave them with words of guidance, as well as words of challenge, Moses presented them with a challenge, which can be summed up in one simple statement:

Life is filled with choices -- make the right ones.

The days ahead, Moses reminded them, would be filled with choices. Two roads were stretched out before them, one leading to life, the other leading to death; one leading to blessing, the other to a curse. Never one to leave the people in a quandary, Moses said to them:

"In the light of all of this, choose life!"

"Choose God and God's way. Go with God. There may be other ways that seem inviting and even right, but those other roads lead to death. Choose God ... and choose life!"

You want to know something? The same choice that the people of Moses faced many years ago is the same choice you and I face today. Before us there are two roads also. One leads to life; the other to death. One leads to blessing; the other to a curse. Oh, that we might make the right choice. Oh, that we might choose life.

One of the regrets that I have about the past thirty years -- one of the burdens that I carry in my heart as we leave -- is that I apparently have not been able to convince some to make the right

choice. I have not been able to get some to choose life. For whatever reason or reasons, I have not been able to convince you that the “Jesus way” is the best way and that you ought to make Jesus your choice. Even in saying that, I am aware that I can’t persuade or convince anyone of anything. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit does use human instruments in His work.

If you wonder what it means to choose life, you need but read verse twenty of Deuteronomy thirty. Choosing life, Moses said to the people, involved three things: loving the Lord God, obeying His commandments and clinging to Him.

Choosing life, he said, meant to **love God**. Most of us would like to say that we do that. What we sometimes fail to realize is that for those of us on this side of Bethlehem we cannot really love God and ignore His Son, Jesus Christ. We prove our love for God when we open our hearts to His Son, Jesus.

In addition, Moses said that choosing life meant **obeying God** as well. “Obey His voice” is the way Moses put it to the people. Again, most of us would like to think that we obey God. That is not true, however, if we deliberately do that which is contrary to His will as revealed in His Word. To choose life, we must do what He asks us to do.

But that was not all. In addition to loving and obeying God, Moses said that life also involved **clinging to God**. In other words, we are not to be so casual and nonchalant in our commitment to God. If we’re going to go with God, we need to get with it! “Cling to God,” Moses said. Don’t let go, no matter

what. Don't just invite God aboard your ship, let Him be the Captain. Cling to the Lord!

What shall I say to you in this final sermon? The very same thing Moses said to his people in his final sermon a long time ago.

“Life involves choices ... make the right ones. Before you there are two roads, one leading to life, the other to death; one leading to blessing, the other to cursing. Therefore, choose God ... and choose life. And that means loving, obeying and clinging to Him.”

That's what Moses said to his people in his final words to them, and that's what I say to you. May someone hearing these words choose God -- and life -- today!

Life Is Filled With Opportunities -- Take Them!

Moses was not the only one of God's servants to share a farewell message with his people. The apostle Paul did the very same thing. He, in fact, had several farewells because he went to so many different places and knew so many people. I would call attention to but one of those farewells, the one with which we are most familiar.

In 2 Timothy 4 we have the account of Paul's farewell words to his young friend, Timothy. He expressed his farewell in these words:

“Timothy, I am now ready to be offered for the time of my departure is at hand,” and he was talking about his own death.

Continuing, he added:

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:6-7)

As a result, he concluded, there was a crown of righteousness awaiting him, the same kind of crown God has waiting for all His faithful servants.

Having said all of this, Paul adds some final words in verse 9:

“Timothy,” he added, “be diligent to come to me quickly.”

The urgency of his request was even more explicit in verse 21 where he said:

“Do your best to come before winter.”

Paul at the time was in jail in Rome. He wanted his books and some warmer clothing. Thus his admonition to Timothy:

“Timothy, I have something I want you to do, but you must act quickly. If you wait it will be too late for the shipping lanes will close for the winter. If you are going to come to see me, do it now!”

Let me translate this for you in a way that all of us can understand:

Life is filled with opportunities -- make the best of them!

Paul admonished Timothy to act quickly for delay would be very costly. If he delayed until spring, Paul might be dead by then. What he needed to do, he needed to do expeditiously.

Life is like that for every single one of us. Doors and windows of opportunity open before us. If we fail to enter the doors or take advantage of the opportunities, they may not be there again. Life includes opportunities -- we need to take them.

