

Passing Down the Dove

**Pastoral Succession
in Calvary Chapel Churches**

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Introduction

In his book entitled *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make*, Hans Finzel makes the observation, passed on to him by an older pastoral predecessor, that “Success without a successor is failure.” That is a sobering thought, especially for those who spend their lives in ministry. The rigorous demands of ministry, and the high expectations of those being ministered to, as well as the high expectations most pastors put on themselves, leaves little time or energy to consider the matter of preparing for a successor. And the emotional challenge of considering the fact of one’s own mortality, or even one’s own effective tenure in a particular ministry into which you have invested your life, is often too daunting to face. But such consideration is too crucial for the future of a church for it to be left to chance, even when our version of chance is “just trusting the Lord.” Whether a succession comes from a pastor moving on to another church, a pastor’s health condition that limits him, a forced resignation because of a moral failure, or from a pastor who retires from active pastoral ministry, or who dies, pastoral succession can hit anywhere, and sometimes suddenly, and we can’t afford to ignore this reality. Jim Collins, the author of *Good to Great* and many other well-known books was speaking to a group of pastors for Leadership Network. He opened his talk by saying, “Your church cannot be great if it cannot be great without you.”

This book is designed to explore the question, “What are the most effective pastoral succession and transition models for Calvary Chapel churches?” By the term “succession” we are referring to the process by which the next leaders will be identified.

By “transition” we are referring to the process of identifying the next generation of leaders, and passing the baton to that next generation. This study will hopefully be of use to Calvary Chapel Senior Pastors as they consider the future of their churches moving forward. It should also be helpful to the next generation of younger leaders, and those who aspire to one day either succeed an existing Senior Pastor, or to plant a new work. It will also hopefully prove to be a valuable resource for those, other than Senior Pastors, who find themselves in a place of influence in the succession and transition process in a church. These would include Assistant and Executive Pastors, members of church boards, and other church staff members and laymen who find themselves having a voice in this process in some way. And although this is specifically addressed concerning Calvary Chapel churches, much of the material may also be helpful to those in other types of churches, particularly as there are more independent churches, with strong pastoral leadership, being planted.

This is a topic that is of much personal interest for me. I am the Senior Pastor of a Calvary Chapel church where I have served in this capacity for the past 14 years. When I turned 60 recently, I began to reflect on my own mortality a bit. I have been serving in a pastoral role within Calvary Chapel since 1979. I was an assistant pastor at Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, the mother church of the Calvary Chapel movement, for 25 years, and taught in their Bible school for four years prior to that, and attended services there since my conversion in 1971. In my service at Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, I worked very closely with Pastor Chuck Smith, the late Senior Pastor of the church. I had complete access to him, and it was a rare day when I didn't sit and talk with him. And I

constantly asked questions, picking his brain about ministry, church, and life. He always spoke very candidly with me, and I with him, and when he went to be with the Lord, in October of 2013, it was a huge loss for me. But it also drove me to further consider the question of pastoral succession. The man who I thought would just always be here, was now gone. I had to be realistic about my own mortality. And I had no guarantee that I would live to the age of 86, as Chuck had, or that I would maintain the ministry competencies at the level that he had.

Part of my attempt at facing my future led me to enroll in the Doctor of Ministry program at Talbot School of Theology, the graduate school of Biola University. I had graduated from Biola in 1975, with a degree in Bible. I then graduated from Talbot in 1980, with a Masters of Divinity degree in Practical Theology. But it had been a long time since I was in school. And as I began to reflect on my life and ministry, moving forward, I made the decision to return to seminary by entering the Doctor of Ministry program. I knew that I could have just continued doing what I was doing, the way I was doing it. I was very comfortable in my role as Senior Pastor, our church was thriving, I was blessed with a great staff, my radio ministry was reaching thousands, and I had constant invitations to speak at various conferences and events. But I realized I had a choice to make. Should I just coast for the rest of my life, doing ministry as I have always done it, or should I consider carefully how God might have me leave the comfort of “how I’ve always done it” and explore what new and fresh things the Holy Spirit might want to do in my life and ministry? I decided I would rather have God’s leading than my comfort and safety and began taking a fresh look at everything I was doing in ministry. A part of

that quest was going back to seminary, after being gone for thirty years, and being open to what God might show me there. This book, in addition to being my attempt at contributing to the resources that might help pastors in considering the future of the church, is also my final thesis project to be submitted to Talbot School of Theology, to complete and fulfill the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry degree. For me personally, my motivation for studying and writing is primarily my desire to consider the question of pastoral succession and transition for my own life and ministry, and for those of my ministry colleagues. My desire to earn a degree is much lower on my scale of personal priorities. And yet, it was my participation in the Doctor of Ministry program that prompted me to explore this vital area, and I am extremely grateful for the inspiration I received from my professors and others at Talbot, for expanding my thinking concerning ministry to include this vital topic.

This study will be comprised of six chapters. In Chapter One, we will take a look at Calvary Chapel itself. There are certain characteristics that are typical of Calvary Chapel churches, and some of those contribute to the difficulty in pursuing a sound system for succession and transition. In this chapter, we will explore our history, our theology, and our examples, to see how these may pose particular challenges to us as we seek to establish reasonable plans for pastoral succession. Chapter Two will look at what the Bible teaches concerning ministry succession. We will look for examples and instruction that may prove helpful. Chapter Three will look at some of the current literature that is available on the subject of pastoral succession, and leadership succession in general, to see what kind of help we may find there. In Chapter Four we will discuss

some particular examples of pastoral succession and transition, within Calvary Chapel churches, and see how those models might be useful to others, either as positive or negative examples. Then in Chapter Five we will look at the current state of planning for succession within the various Calvary Chapel churches. By surveying the Senior Pastors at Calvary Chapels, we will ascertain what plans are currently in place, if any, and what their level of openness is concerning some of the suggested strategies. We will also survey them concerning their past experiences, both positive and negative, where they were involved in a pastoral succession. Finally, in Chapter Six, we will attempt to draw some conclusions, and make some recommendations, concerning future planning for leadership succession in Calvary Chapel churches.

Chapter One

Particular Challenges Faced by Calvary Chapel Churches in Planning for Pastoral Succession

There are certainly many characteristics that are shared by most churches, and most types of churches aren't nearly as unique as they sometimes believe. However, each church has its own culture, and there are certain typical commonalities that exist within most of the churches within a particular denomination or fellowship of churches. That is certainly the case within the Calvary Chapel movement. Although each church within the movement is distinct from the others, there are still certain characteristics that tend to describe what it is to be a Calvary Chapel. Calvary Chapel has a booklet entitled *Calvary Chapel Distinctives*, which attempts to describe those characteristics, practices and beliefs that make Calvary Chapel distinct from other evangelical churches. The problem with using the term "distinctives" is that you draw unnecessary lines between Christian churches that don't really exist. Many of the distinctives discussed in *Calvary Chapel Distinctives* aren't unique to Calvary Chapel at all, and some of them describe almost any Evangelical church. For the sake of this discussion, I will try to use the term "characteristics" rather than "distinctives." There are characteristics of many Calvary Chapel churches that generally apply to most Calvary Chapels, thus they are particular to Calvary Chapel churches, but this doesn't mean to imply that these characteristics are not shared by many other churches as well. There are certainly some elemental components of Calvary Chapel that really are rather unique to Calvary Chapel, such as the unique history of the movement, and the unique man who founded the movement. But there are many other factors that comprise what a Calvary Chapel church is like that we share with many other types of churches.

Calvary Chapel's Unique History

Calvary Chapel has a storied history, which is certainly something most of us are legitimately proud of, but which also tends to inform how we do things in various ways. Chuck Smith, who was an extraordinary man, was used by God in a unique way for his time. After spending much of his life serving as the pastor of tiny denominational churches, he ultimately left his denomination (The Foursquare Church) and became a non-denominational pastor. After some time leading a non-denominational church in Corona, California, Chuck became the Senior Pastor of a little independent church in Costa Mesa, California, that at the time had around 25 members. The members of Calvary Chapel had seriously considered disbanding the church before Chuck Smith came to serve as Pastor. Chuck began teaching through the Bible at the fledgling Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, and before long the church began to grow. They outgrew their little Sanctuary in Costa Mesa and moved to a small school facility, which had been declared surplus by the school district.

During this time the hippie movement was growing exponentially. As opposition to the war in Vietnam galvanized the youth, and drug use was now rampant, while rock and roll music was exploding across the world, there was a whole new subculture that permeated many areas of Southern California. Many of the kids who participated in this subculture were runaways, or abandoned children. Homelessness was becoming a major problem, as were drug related crimes. People like Timothy Leary, who was a psychologist and professor at Harvard University, were advocating that young people should

experiment with psychedelic drugs like LSD, and many heeded his call to “turn on, tune in, and drop out.” This message was popular in Southern California, and if you went to the beach in the late sixties, there were large groups of hippies playing rock music, using drugs, and basically going nowhere. It was during this time that Pastor Chuck and his wife Kay began to go down to the beach and look at these kids, and pray for them. They prayed that there would be some way for these lost kids to be reached with the gospel.

Pastor Chuck had expressed the desire to meet some hippies, and eventually he was introduced to Lonnie Frisbee. Lonnie was a bonafide hippie, who had accepted Jesus while under the influence of LSD, had made his way up to Haight Ashbury in San Francisco, where he linked up with some “Jesus Freaks” as the hippie Christians were called, and had now moved back to Southern California where he was raised. Chuck was so impressed with Lonnie that he allowed him to move in with the Smith family, and soon Chuck was allowing Lonnie to teach a youth Bible study. Lonnie was an avid evangelist, and before long many of the hippies were coming to Christ, and to the growing Calvary Chapel. The church had to move again, this time to its present location at the corner of Fairview and Sunflower, on the Santa Ana/Costa Mesa border. The church met in a large circus tent, while they constructed a new sanctuary. There were Bible studies and concerts every night of the week, huge baptisms in the Pacific Ocean, several communal houses were opened, and the fledgling church of 25 people and a middle-aged conservative pastor who wore a suit became a phenomenon that was known worldwide. Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa became, at the time, the largest church in the United States.

There were several church cultural traditions that developed at Calvary Chapel as a result of its history. Some of these have huge implications in planning for pastoral succession.

First of all, there was a sense at Calvary that nothing like this had ever happened before. The way God was working was seen as unprecedented, and in many ways this was true. Because the times were so unique, and the move of God so profound, there was a sense of a freedom in the Spirit, and every day you didn't know what God would do next. Planning was not a part of the church culture at all. Making plans was considered to be limiting God. Because God had done so much more than Pastor Chuck had ever dreamed of, Chuck didn't want to make plans that might limit what God would do. Chuck would often say, "I didn't plan this. God did." And this was the perfect ministry philosophy for a bunch of hippies, who wanted to live life simply, one day at a time. The church never had a budget. They never talked about vision. The only planning that took place was very short term. The common philosophy of "Live for today, yield to the Spirit, it is God's church and the future of the church is God's problem" did not bode well for long term planning. This created an exhilarating environment where you never knew what to expect. Chuck was the master of the "spur of the moment" decision. That is an exciting environment, but not one in which you sit down with a group of people and talk about your long term plans.

A second trait that came from the history of Calvary Chapel had to do with denominationalism. Pastor Chuck had left the denomination he was raised in because he

was so offended by the carnal means they were using to try to do the Lord's work. He often told the story about the denominational officer saying, "If our people are carnal, we need to use carnal methods to reach them." That disgusted Chuck, and was one of the main reasons why he left that denomination. He vowed many times that Calvary Chapel would never become a denomination. (Some would argue that, somewhere along the way, we eventually became a denomination, but that discussion is for another day.) Before long, in Calvary Chapel, non-denominational became anti-denominational. Despite the fact that the church bulletins at Calvary Costa Mesa had a doctrinal statement on the back that said, "We are not a denominational church, nor are we opposed to denominations as such; only their over-emphasis of the doctrinal differences that have led to the division of the Body of Christ." there was still a very strong suspicion of the "denominational" way of doing things. Even after Calvary Chapel had over 2,000 churches throughout the world, Chuck was still insistent that all the churches are totally independent. He once told me, "We have one church. Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa." And with a church history that is so averse to anything that smacks of denominationalism, the process of helping churches plan for the future was not to be taken seriously.

Another characteristic that was emphasized in the history of Calvary Chapel was humility. Power was seen as suspect. Pastor Chuck never saw himself as a powerful leader, even though he most certainly was. He went out of his way to be a "regular guy." Although he was sought out by the rich and famous, both inside and outside the church world, he was much more comfortable hanging out with the janitors, plumbers, electricians and carpenters. He dressed in a humble way (some would say dowdy), he

never bought new cars, he wore cheap wristwatches, ate out at restaurants like Sizzler or Souplantation, and he worked on his own cars, house, yard, and anything else that broke down. Whenever an underground pipe at the church would break, Chuck would be the first one in the muddy hole. Unclogging toilets was not beneath him. At the age of 86, after suffering from multiple strokes, as well as cancer, Chuck would still pick up trash from the parking lot at Calvary Chapel. He was a phenomenal example, in so many ways, of a servant leader.

However, there was a downside to that. Leadership itself was seen as suspect. Any attempts at organization were generally scorned, and people who tried to make plans were ridiculed as “trying to build your own kingdom.” I remember many years ago when I met a man who had just been hired by Pastor Chuck. This man had worked for one of the major soft drink corporations as an efficiency expert for many years. I asked him what he was going to be doing at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa. He responded that Pastor Chuck wanted him to be our efficiency expert. I told him “Believe me, the last thing Pastor Chuck wants is an efficiency expert. He doesn’t trust efficiency.” I think this man was our “efficiency expert” for a couple of weeks.

So, how do you construct an efficient succession plan in an environment and organization that scorns leadership, organization and structure? It will take some serious cultural adjustments. (I should say here that for many of the Calvary Chapel churches, that adjustment has already taken place. Some of the larger Calvary Chapels have left

their traditions, organized themselves in a more professional way, and are exhibiting impressive structure and planning.)

A fourth aspect of our Calvary Chapel history that can create some challenges in the area of succession planning has to do with the Calvary Chapel attitude toward ministry preparation academically. In the early days of Calvary Chapel, high school dropouts, some of whom had only been Christians for less than a year, were going out to start churches. They had no ministry preparation and no theological training. They went straight from sitting and listening to Pastor Chuck's teachings on Sunday, Monday and Thursday, and headed out to plant churches in areas that were begging for a Calvary Chapel type church to be started in their area. Often their sermon preparation consisted of listening to cassette tapes of Pastor Chuck's teachings, then preaching his messages. But the amazing thing was, it actually worked! A hippie who had only been saved for a year or so would go to another city, set up church in an abandoned theater, warehouse, or whatever building was available, and within months his church would be the largest church in the city. (This was back before other churches decided they should use contemporary praise music, and have a more casual approach to doing church.) As a result of this storied history, there are still many people in Calvary Chapel who believe that anyone who goes out and starts a church, regardless of their qualifications, will only have to put up a sign, get a praise band, and teach the Word, and their church will multiply. That was the folklore, as the history was recorded. In actuality, most of the hippies who went out and followed that formula failed miserably. There were a handful of guys who succeeded phenomenally, but most of those men, even though they lacked

formal education, were extremely talented and gifted individuals. Men like Mike Macintosh, Raul Reis, Steve Mays and Greg Laurie were uneducated, but extremely smart, and had amazing talents in dealing with people. (Mike, Steve, Raul and others later recognized the need for further education and went back to college and seminary after achieving success as pastors.) But if the tradition says, “Anyone can do this”, that tradition can be an impediment to taking an intelligent approach to facing the future.