The trouble with so many of us is that we are masters of the art of procrastination. We live by the philosophy: Never do today what you can put off until tomorrow. And we apply this principle at work, at home and in so many areas of life. We even apply it when it comes to spiritual values as well.

- ◆ “I know I should visit my unchurched neighbor, but ...”
- ◆ “I know I should visit that shut-in, but I’ll do it later.”
- ◆ “I know I should write that note or make that call, but I’m so busy.”
- ◆ “I know I should give my heart to Jesus... maybe next Sunday or next year.”

Let me give you a specific example. Awhile ago I mentioned the fact that there are those I have not been able to win to the Lord or to convince of their need for Jesus. This means, of course, that they are lost and shall remain so until and unless they come to the Lord.

Want to know something? Not one single one of them plans to do that. There is not a single lost person under the sound of my voice who plans to remain that way. Every single one plans to come to the Lord ... but someday, some tomorrow. But tomorrow, as you well know, never gets here. Tomorrow is always that -- tomorrow!

Is there a message for us in Paul's farewell word to Timothy? There is and the word is this:

Life is filled with opportunities, with open doors and times for doing the right thing. When those doors swing open and the opportunities come, we need to take advantage of them. Why? Because the doors may close and the opportunities may no longer be there.

That's what Paul said to Timothy and that's what I say to you.

Life is filled with opportunities --- take them when they come your way.

Life Is Filled With Needs -- Meet Them!

To the farewell words of Moses and Paul I would like to add the farewell words of One other, the farewell words of our Lord

Himself. Final words are always cherished words and that's especially true as far as our Lord is concerned. He said so many wonderful things while here on earth. But what were His final words?

As you might expect, His final words were addressed to His disciples, to those nearest and dearest to Him. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record the words for us. Luke, in fact, gives us an additional account in the second chapter of Acts. Basically what our Lord said in His final words was this:

“There is a world out there that desperately needs the good news. I want you to share that good news with them. You will not be able to do that in your own strength. You will need a strength beyond your own strength; a power beyond your own power. You will need ‘Holy Ghost power’ to do what I’m asking you to do. Once you receive that power, go ... and do what I’m asking you to do.”

Or as Luke so eloquently expressed it: “You are witnesses of these things.” (Lk. 24:48)

Is there a way to summarize the farewell words of our Lord even as we summarized the others? There is and this is the way I would do so:

Life is filled with needs -- meet them.

To say that life is filled with needs is an understatement if ever I have made one. All around us there are people with needs. There are those who are sad and those who are lonely, those who

are hurt and those who are hungry, those who are down-and-out and those who are up-and-out, some with broken bones and some with broken hearts. They all, however, have one thing in common -- they all need someone to help them meet their need. The question and the challenge facing us is a rather simple one: Will we dare to let them continue on in their pain and hurt, or will we reach out to them in the name of Jesus? Will we pass them by, as did the priest and the Levite on the Jericho Road, or will we go to them and minister to their needs as did the despised Samaritan? Our Lord answers that question for us.

“You have no choice if you follow Me. As my Father has sent Me, so send I you! You are My witnesses in the midst of these needs!”

To do what He is asking us to do will require of us the same thing required of those early disciples. We, too, will need Holy Spirit power to do the job. And that power comes to us the same way it came to them -- as we submit to His rule in our lives, and seek His face and in-filling. That's when the power will come and that's when we will be able to meet the needs that almost seem to overwhelm us. We must simply make ourselves available to God so that His Spirit and power may flow through us. That's when we become the channels of blessing of which the song writer wrote.

Life is, indeed, filled with so many needs and God wants us to help meet them.

The Answer to the "Final Question"

After thirty years and one month of traveling together, we come to the last leg of our journey. After over 3,000 sermons, we come to this last one. Moses' question at the burning bush is our question this morning: "What shall I say to you?"

What I say to you is what Moses said to his people a long time ago --

Life is filled with choices -- make the right ones. Choose life over death, blessing over cursing, God over anyone or anything. And that means loving, obeying and clinging to Him. Have you made that choice?

What Paul said to Timothy is what I say to you --

Life is filled with opportunities -- make the best of them. If you wait, the door of opportunity may close. What you plan to do for the Lord and others -- do now. Winter is on the way and then it will be too late.

What our Lord said to His disciples is what I say to you --

Life is filled with needs -- meet those needs. And the greatest need of all for some is their need for Jesus. Share His love. Make yourself available for Holy Spirit power. Let God work through you to meet those needs.

What I say to you today is what I've been trying to say for the past 30 years.

- ◆ Make the right choices.
- ◆ Take advantage of your opportunities
- ◆ Strive to meet the needs of those around you.

And this, my dear friends, is this preacher's final word to you.

10

Postscript

"Finally my brethren ..."

Philippians 3:1

With the process now behind us, some may wonder as to the real value of the plan followed by Downtown Baptist Church in its transition. If you had to do it over, would you do it that way again? Are the plan and process followed at Downtown Baptist Church one you would recommend to other churches?

The plan definitely is one I would recommend to other churches under certain conditions. You realize, of course, that such a plan would not work in a situation where a pastor resigns to take another pastorate. For rather obvious reasons there cannot be a year's advance notice. But in situations where the pastor may be retiring or under some other special conditions, the plan, I believe, is not only workable, but worthwhile. It does require, as Dr. Bob Perry told us, "an unusual church and two unusual ministers."

As with any other process, there were some weak points and possibly some risks involved. It was, however, a good plan for Downtown Baptist Church for the following reasons:

- ◆ It prevented the long period without a pastor which some churches experience. Some churches may be able to handle that without any problem. Downtown, I believe, would have suffered during such a time.
- ◆ The arrival of the new pastor before my departure had a stabilizing effect on the congregation. It did something for the people to have both of us there for awhile sharing in

ministry. This was especially true, I believe, on my last Sunday with the church when the new pastor and I led the communion service.

- ◆ It provided the church with an opportunity to prove that there could be transition without conflict. Though the new pastor and I were total strangers to each other beforehand, the church saw him celebrating with them at our farewell banquet and saw me celebrating with him at his installation. To my knowledge, there was never the slightest hint of jealousy or competition between the two of us. This, I believe, was a blessing to them.

Some may wonder about the effectiveness of a lame duck pastor who announces his resignation-retirement an entire year in advance. Can one be productive in ministry and effective in leadership under these conditions? Others may differ with my conclusion, but I honestly feel that some of my most productive work was done during this final year. There was no lapse in ministry effort, attendance, finances or in any other way. This, I believe, was due partly to the fact that I did not make constant reference to our departure. I went about my job while trying to keep things as normal as possible.

While saying what I have said about the process we followed, I do not want to leave the impression that this was something we pulled off. More than anyone, I am aware that what happened at Downtown was not man made. In His infinite wisdom and mercy God saw fit to bless us as He did for reasons I shall never fully understand. All I can do is thank and praise Him for what He did and share that with others along the way. That's why I've written this book; so that others may see how God can indeed be glorified when the torch is passed.

11

Addenda

Elsewhere in the book you will find reference to a series of Sunday evening sessions I shared with the congregation as I tried to prepare them for the transition awaiting them. Several of those sessions were designed to help prepare the church for the arrival of a new pastor, something many of them had never experienced. Out of those early sessions, several others evolved, in which I simply shared some things that were on my heart, some things I thought would be helpful as well. Topics included are as follows:

(1) Ten Things Every Flock Owes Its Shepherd

or

Ten Things Every Church Member Owes
the Shepherd Who Serves them

(2) Ten Things The Shepherd Owes the Flock

or

Ten Things Every Congregation Has A Right
To Expect of Its Pastor

(3) Thirty Years of Wisdom in Ten Words

or

Ten Words of Advice to My Successor

(4) If I had My Ministry To Live Over

or

What I Would Do the Second Time Around

As you read through the outlines, please remember that the words were prepared and spoken by a pastor who was trying not to be particularly profound, but simply trying to help his people through the transition awaiting them. They were not intended to be sermons, but heart-to-heart talks between a pastor and his people. I encourage young pastors or pastors in transition to take special note of some of the things said. They are not out of a book, but out of my heart; out of forty-plus years as a pastor. For the one needing it, there may be a helpful word somewhere.

ADDENDUM - I

Ten Things Every Flock Owes Its Shepherd
or
Ten Things Every Church Member Owes
the Pastor Who Serves Them

CHURCH MEMBERS OWE THE PASTOR:

1) *The Opportunity “to Be”*

The fishbowl lifestyle of the pastor is a well-known. Because of this, many pastors are never able to truly be themselves. They seem to feel that they must fit the mold that others have prepared for them. This is unfortunate for it prevents creativity and hinders productivity. Pastors need the freedom to be the persons God created them to be.