Another challenge to pastoral succession that comes from our history has to do with the longevity of the typical Calvary Chapel pastor. Our pastor was the Senior Pastor at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa for 48 years, until the time of his death. Even when his health was failing so bad that he was unable to stand, he would prop himself up in the pulpit and deliver his messages. And it wasn't just his preaching either. He continued to approve every purchase order for the entire corporation until the week he died. We will discuss the uniqueness of Chuck as an example in a later section, but the point here is, Calvary Chapel pastors don't move around and change churches much. Many of them are still pastoring the churches they founded over thirty years ago. While this is a real plus, for the stability and continuity of a ministry, it does have other liabilities. For instance, if a church changes pastors every three to five years, the people tend to be more attached to the church than to the pastor. They get used to pastors coming and going, and the pillars of the church tend to be the long-standing elders and other lay leaders. But when the Senior Pastor has been at the church for twenty or more years, the church and the pastor become indistinguishable. No one can remember having a pastor other than their current pastor. They have seen the church grow, from humble beginnings to its current state, and

in such cases, replacing a pastor becomes like changing your parents. The longer the tenure of the Senior Pastor, the more painful and tricky will be the transition to a successor, and the more important it becomes for the outgoing Senior Pastor to be closely involved with the process. Furthermore, the longer a Senior Pastor continues to lead his church, it becomes more difficult to give younger men the opportunities to transition into Senior pastoral roles, since the existing Senior Pastors stay in leadership for so long. By the time a man is unable to continue in his role as the leader, the next generation is already too old to succeed him, because no one really wants to go through the challenges of a succession process, then do it again in ten years or less.

Calvary Chapel's Particular Theology

Not only are there historical and traditional factors that challenge us in seeking a viable plan for pastoral succession in Calvary Chapel churches, there are also theological challenges to overcome.

The most fundamental characteristic of a Calvary Chapel church is the fact that they teach through the Bible, chapter by chapter, and book by book. This is the way Chuck Smith taught from when he came to Calvary. On Sunday nights he would teach through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. This would be a study that would last at least an hour, and back in the 70's and 80's, especially in the summer, it wasn't unusual for the study to go for two hours. Then on Sunday morning, he would teach on a shorter passage taken from the longer passage that would be taught on Sunday night. It would usually take him five to eight years to make it all the way through the Bible, and he

would then start all over. The midweek service would usually be an in-depth study through a particular book. This method of teaching through the Bible was at one time considered to be the mark of a Calvary Chapel church. (In more recent years, especially in some of the larger churches, they got away from this systematic study through the Bible, and went more to topical teaching or various teaching series, but there are still many people who don't consider you to be a "real" Calvary Chapel unless you go from Genesis to Revelation.) To someone who is less familiar with Calvary Chapel, this may not seem like a theological point, but within Calvary Chapel it is often treated as an important theological distinction, teaching through the Bible "the way it was written." But, one might ask, why is this propensity for teaching through the Bible something that presents a challenge for the succession planning of a church? Continuity is very important, when you are teaching through the entire Bible. The studies collectively become a "through the Bible" set. And people certainly appreciate the opportunity to easily hear a study on any particular passage of Scripture. In the case of Pastor Chuck, there were several good audio sets of his studies that went all the way through the Bible. Back in the 80's many people who fellowshiped at Calvary Chapel would have a wall rack full of Chuck's studies through the Bible on cassette tape. Then in the digital age, it was possible to get his entire through the Bible series in a digital format, and have it on your iPod. These studies were also edited for use on the radio programs, so people listening to the radio all over the world could listen to Chuck teaching through the entire Bible. This was a great resource. However, this approach only works well for a man who is there almost every week. If you have another pastor fill in, they can't teach the passage

that was coming up, because it would break up the set. So either the series is interrupted when the pastor is away, or someone teaches the passage that was scheduled, and the through the Bible set is now broken up. At one point, when Pastor Chuck brought Jon Courson on staff in 2002, he asked Jon to teach on Sunday nights. But Jon picked up where Chuck had left off, halfway through the Old Testament. Then when Jon resigned and went to an orphanage in Mexico in 2005, Chuck brought Skip Heitzig in to teach on Sunday nights for awhile. Then when Skip left in 2006, Chuck picked up the Sunday night teaching again. But that entire through the Bible series was basically useless, because it wasn't Chuck's, Jon's or Skip's. (And Jon and Skip each have their own through the Bible series available, from their own churches.) They don't use those studies for the radio, and I don't even think they are available for purchase. What creates the difficulty with this, in talking about succession planning, is that when a pastor begins teaching the Book of Genesis, he is somewhat committed for the next 7 years or so. And any kind of plan whereby there is a gradual transition of one pastor to another doesn't really work well in such a teaching environment that is all about going through the Bible.

A second theological distinction for which Calvary Chapel is known is our eschatology. From the very beginning, Pastor Chuck taught us that Jesus is coming soon. He would remind us constantly of the imminent return of Jesus Christ, in a pre-tribulation rapture. Chuck would often talk about current events, and discuss how they could be indicating the soon return of Christ. Each year, the highlight of our New Year's Eve service was when Chuck did his annual Prophecy Update, sharing with us the indications of the Rapture of the Church being close. He led numerous trips to Israel, and had close

relationships with Israeli government officials, and this was all motivated by his conviction that the prophecies of Ezekiel, Daniel, Revelation, and other prophetic books were about to unfold, and Israel would be the center of attention during the Tribulation period. One can't over exaggerate the importance of this emphasis within Calvary Chapel. In fact, in the book *Calvary Chapel Distinctives*, there are 5 pages dedicated to the chapter on "The Priority of the Word", 8 pages on "The Centrality of Jesus Christ" and 7 pages on "Building the Church God's Way" but the longest chapter in the book by far, with 25 pages, is the chapter entitled, "The Rapture of the Church." For Chuck this was clearly a very strong personal conviction. And he believed, almost until the end of his life, that he would personally see the Rapture of the church. This had obvious ramifications for any kind of pastoral succession plan. In fact, as Chuck got older and had growing health problems, it was natural for people to ask him about succession. Everyone else was talking about it but it seemed he never did. And on several occasions when he was asked about his plans for succession, his response was, "I don't have a succession plan. I expect to be the pastor of Calvary Chapel until the Rapture comes." Of course it would never be warranted to say that no one who believes in a pre-tribulation Rapture and an imminent return of Christ can have a reasonable succession plan. However, when a great emphasis is put on "looking for that blessed hope" it is easy to regard issues such as planning ahead for various eventualities as being trivial and even wasteful, like "polishing the brass on a sinking ship." So, if Calvary Chapel is to form realistic pastoral succession plans, it will need to emphasize the two-fold challenge: living like Jesus could return today, while simultaneously living like He may not come back when we expect

Him. He isn't slack concerning His promise, but He is patiently waiting for more people to come to know Him. (2 Peter 3:9) This is an important balance to maintain. But an emphasis on a pre-tribulation theology can make this more challenging.

But perhaps the greatest theological challenge Calvary Chapel faces, in formulating a cohesive pastoral succession plan, comes from Calvary Chapel's rather unique approach to ecclesiology as it relates to church governance. There are three basic typical models for church governance that are used in the vast majority of churches today. Some churches operate under an Episcopal model. In this model, the ultimate place of authority lies with denominational officials (or "overseers" from "episkopos" in the Greek) who operate from a central office, separate from the local churches. The most prominent examples of this form of church governance is seen in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, as well as the Anglican and Methodist churches. Many Lutheran churches are also patterned after the Episcopal model. In the Episcopal model, church authority comes from the leaders of the denomination. Another church governance model is the Presbyterian model. In this type of church governance, the power rests with a plurality of local church elders. (The Greek word "presbuteros" is translated "elder" in the New Testament.) This form of church governance is seen in the various Presbyterian denominations, and other Reformed churches. Presbyterian church governance developed as new churches sprang up coming out of the Reformation, as an alternative to the Episcopal system that existed prior to the Reformation. The other prominent form of church governance is the Congregational model. In this case, the final authority rests with the church members themselves. Most Baptist churches, and many other denominations,

especially in the United States, operate under this system of church governance. Most churches today are run using some combination of these three models, with one being the predominant approach in each type of church.

But Calvary Chapels generally run under an approach to church governance that differs from these three models. In Calvary Chapel churches, the church governance model would generally be best described as Pastor-led. (This is sometimes referred to as “Moses Model” leadership, because of Pastor Chuck citing Moses as an example of a leader-centered governance structure, but the term “Moses Model” is generally used by people who oppose this type of governance, and tends to be pejorative, so I prefer to call it “Pastor-led.”) In the Pastor-led form of church governance, the general authority of the church rests with a single elder and Senior Pastor. Of course, no system of church governance is exclusive, so within Calvary Chapel there is a certain amount of central structure, as there are certain guidelines as to who is permitted to use the name “Calvary Chapel” and who can be listed on the Calvary Chapel webpage as affiliated Calvary Chapel churches. But the central authority in Calvary Chapel is a far cry from the kind of Episcopal control that is exercised in more structured denominations. Each individual Calvary Chapel also generally has a board of elders, but it is generally nothing like the “plurality of elders” model of a Presbyterian form of church governance. The elders (generally referred to as “board members”) at a Calvary Chapel are not peers with the Senior Pastor. They are there to offer some level of accountability, but their primary role is to support the Senior Pastor. And in the typical Calvary Chapel, the members of the congregation have very little say in the direction of the church. They are often not even

given legal standing as members. They are then referred to in the church bylaws as “congregants” rather than members. In a pastor-led model, such as Calvary Chapel, the Senior Pastor is the undisputed leader of the local church. Pastor Chuck taught that if the pastor had to answer to the authority of the board of elders, he would then be reduced to the role of a hireling, working under the authority of the board. Chuck felt that the pastor should be responsible to God alone. The idea was that the best person to make decisions about the ministry of the church is the one with the greatest amount of training, experience and commitment to the church, which would presumably be the Senior Pastor. The church board, which is usually comprised of men for whom church leadership and ministry is a mere hobby, should not be on equal footing with a man who has devoted his life to studying and teaching the Word of God, and serving and building the church. (I am not supporting or defending this model of church governance. I am merely describing the form of governance that was practiced by Chuck Smith, and generally taught by him, and is thus fairly typical among Calvary Chapel churches. I should also say that at different times Pastor Chuck would describe Calvary Chapel church governance as being Episcopal, with the Senior Pastor being the Episkopos, and at other times he described it as being Presbyterian, with the assistant pastors serving as elders. And the bylaws of Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa were largely Congregational for most of the church’s history.) A Pastor-led church governance is certainly not without Biblical and historical precedent, as many people would assert. Paige Patterson, writing in a book called *Who Runs the Church? Four Views on Church Governance* cites four basic defenses of this church leadership model. First, he points out, it is consistent with a general pattern of

leadership in both Old and New Testaments. Moses, the Judges, Peter, James and Paul are examples. Secondly, he cites church history examples like John Chrysostom and Augustine. Thirdly, he suggests that the pattern of leadership in the Synagogue probably influenced the early church. And finally he cites modern information from the psychology of human leadership as a defense for this pattern of leadership. And although this Pastor-led form of church governance may appear to be strange and unduly authoritative to those who were raised in one of the other models, if you consider the history of Calvary Chapel, it makes sense. Pastor Chuck was the sole authority figure in the early Calvary Chapel days because he was one of the only adults. He was a father figure who was often called “Papa Chuck” by the hippies. He was the only one who even knew how to do church, and was the only one trained for ministry. He was absolutely trusted by the thousands of young converts. He was looked up to, admired, adored and emulated, so it was a very natural thing for him to become the central leader of the church. And he was much too busy to spend time trying to build consensus with those who didn’t know what he knew. An argument can certainly be made that the church and Chuck would have been better off if the church had evolved into a more traditional structure, once there were other leaders there who were qualified, but traditions die hard.

In an Episcopal form of church governance, leadership succession is fairly easy. The central authorities in the denomination choose a new pastor, and assign him to the church. The church may or may not have the opportunity for input in the process, but it is very simple. People in these kinds of churches are used to changes in leadership, and trust the central organization to take the responsibility. In a Presbyterian form of church

governance, the task of pastoral succession is generally handled by the elders. The denomination may provide a list of possible candidates, but it is up to the board to select the next pastor. Sometimes the congregation has the right to confirm the nomination, but the process is essentially a function of the elders. Then in a church governed by Congregational rule, the pastoral succession is the task of the entire voting congregation. A search committee will generally be formed, made up of various members of the congregation, and the various candidates will interview with the committee, then speak before the congregation. A vote is taken, and if a candidate receives the specified number of affirmative votes, they become the next Senior Pastor, until such time as they displease the congregation, and the process starts over. Each of these approaches has strengths and weaknesses, and they can all yield themselves quite well to a pastoral succession plan, and they also all have potential for succession disasters.

In the Calvary Chapel pastor-led model of church governance, replacing or transitioning a pastor isn't as simple as assigning one, selecting one, or electing one, as in the other forms of church governance. In Calvary Chapel churches, it is vital that the existing Senior Pastor be intimately involved in the succession plan, process and transition, whenever possible. If one man is the central authority figure in the church, and is seen as the undisputed leader, he certainly plays a key role in handing off his mantle to the next leader of the church. The new leader will only have credibility based on the hearty endorsement of the previous pastor. And the former leader possesses the ability to destroy the leadership of the new leader, simply by expressing subtle doubts about the future direction of the church. The existing Senior Pastor also, presumably, has the most

accurate picture of the needs of the church, as he knows the people so well. After all, most of them chose this church primarily because they liked the Senior Pastor. Thus, the Senior Pastor should bring an informed perspective concerning the type of man who would be an effective successor. Thus, as the Senior Pastor is the key leader in the pastor-led church, he is ideally also the key person to facilitate succession and transition. But this presents numerous challenges to succession as well. Obviously the worst-case scenario is when a pastor leaves unexpectedly from a pastor-led church. This can happen in the case of a sudden incapacity or death, or in cases where a pastor is forced out because of something that disqualifies him biblically, such as a moral offense. In a pastor-led church, when the Senior Pastor leaves suddenly, the church instantly loses their entire authority structure. The church board would generally be called on to step in and lead, but that hasn't been their role, and they are generally unprepared to perform it effectively. This makes it even more important, in a pastor-led church such as Calvary Chapel, that plans for unanticipated succession be made while the senior pastor is still an active leader in the church.

The Example of Pastor Chuck

Perhaps the greatest challenge to establishing a plan for pastoral succession and transition within Calvary Chapel churches though, is the example that Pastor Chuck set. This may run even deeper than our historical and theological challenges. Pastors who serve in Calvary Chapel churches can't escape the imposing figure of Chuck Smith as our consummate image of a pastor and leader. Chuck was a man who greatly inspired other

men to become pastors, and we all see him as setting a standard that we would love to live up to. Having an example like Chuck is a blessing and inspiration in so many ways. But in other ways, his example can be a hindrance. Pastoral succession is one area where he really didn't leave us with the best example. When he was in his sixties he would talk openly about eventually retiring. He considered a few different successors, and one year he even stated at the pastor's conference the three criteria he would use in selecting a successor. (He said he would reject anyone who called their church anything other than Calvary Chapel, or who drove a luxury car and lived extravagantly, or anyone who salts their food before they taste it.) Then in 2002 when Jon Courson left his church in Oregon, to come on staff at Calvary Costa Mesa, and Don McClure left his church in San Jose to join the staff at Costa Mesa, they formed a kind of dream team, along with Brian Brodersen. Contrary to Chuck transitioning though, it actually seemed to energize him, and he showed no sign of stepping aside. Don left in 2005, as did Jon, and from then on Chuck never again showed any inclination to step down. On December 3, 2003, Pastor Chuck had a personal meeting with management guru Peter Drucker, (along with Chuck Fromm, who is Chuck's nephew, and Chuck Smith Junior, Pastor Chuck's son) to discuss succession and retirement. (See Appendix) We will discuss some of this meeting at a later point in this paper, but what Pastor Chuck seemed to take away from this meeting with Peter Drucker was that retirement should not be an option. Drucker said emphatically to Pastor Chuck, "The likes of you don't retire and shouldn't retire." Eventually even multiple strokes and cancer didn't move him any closer to retirement, and he preached the Sunday before he died. I spent the day with him two days before he died, and asked