2) *The Opportunity to Become Pastor*

Churches call pastors to preach to them and that can be done the first Sunday on the job. The preacher must earn the right to become pastor. This, of course, takes time, in most cases, years. No wonder some preachers never become pastors. They don't stay long enough to win the confidence and trust of the people. Let your preacher become your pastor!

3) *The Pleasure of A Honeymoon*

The new pastor's honeymoon is that period of time when mistakes and oversights are allowed; when even failure is allowed as new ideas and programs are implemented. The honeymoon requires patience, trust and a whole lot of love.

4) *Faithful and Consistent Prayer Support*

Some church members have no problem criticizing the pastor. How different things would be if they prayed as much as they criticized. What Samuel said to his people a long time ago every church

member should say to his pastor: "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." (1 Samuel 12:23)

5) *Commitment to the Lord and His Church*

So much of the pastor's time, effort and energy must go into getting church folks to do what they ought to be doing on their own if they truly loved the Lord and were committed to Him and His church. Free your pastor to do the more important things by not having to push you to do the things you need to and ought to be doing.

6) *Opportunities To Get To Know You*

We get to know people when we spend time with them. Don't criticize the pastor for not knowing you if you have never provided those opportunities for doing so. An invitation to dinner or lunch or a snack after church will provide such opportunities. Pastors go to some homes more than others because they are invited!

7) *The Opportunity to Try New Things*

No two pastors are alike (thank the Lord!) just as no two churches are alike. This means that different pastors will do things in different ways. New programs will be instituted; new methods will be adopted. They may not work and they may not be the best for the church at this time, but at least be willing to try them.

8) *The Opportunity to Fail*

As new ideas and programs are attempted, some, no doubt, will fail. How many times did Edison fail before he got the light bulb to work? Failure is not the end of the world. By it we come to know what won't work either.

9) *Love Enough To Share Disagreements*

No pastor is perfect. I, at least, have never met one who is. This means that they will do and say things with which we may disagree. Such disagreements are not the end of the world either. Love your pastor enough to disagree. Love him so much, in fact, you will make

the effort to sit down with him and share your disagreements. Out of such discussions mutual respect often grows.

10) More Compliments Than Criticism

Most church members don't need a whole lot of encouragement to offer criticism of those things they don't like. They are not as eager, it seems, to offer compliments when they are deserved. The average pastor hears enough criticism to keep him humble. Be one of those who offers the compliments, instead. Your compliment may be just the word needed!

ADDENDUM - 2

Ten Things The Shepherd Owes His Flock
or
Ten Things Every Congregation Has A Right
To Expect Of Its Pastor

THE CONGREGATION EXPECTS THE PASTOR:

1) *To Be A Person Of God*

The pastor may not be a great orator, administrator or counselor, but every pastor can be and must be a person of God. He must talk to and walk with the Lord. Many of the Old Testament leaders are described in this manner. There is not a more complimentary title.

2) *To Be A Student of the Scriptures*

To preach biblically-centered messages, the pastor must “search the scriptures” as we are all admonished to do by our Lord. (John 5:39) This requires discipline, effort, time and prayer. There is no excuse for the pastor who fails to spend time in the Word.

3) *To Be A Person of Prayer*

To be a person of God and to understand the scriptures, the pastor must be a person of prayer. To go before the people with a message from God Sunday after Sunday, the pastor must frequent the prayer closet. Again, there is no excuse for failure at this point.

4) *To Be A Person of Integrity*

We have seen enough preacher scandals in recent years to validate the need at this point. What difference does it make how great a preacher one might be if that individual doesn't walk the walk while talking the talk? A lifetime of ministry can go down the drain if integrity is compromised. Pastors must never forget the other Beatitude: Blessed is the pastor who keeps his nose clean!

5) *To Be An Example In Family Affairs*

While trying to save the world, some pastors end up losing their own families. And they lose them because they are often sacrificed on the altar of ministerial success. Our Lord once asked, "What does it profit, if a man gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" -- or loses his own family? (Matthew 16:26) How successful is the pastor who has the big church, but is a failure at home? The pastor must be an example in family affairs.

6) *To Be A Servant In Spirit*

Our Lord taught His disciples one of the greatest lessons of life with a basin of water and a towel when He washed their feet. (John 13:1-14) The lesson is one the pastor must never forget and our Lord made sure we wouldn't when He added: "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done." (John 13:15)

7) *To Be Compassionate In All Things*

With so many hurting people in the world today, the pastor must not have a heart callused or indifferent toward those with needs. Pastors need to remember that a priest (or pastor) and a Levite (associate pastor) were the ones who passed by on the other side when they saw the guy dying in the ditch. (Luke 10:31-32) Woe to the pastor who passes by.

8) *To Be A Person Of Vision*

The pastor must not only preach to the people, but must also help them catch the vision; to help them see what God wants to do in the church and community. Without such a vision, the scriptures remind us, "people perish." (Proverbs 29:18) And people are perishing today because of visionless pastors.

9) *To Be A Pastor To Everyone*

The pastor is called to serve and minister to the whole flock, not just the appreciative and gentle ones. Many pastors get into trouble because they are guilty of partiality. Woe to the pastor who falls into this trap. Some pastors are well known at the country club, but

unknown to the little people in the church or community. The pastor who needs guidance at this point needs to read the New Testament and follow the example of Jesus.

10) To Practice What Is Preached

The Indians on TV accused the white man of speaking with a forked tongue; that is, of saying one thing and then doing something else. Some pastors are guilty of the same crime. They preach discipline, but don't practice it. They preach stewardship, but don't give as they ought. They preach integrity, but compromise and cut corners. The pastor who talks the talk must be willing to walk the walk. The pastor must practice what is preached.

ADDENDUM - 3

30 Years Of Wisdom In 10 Words

or

10 Words of Advice To My Successor

10 WORDS FOR MY SUCCESSOR:

1) *Be PATIENT -- Rome Wasn't Built In A Day*

Some pastors make the mistake of trying to change too many things too quickly. Some things need to be changed, but not all things have to be changed immediately. Rome wasn't built in a day, they say, so be patient. After you win the confidence of the people changes will come easier.

2) *Be FAITHFUL -- To God and His Word*

Paul said that faithfulness is required of stewards (1 Corinthians 4:2), and it is also required of pastors. We need to be faithful to God and faithful to His Word. No excuse will compensate for failure at this point.

3) *Be VISIONARY -- Be A See-er*

The Old Testament prophets were also called seers, because they apparently could see what others could not see. They, for example, could see God's impending judgment when others could not. The pastor needs to be a see-er as well, one who sees what God is up to!

4) *Be CONSISTENT -- Treat Everyone the Same*

There is always the temptation to cater to certain members of the church, e.g., the influential, the big givers, etc. The pastor who gives in to this temptation betrays the One in whose steps he walks for our Lord always treated everyone the very same. The ground at the foot of the cross, it has been said, is level. The floor of the church is level also!

5) ***Be OPTIMISTIC -- Negativism Breeds Negativism***

There will always be enough negative people in the church. Of all people, the pastor doesn't need to be this way. The pastor who has his eyes on the Lord will have reason to be optimistic. It is contagious as well!

6) ***Be CREATIVE -- Progress Involves Risk***

Some pastors do not remain with a church very long because they always do the same thing the very same way. They are strangers to creativity. Most people who attend church are eager for a fresh idea every now and then. It involves risk, but a risk worth taking.

7) ***Be FORGIVING -- Mistakes Will Be Made***

Church members are human beings just like pastors. They will make mistakes. They will disappoint and let us down. They won't do things as well as we might like. Be forgiving and in doing so walk in the steps of the One who taught Peter the "70 x 7" principle. (Matthew 18:22)

8) ***Be AVAILABLE -- Make Time for People***

The preacher needs time to pray and study, but also needs to be available for the people. The people won't remember many great sermons but they will remember when we were there in a time of need. To be called an inaccessible pastor is not a compliment.

9) ***Be PREPARED -- To Preach, That Is***

The disciplined pastor will find time to prepare challenging, inspiring messages for the people, and they have every right to expect this. People, I have found, will overlook many faults of the pastor, but they are not very forgiving of the pastor who constantly comes to the pulpit unprepared. Such preparation requires a lot of time, effort, energy and prayer. Seldom will a pastor have a valid excuse for not being prepared.

10) Be HUMBLE -- God Can't Use A Proud Preacher

Pride is abhorrent in the life of any Christian, but especially so in the life of the preacher. Life on the pedestal lends itself to feelings of pride, but those feelings must be dealt with in prayer. A call to the ministry does not automatically rid one of all prideful endeavors. The pastor must spend a lot of time at the feet of Jesus to overcome pride.