him how long he was going to keep this up. He told me he wanted to give his last message on the upcoming Sunday, but he passed away on Thursday, with one more sermon in his computer. On one hand, you have to admire that. On the other hand, you have to wonder if the transition could have been so much healthier had he made a gradual transition instead of clinging to his position until the last moment. And he certainly could have aided Brian Brodersen greatly by being more supportive of him while Chuck was still alive. In a personal interview with Pastor Chuck on the subject of pastoral succession (he knew I was writing on the subject for my doctorate) I asked Chuck, “Pastor Chuck, with everything you’ve gone through, with Brian, then Jon and Don, then Skip, then Brian, then several attempts at getting Jon back, some talks with Skip again, and now with Brian as the apparent successor, what can you share with people that you have learned about pastoral succession?” Chuck looked down and said, “Nothing.” I chuckled and said, “Seriously?” He then looked me in the eye and said, “Dave, I haven’t learned a thing.”

So, how does a Calvary Chapel pastor approach this task in our ministries, when our leader and inspiration never really dealt with it effectively? It won’t be easy. Honestly, one of the greatest barriers to my facing the issue of succession myself is that I have that sense that Chuck would think I’m a wimp for even considering the time when I am not fulfilling the same leadership role that I presently fill. In fact, in explaining to him what I was working on for my thesis project, I could tell he thought it was ridiculous for someone my age to even be talking about succession. But it was actually good for me to discuss it with him, realizing that I wanted to handle this challenge better than he had.

But although I understand that Chuck didn't handle this issue very well in his own life and ministry, it is still hard to break away from the pattern of ministry he established for so many years. There is a part of me that would still like to die in the saddle like he did. I heard someone ask Charles Swindoll when he was going to retire. His response was, "I want the last sound I ever hear to be the sound of my head hitting the pulpit." I am really drawn to that model myself, because of the example Chuck Smith set for me, but I want to do better than that. I know it will take intentionality and resolve. There is so much good that I received from Pastor Chuck's example in so many areas, and I desire to be a better pastor as a result of his poor examples as well as his good examples.

Chapter Two

What the Bible Teaches About Pastoral Succession

As Calvary Chapel pastors, everything we do is intended to spring forth from the Word of God. Above all else we want to be Biblical. Unfortunately, there is no explicit Bible teaching concerning pastoral succession. Our concept of having a pastor as the leader of a particular congregation, for an extended period of time, would have been foreign in the early church, where the leaders tended to be more itinerant and transitory in nature. However, despite the fact that the Bible doesn't give explicit instructions concerning pastoral succession, the Bible still offers us many stories and principles that can inform our approach to succession. In the Old Testament, there are several examples of leaders who eventually gave way to other leaders. Some of these serve as excellent examples, while others serve as examples of how this should not be done. We will look at several of these.

The New Testament also has much information that can be useful to us in exploring the topic of pastoral succession. Although there isn't a specific case where one long-term pastor turned the leadership over to another, we still see a lot of principles that can prove helpful. We see, especially in the writings of Paul to younger leaders, the principles he wished to pass on to them. There is a similar emphasis in Peter's second epistle. And in the Book of Revelation, where Jesus addresses the seven churches of Asia Minor, these exhortations are very informative relative to the ministry of a pastor. Then of course, our ultimate example Jesus, as He prepares His disciples for life without Him, offers much that is helpful for us. Much of this New Testament material emphasizes the character qualities of an aspiring leader. This should help us in the process of selecting the next leaders. Other material shows us good and bad examples of outgoing leaders.

Both of these inform us as to the role of the one who transitions out. So, there is much valuable help in the Bible, to lead us toward successfully transitioning in ministry, and we will explore some of that.

Moses to Joshua

Moses was really one of the first great leader in the Bible. His own call to ministry had happened when he was 80 years old. He certainly wasn't anxious to be a leader, and he and God had quite a discussion about it before he finally agreed to do it. In the encounter Moses had with God at the burning bush, we observe some valuable insights into leadership. Consider the humility of Moses. God responded to his humility by assuring him of God's ability. (Exodus 3:11-12) Any incoming leader needs to be keenly aware of his own lack of competence, but needs to be reminded of the power of God, and the fact that we represent Him, not ourselves. Throughout his ministry, Moses kept that in order. He continued to be "the meekest man on earth" (Numbers 12:3) while at the same time boldly representing God at every turn. Whenever his leadership was challenged, he always fell back on God. And his heart was also thoroughly with those he led. He loved them, and often pled with God on their behalf. (Exodus 32:9-14) He always put the good of the people before his own good. (Exodus 32:32) Moses was clearly a great example of a leader who exemplifies what every young or old leader should want to become, especially when engaging in a ministry transition.

Some up and coming aspiring pastors get frustrated when the process seems to take so long. But think about Joshua. The transition between Moses and Joshua took

around forty years! It certainly tells us something about Joshua that he was willing to patiently serve a forty-year apprenticeship. The first time we see Joshua, he was with Moses, and Moses asked him to select some soldiers and lead them in a battle with Amalek. As Moses held his rod up high, with the help of Aaron and Hur, Joshua defeated the Amalekites. (Exodus 17:8-13) This is a beautiful picture of the need for older helpers to support the leader, while the next leader fights the early battles. The next time we see Joshua he was accompanying Moses on Mount Sinai, as Moses was receiving the Law. This time Joshua is seen as the assistant of Moses. (Exodus 24:13) Imagine the impact that would have made on a young man like Joshua. Hearing the voice of God, seeing Moses receive the tablets, witnessing the rebellion of the children of Israel at the base of the mountain, and how Moses dealt with the rebellion. I'd imagine the experience on Sinai made an indelible impression on Joshua, and cemented a calling within his heart. Next we see Joshua accompanying Moses as Moses went to the tabernacle of meeting, to commune with God. It is said that Moses talked to God face to face, as a man talks with his friend. Joshua witnessed that. Not only that, Joshua would stay in the tabernacle of meeting after Moses left. (Exodus 33:11) This certainly demonstrates a heart for God, in this young leader. He probably didn't have the same spiritual sensitivity that Moses had, but he was observing and accompanying Moses in his times of communion with God, and was apparently emulating the spiritual disciplines he saw in Moses. The next time Joshua is mentioned, he was jealously defending the position of Moses as prophet. Two men were prophesying, without the authorization of Moses, and Joshua tells Moses to forbid them. At this point Joshua is described as "Moses' assistant, one of his choice

men.” (Numbers 11:28) Moses calmed him down by telling him not to be concerned for his sake. Moses said he wished there were even more prophets. No doubt this served as a lasting lesson for Joshua. A leader can’t be insecure about the success of others. A true leader desires success for everyone. Leadership is not a place for defensiveness. Next we see Joshua being chosen by Moses to be the leader of the spies who would investigate the Promised Land before the invasion. (Numbers 13:16) Joshua and Caleb encouraged the people to move forward and enter the land. But the other ten spies gave a discouraging report, which resulted in another 38 years wandering in the wilderness. But we see Joshua’s courage and conviction, as a good leader. He definitely stood out as a man of faith. But he also needed to learn the lesson that a leader doesn’t become a leader by having people follow him. A leader leads whether anyone follows or not. A leader trusts God and does the right thing. A godly leader will survive all of his critics. They will die in the wilderness. All of these events that involved Moses and Joshua were ultimately leading to the inevitable time when Moses would be gone, and Joshua would be the new leader. This transition really begins to pick up steam, though, when God told Moses to anoint Joshua before the people, and designate him as the next leader. (Numbers 27:16-23) This inauguration was not the end of the leadership of Moses. He still would serve as the main leader for awhile more. But this is where Moses announced to the people that Joshua would be the new leader. Moses recognized that his days were numbered. And he desperately wanted to make sure that the people would be taken care of before he was gone. Moses didn’t specifically suggest Joshua. He just asked God to raise up a successor to him. God is the one who mentioned Joshua, saying that he was