ADDENDUM - 4

“If I Had My Ministry To Live Over”

or

“What I Would Do the Second Time Around”

IF I HAD MY MINISTRY TO LIVE OVER, I WOULD:

1) *Listen to God More and To People Less*

There have been the times when I thought I knew what God wanted me to do, but I listened to the advice others gave me. Their voices prevailed. On the second time around I would listen to God more. His must be the prevailing voice.

2) *Give Greater Attention to My Own Family*

This is what every older minister says when given the opportunity to express a word on the topic. It is a regret with which many of us have to live. It's not that we deliberately neglect our families, we just let church duties have priority in our lives. Wise is the pastor who decides early on that family will be priority.

3) *Try Better To Equip the Saints*

Because I am a doer by nature, I often ended up doing things myself because it was the easy way out. Paul admonished us otherwise. He has gifted some of us in order that we might “equip the saints to do the work of the ministry.” (Ephesians 4:12) Again, wise is the pastor who heeds the apostle's admonition.

4) *Decide What Issues Are Worth Dying For*

Some problems which arise in churches are often peripheral in nature. In the long run they don't amount to the proverbial hill of beans. Effort and energy are often expended on these “bean hill” issues. On the second time around I would decide which issues were primary and which ones were secondary. Some battles are not worth fighting; some issues are not worth dying for.

5) *Give Greater Attention to Personal Evangelism*

This is one area of ministry that often gets pushed to the back burner if one is not careful. There are just so many other things to do. It is an area of ministry that must not be sacrificed -- regardless!

6) *Invest More Time In the Lives of Men*

Men provide the untapped resource in many churches. They have the potential, but that potential is seldom reached. Our Lord invested so much of His time in the lives of the men who surrounded Him. I would do the same if I could live my life over.

7) *Lead My Church to Organizational Efficiency*

I never cease to be amazed at the effort and energy that is so often wasted in church business. We have committees for everything, half of which we could probably do without. No wonder some church members experience burn out. They burn out because we waste so much of their time doing things that don't need to be done. Is it really necessary to have four or five committees -- and the Deacons - - involved in the decision as to the color of the ladies' bathroom?

8) *Take My Vacation Time/Days Off*

Another regret that I have is that I seldom did this for the greater part of my ministry. I was just so busy I couldn't afford down time. I not only paid the price for this, but worse still, my family. Sometimes we could do more if we did less.

9) *Become Part of An Accountability Group*

A lot of preachers, I find, are Lone Rangers in how they go about things. They are afraid to let their hair down or open their hearts to others. No wonder so many become has beens because of moral failure. Their participation in an accountability group might have prevented some of this.

10) *Let Others Take Care of the Little Things*

As already indicated, I am a doer by nature. I like to fix things. This has gained me a lot of experience in a lot of different

areas, but has prevented some other people from having the privilege of doing those things. Besides, they probably could have done them better than I. The next time around I would let others take care of the little things.

About This Book

Those involved in the work of the church today are coming to realize that, although the Christian *message* of hope and salvation never changes, outdated *methods* may no longer get the job done. This book tells the story of how one church dared to take some non-traditional risks when it came time to pass the torch of leadership to a new pastor. The transition was carried out without missing a heartbeat. The message is a valuable one for any church facing a similar transition. Pastors, church members and pastor search committees will all profit from its reading.

About the Author

For forty-three years Don Bowen served Baptist churches in rural, suburban, small town and urban settings. For the last thirty years of his ministry he served as pastor of the Downtown Baptist Church in historic Alexandria, Virginia, where his preaching skills were widely recognized and acclaimed. He led the church to pursue creative and innovative methods for reaching people in the Washington, DC area, no small feat in a day when many churches have accepted defeat or opted to close their doors. Of his many accomplishments, one of his greatest was when he led the church down a non-traditional road when it came time to choose his successor. *Passing the Torch* is his personal and warm-hearted account of that journey. It is a *must* reading for pastors and lay persons alike.

Summary of Contents

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- ◆ Using a two-team approach to get a job done
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- ◆ The way God led in choosing a new pastor
- ◆ How a pastor tried to prepare his church for transition
- ◆ Inspiration and emotion when a new pastor is installed
- ◆ How a community and church honored a pastor
- ◆ An evaluation of the process by one very close to it
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