filled with the Spirit, and that Moses should lay hands on him, declaring before all the people that Joshua was to be the next leader. At this time, it says that Moses should give “some of his authority” to Joshua. (Numbers 27:20) Here we see a progressive transition that serves as a good model. God told Moses who his successor would be, Moses laid hands on Joshua in front of the people, then gave him a certain amount of authority, while still maintaining his final leadership position until the Lord took Moses home. Once Moses passed away, God commissioned Joshua and handed off the complete authority that Moses had enjoyed, and gave it to Joshua. God told Joshua that He would be with him, as He had been with Moses. He exhorted him to be strong and courageous, and to do everything God had written in His Word. (Deuteronomy 31:1-8) Then, in just a few years, Joshua led the people into the fulfillment of all the hopes and dreams that Moses had for them, and the succession and transition were successful. From the succession from Moses to Joshua, we can learn many things. First of all, we realize that some of the best succession plans can take some time. A last minute emergency plan would not have yielded the results that this forty-year plan did. Secondly, we learn the importance of humility, on the part of the person giving up authority and the person taking on the authority. There is no place for egotism in a leadership succession. Thirdly, we see the advantage of transitioning to a leader who has been around long enough to really understand the people and the leader. No one knew Moses like Joshua did. He was there for all the big events. And he knew the people as well. Experience is a great teacher. Finally we see the importance of having the older leader bless the younger one. This ideally happens before the authority position is passed down. In the transition process, if

the older leader is delegating actual authority to the younger leader, it certainly helps the people get used to their next leader. When the message is sent to the people that “this is the man God has chosen to carry on my mission and ministry” that goes a long way in helping the new leader to be accepted by the people. And as always, the qualities of courage, humility, and a deep relationship with God, are the characteristics of the one who is called by God.

Eli to His Sons, Then Samuel

After the days of Joshua, as the children of Israel settled in the Promised Land, there was a period of time, about 400 years, where the people were led by a succession of Judges. This era is recorded in the Book of Judges. It was primarily a dark era, where God’s people repeatedly fell into apostasy, after which they would repent, be led out of desperate conditions by a brave leader God would raise up, only to repeat the cycle over and over. In the first eight chapters of First Samuel, we see the leadership of the last of the Judges, that is Samuel, and the transition from the period of the Judges to the time of the Kings. Samuel oversaw the transition from Judges to Kings, and personally anointed the first two Kings of Israel, Saul and David.

Samuel was born at a time when Eli was the priest. Eli seemed like a good man who feared God, but he was assisted in the priesthood by his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who would ordinarily succeed him, and they were really bad men. The first time these two assistant priests were introduced, it is said, “Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know God.” (1 Samuel 2:12) It goes on to describe some of their

despicable behavior as they would steal from people and God, and take advantage of women sexually in the name of worshipping God. It says, “Therefore, the sin of the young men was great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.” (1 Samuel 2:17) People hated to worship God because of these corrupt priests. And God had warned Eli several times about the fact that he was allowing his sons to abuse the priesthood. Eli talked to them about it, but didn’t do anything to prevent it, and they wouldn’t listen to him. (1 Samuel 2:22-25) God held Eli responsible and said, “Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in my dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?” (1 Samuel 2:29) Finally God declared irrevocable judgment on the family of Eli by declaring, “I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them.” (1 Samuel 3:13) Shortly thereafter Hophni and Phinehas were killed by the Philistines, the Ark of the Covenant was captured, and Eli died when he heard the news. (1 Samuel 4)

During this ugly time of corrupt leadership transition, young Samuel was living at the Tabernacle with Eli and his sons. His mother had dedicated him to God and he was serving faithfully under the leadership of Eli. Samuel was the son I’m sure Eli wished he’d had. He was obedient, respectful, humble, and had a deep connection with God. This is particularly amazing considering the environment he was raised in, having Hophni and Phinehas as role models. The normal order of priesthood succession would have always been filial, where the priest’s sons became the next priests. That transition was well

underway between Eli and his sons when Samuel came on the scene. God interrupted that assumed transition, and Samuel succeeded Eli and became a priest (even though he was not a Levite) and additionally became the last Judge of Israel, and one of the greatest prophets as well.

This story provides several important lessons. First of all, we are reminded again that character matters more than anything else in choosing a successor. Hophni and Phinehas were older and more experienced than Samuel. They had worked under their father's leadership much longer than he. The people already saw them as leaders. They were certainly independent thinkers, and weren't just clones of their dad. The only thing that was missing was a heart for God. But as it turned out, that is what God cared about the most. And that is still what God cares about the most. It certainly isn't the only qualification for leadership, but it is most certainly the most important qualification for leadership. Secondly, this story serves as a frightening reminder of the dangers of filial successions. Turning leadership over to a relative can have disastrous effects on the family and on those being led. No one should be disqualified because of their relationship with the previous leader, but if a relative serves as the successor to a leader, especially a church leader, it should be very clear in everyone's mind that they are the most qualified candidate, irrespective of their genetic relationship to the previous leader. Thirdly, we see from this story how dangerous favoritism can be. It is easy to lose objectivity when evaluating those closest to us. Our desire to maintain relationships can often lead us to look the other way when it comes to the faults of those close to us. It would be too relationally costly to confront them on their shortcomings. This was the case with Eli.

And his favoritism for his sons not only hurt Israel, it hurt his sons as well. Who knows what Hophni and Phinehas would have become as men had their father held them accountable and disciplined them? It would seem that a wise pastor, when even considering the possibility of his own son, or someone close to him, as successor, would want to involve other more objective people in the process. Since it is difficult for us judge those close to us objectively, finding others who are more detached and objective to participate in the process would seem prudent. Being realistic about our own biases is the only humble thing to do.

Saul to David

Saul was the first king of Israel. Since he was the first, he didn't succeed any other king. As the first king, I suppose one could say that he succeeded Samuel, the last Judge, but Samuel remained as a spiritual authority figure even as Saul became the political leader, so it was never a true transition. But the leadership transition from King Saul to King David definitely has many interesting elements that can prove helpful in considering leadership succession. For the most part, Saul serves as an example of an older leader doing everything wrong possible in the succession process. And David serves as an example of a newer leader who seems to do everything right in this long and painful transition period.

The first time we meet David he is the youngest brother in his family, and was a shepherd. When Samuel came to town to look for the next King (God had already told him that Saul hadn't measured up, and would need to be replaced) God led him to Jesse's

house, and ultimately to David as the one whom God had chosen. To everyone's amazement, I'm sure, Samuel anointed David, designating him as the next king of Israel. At that time the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. (1 Samuel 16:13) But Saul was still the king of Israel, and David would have to wait a long time before the succession transition would take place. Things were looking promising when David was hired as a royal musician. (1 Samuel 16:23) And it looked even better when he enjoyed the great victory over the Philistine giant Goliath. (1 Samuel 17) But this victory, and David's subsequent accomplishments, wisdom and giftedness only served to inflame Saul's jealousy of David. He would not accept the fact that it was time for him to step aside and give way to the more capable and spiritual David. This led to years of Saul hanging on to power. He became focused more and more on destroying David, and the more his jealousy drove him to persecute David, the more the people seemed to love David. Saul's daughter married David, and Saul's son Jonathan (who was Saul's choice to succeed him) became David's best friend. (1 Samuel 20:17)

But David's response to this persecution was amazing. It would have been fairly easy for him to pull off a coup. The people were behind him, he was younger, better looking and stronger than Saul. It would have been easy to justify seizing power, since God had already identified David as the next king of Israel. The throne should be his. God had withdrawn the anointing from Saul, and given it to David. But David refrained from lifting a hand against Saul. On two occasions he had a perfect opportunity to kill Saul and become king. Everyone wanted him to do it. But David would not lift a finger against the reigning king of Israel. (1 Samuel 24, 26) He knew that the throne was

rightfully his, and that God had assured him of this, but he wasn't going to seize the throne with his own strength. If God would fulfill His promises to David, God was going to have to bring it about. David would not touch the Lord's anointed. Here we see such a huge difference between Saul and David. David would not lift a finger against God's anointed, whereas Saul had no problem attempting to kill God's anointed. One man was willing to wait for God to fulfill His promises, while the other man was fighting to stop God from doing what He said He would do.

Ultimately, when Saul was killed, and David became the king of Israel, David did not celebrate his good fortune. He did not rejoice in the fulfillment of God's promises to him. Instead he mourned the life of Saul. (2 Samuel 1) It takes a special person to mourn the life of the one who had repeatedly tried to take your life.

The leadership transition from Saul to David provides us with many lessons that can be applied to pastoral succession. One of the lessons is that God ultimately chooses leaders. We can only pray to recognize who God has chosen. Another lesson from the transition of Saul to David is that we need to guard ourselves against the temptation to allow jealousy to drive us to reject a leader God may have chosen. We should want to have a successor who is more capable and gifted than we are. Encouraging such gifted young leaders could become our greatest accomplishment. We also see that it is important to know when your time is up. Hanging onto leadership for too long is terrible for everyone involved. The new leader suffers, the people suffer, and you yourself will suffer. In the immortal words of the prophet Kenny Rogers, "you've got to know when to hold

‘em, know when to fold ‘em.” Think of the different legacy that could have been Saul’s if he had embraced David, and given him greater opportunities and responsibilities. David would have been better prepared as a leader, and Saul would have been able to defeat all his enemies, and would have gone down in history as perhaps the greatest king in Jewish history. Instead he is remembered as a failure, primarily because of his resistance to the leadership transition process. Such tragic consequences can be ours as well, if we don’t manage the next generation of leaders properly.

Elijah and Elisha

Elijah and Elisha had an interesting relationship, where the first time they met was for the purpose of Elisha being named as the successor to Elijah. Elijah was one of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament. For the most part, Elijah was a loner as a prophet. His greatest moment came when he challenged the prophets of Baal, to see who was worshipping the real God. With all of Israel watching, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to call fire from heaven. When they tried all day and were unsuccessful, Elijah stepped up (after some showmanship that involved pouring lots of water over the sacrifice) and prayed a simple prayer to God, and God responded by sending fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice, the altar, and the water that surrounded the altar. All the people chanted “the Lord He is God!” A prophet couldn’t ask for a greater response to his challenge of Baal. (1 Kings 18) But Queen Jezebel threatened Elijah, and he ran away to the wilderness, completely depressed and wanting to die. After all he had been through, he now felt alone. But God spoke to him, in a still small voice, and let him know he

wasn't alone. And a part of God's encouragement came in the form of God naming Elijah's successor. God said, "Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place." Elijah then came alongside Elisha and threw his mantle over him. Elisha followed him and became his successor. (1 Kings 19) Wouldn't it be nice if it were always that clear?

Later, when the Lord was about to take Elijah up into heaven, Elijah told Elisha to wait behind, while he went to Bethel. But Elisha refused to leave him. In Bethel there was a group of prophets who told Elisha that Elijah was about to be taken up, to which Elisha responded, "I know. Be quiet about it." Elijah again tried to get Elisha to stay behind, while he went to Jericho, and again Elisha refused to leave him. Another group of prophets approached Elisha at Jericho and told him Elijah was about to die. Again Elisha responded, "I know. Don't talk about it." Then Elijah said he was going to the Jordan and told Elisha to stay behind, and he again refused. Finally Elijah used his mantle to part the Jordan River, the two men walked across, and now Elijah asked Elisha, "What can I do for you before I depart?" Elisha responded, "Give me a double portion of your spirit." Elijah told him that is a tough thing, but that if Elisha was with him, and saw him depart, he would receive a double portion of his spirit (or spiritual power.) Of course, by now Elijah realized Elisha wouldn't leave him, and when Elijah was taken up in a chariot and horses made of fire, Elisha witnessed the event. Elisha mourned the loss of his mentor Elijah, picked up his mantle, and continued his ministry. (2 Kings 2)

There are several lessons and observations we can draw from this story of Elijah and Elisha. First of all, sometimes God raises up a successor in response to a leader becoming weary. When a leader is worn out and discouraged, it is a good time to listen to God to see if He has a successor in mind. We all feel alone at times, as Elijah did in the cave. But we aren't alone. God already has people in mind who can encourage us, assist us, and ultimately to succeed us. If we stay in the cave, and don't get moving to look for those who may assist and succeed us, we will just die in the cave. Secondly, we see the importance of presence. A faithful assistant, who is a good candidate for succession, may not take "no" for an answer. They will insist on helping us, and even accompanying us, even when we'd rather be alone. And it is up to the predecessor to allow that accompaniment. Thirdly, a good successor will be one who desires to exceed the results that were achieved by the older leader. A good successor will build on what has been accomplished already, rather than just having his own agenda and his own plan. A good successor doesn't reinvent the wheel. He takes the mantle and carries it further than its original owner ever could. Fourthly, a good successor will not be anxious to take over. Rather, he wants to be with his mentor until the end, will mourn his loss, then get back to work, facing the challenges that lay ahead. And finally, a good successor won't necessarily be just like his predecessor. But he will share his spirit.

The Kings of Judah

Once the kingdom of Israel was split in two, there was a long procession of kings in the Northern and Southern kingdoms. But since most all of the kings in the North were

bad kings, we'll confine our observations to the kings of Judah, in the Southern kingdom, because at least some of them were good kings. The succession of kings, like that of priests, was generally determined by heredity. And since this filial succession is also sometimes a consideration for pastoral succession, it is probably good to consider this as a possible option.

Passing leadership along to one's offspring makes sense in some ways. Your children probably know you as well as anyone, and the opportunity to mentor them is unique. They have usually been involved in your church most of their lives, and could help you alleviate some of the problems that ordinarily come in working with potential successors who haven't been as involved with you. So, especially in large and visible ministries, filial succession is not uncommon. But the Old Testament succession of kings may at least give us pause on this.

In the long succession of kings in Judah, once the kingdom split after Solomon, there were six kings who were clearly good kings (Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jotham, Hezekiah and Josiah) and there were ten kings who were clearly bad. (Rehoboam, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah, Ahaz, Amon, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah.) Additionally there were four kings who had significant periods of time as good kings and as bad kings. (Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah and Manasseh.) Of the six good kings, only two of them were succeeded by sons who were also clearly good kings, while the other four were succeeded by sons who were generally bad kings. Of the six generally good kings, only two of them had clearly good fathers. In the case of the clearly bad

kings, four of the ten bad kings were succeeded by sons who turned out to be good, or at least marginally good kings, while the other bad kings were succeeded by sons who also turned out to be bad kings, or at least partially bad kings. It is fascinating that whether or not a king was a good king or a bad king, the likelihood of him having a filial succession that would lead to a righteous leader in the next generation is 50/50 at best. Thus, it would seem that filial succession brings about undetermined results, where they are just as likely to be successful as not. However, one would have expected better results from the righteous kings, who passed their rule down to sons who were raised by righteous kings, and poorer results from those evil kings who were succeeded by their sons. The problem apparently is that, either one can be a good ruler, and even a good man, but not be successful as a father, or that there is something about inheriting a leadership role, without earning it, that can corrupt a man. Perhaps also, people will often learn more from a bad example than a good one. The question that must go unanswered, at least in this historical survey is, “What would have happened if the leaders weren’t customarily bound to select their own sons as successors, and instead just chose the best candidate for the job? Would the righteous kings have been more likely to select candidates who would have been better than their sons, and would the evil kings have been less likely to ever choose a righteous candidate?” Since we will never know the answer to that question, it is probably fair to say that filial succession is as likely to work as not to work. Its success would probably depend on the son’s qualifications for the job, and the mentoring he received from his father and others. If the main determining factor in a man receiving the

mantle of leadership is genetic, you may as well flip a coin to predict the results, and a 50% chance of a beneficial result from a pastoral succession is not very good.

Jesus to His Disciples

While it is a stretch to refer to the disciples as successors to Jesus, He did ultimately select them to fulfill an important role, and left them to continue His work in the world, so in a sense they did succeed Him. Of course, most of what Jesus did in the world only He could do. But the disciples were left to perform His ongoing work moving forward, and to communicate the truth of what He had already accomplished. And initially, they certainly weren't in any position to take His place. They were interested in pecking order and seating arrangements in the Kingdom much more than actually having to represent Jesus on the earth after His departure. However, some of the instructions He gave them as He left can prove to be helpful in considering the whole question of pastoral succession.

Jesus gave some in-depth teachings to the disciples in the last week of His life on earth. In John 14-16 the apostle John shared some of the final teachings of Jesus, intended to prepare them for the upcoming transition. A large part of what Jesus communicated in these final hours had to do with comfort. He knew it would be painful for them to have Him leave, so He assured them of His return, He taught them about the Holy Spirit, who would be even closer to them than He had been. He promised them that their prayers would be answered, and He assured them that they would have a wonderful relationship with Him, along with the Father and Spirit.

In reflecting on these final important instructions from Jesus to His disciples, there are several applicable principles that can be instructive for pastors who are involved in the succession process. In pastoral succession it is so important that an incoming leader is encouraged. In some cases a new leader doesn't even want to face the reality that his mentor won't last indefinitely. But they need to know that everything will be fine. They need to be reminded that the same Holy Spirit who has been working will continue to work. If the older leader feels comfortable about succession, it will go a long way toward empowering and encouraging the new leader. That is a wonderful gift to the next generation. Communicating the fact that there is a close connection between the past generation and the next generation will ease the anxiety of the long time church members. Jesus communicates that there will be change, but that the change will be for the better.

In examining what Jesus taught the disciples about succession and transition, His last exhortations before He ascended into heaven are informative. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus reminds them that He has all authority, and on that basis commissions them to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them. He then reminds them of His eternal presence. So, He lets them know that the essence of their calling is a discipleship and teaching ministry, and that His presence and authority goes with them always. (Matthew 28:18-20) In our succession transitions, we need to remember to empower the next generation, reminding them of God's presence, and letting them know that the essence of their calling is to be discipleship, baptizing and teaching. In selecting potential

successors, it would be wise to identify men who are gifted in those areas, and who have a sense of God's presence.

In Mark's Gospel's account of Jesus' commissioning of the disciples, the emphasis is on preaching the gospel throughout the world. Mark has Jesus including baptizing, as in Matthew's account, but also mentions some spiritual sign gifts like healing and casting out demons. (Mark 16:15-18) So the emphasis in Mark is on the preaching ministry, accompanied by baptism, and followed by the actual personal work of ministry.

Luke's account mentions preaching the gospel to all nations. But then in Acts we see Jesus telling the disciples that they first need the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon them, and after that they are to witness of Him from their local area to the rest of the world. (Acts 1:8)

John doesn't have much of the post resurrection group exhortations from Jesus to His disciples, but He records the conversation Jesus had with Peter, where Jesus restores Peter to his call to ministry, following Peter's failure, and He exhorted him to feed and tend His sheep out of love for Jesus. (John 21:15-19)

Throughout the Gospels we don't see a lot of practical instructions for the disciples as to how to do ministry. Jesus was constantly doing ministry, whether teaching or personal ministry, and they were with Him around the clock, so witnessed personally how He did ministry. But we have very little record of Him actually training them.

Knowing Him seemed to be their training, and ultimately after the ascension of Jesus, the

Holy Spirit became their teacher, to show them exactly how to do the work of ministry. In the last days of Jesus, before and after His death, there is still very little practical instruction. What Jesus did was set an example, then give them broad categories of ministry to which He was calling them. The Holy Spirit was prominent in the discussion because Jesus was expecting them to take His general commands and figure out specifically how the Holy Spirit would have them carry it out. This has some interesting ramifications for those who are raising up others as successors in ministry. It is much more important to remind them of the general calling, and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, than to get too preoccupied with specifics about how to do ministry. The basic principles of ministry are unchanging, while the methodology will change as the Spirit leads.

Paul and Apollos

The one clear pastoral succession we see in the New Testament involves the Apostle Paul handing off the leadership of the church in Corinth to Apollos. Paul started the Corinthian church, and served as its pastor for a year and a half. After he departed for Ephesus, he sent Apollos back to pastor the church in Corinth. (Acts 18) Apollos was a very gifted man who was ultimately disciplined by Priscilla and Aquila before he became the Corinthian pastor. By the time Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians, Apollos himself had moved on, but was still revered by a certain group of Christians in Corinth. In fact, there were four distinct factions in the divided church. Some of the people still identified with Paul, their first pastor. Others identified more with the more eloquent

Apollos. Still another group was partial to the more Jewish flavored ministry of Peter. And a fourth faction felt like they had a personal connection to Jesus that trumped the followers of Paul, Apollos or Peter. Paul rebuked them for their carnality and division. (1 Corinthians 1:10-17) But Paul went on, a little later in his epistle, to discuss the roles of he and Apollos. Paul says, “Who then is Paul and who is Apollos but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.” (1 Corinthians 3:5-7) Paul acknowledged that there were differences between he and Apollos, both in their approaches to ministry, and in their gifts and roles. A ministry of planting differs from a ministry of watering and maintaining. But Paul makes it clear that ministry is not about the pastor, it is about God. God is the One who plants a church and God is the One who grows a church. The pastors are just servants of God.

From this we can see that the church should never be about the pastor. Pastors are relatively interchangeable, while God remains constant in the church. Churches will go through different seasons, and those different seasons will sometimes require different leadership to match the season. Sometimes the season may dictate the type of pastor who would be appropriate. Perhaps at other times having a different pastor will dictate a change in the season of the church. But it doesn't seem like Paul was too concerned with replacing himself with someone similar to himself, in the name of church stability. He was willing to be replaced by someone who could take the church in another direction, in a sense. Apollos has some gifts that were superior to Paul's, and some gifts that would

never match Paul's. But Paul's attitude was that who pastors the church doesn't really matter. "We are nothing. God is everything." Their story also serves as a reminder to us that in selecting a successor, we need to consider what the next season of the church might be, and select someone whose gifts can lead the church through its next era. But the outgoing pastor and the incoming pastor must both realize and acknowledge that church isn't about the pastor, it is about the Lord.

Paul and Timothy

Although Timothy didn't technically succeed Paul, their relationship is often seen as one of succession because of the two powerful little letters Paul wrote to Timothy to teach him about ministry, the second of which was written shortly before Paul's death. The entirety of both books can be helpful as instructions from an older generation leader to a younger generation leader, but we will just pull out a few of Paul's teachings from each book that are relevant to the succession process.

Paul opens both of his letters to Timothy by calling him his son. First Timothy calls him "a true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2) while in Second Timothy he calls him "a beloved son." (2 Timothy 1:2) Similarly he addresses Titus as "a true son in our common faith" (Titus 1:4) in his letter to him. Although there is never an example of a filial succession in the New Testament, it appears in the case of Paul that he regarded Timothy (as well as Titus) as being like a son to him. For Paul, mentoring, and thus succession, was accomplished in a spiritual environment that resembled a family. Leadership in the church was to be like the best family relationships.

Paul's first exhortation to Timothy was a commitment for him to fight against all false teaching, on the basis of the prophecies that had been made concerning Timothy, and the charge that Paul was declaring for him now. (1 Timothy 1:18) This would seem to harken back to Timothy's earlier years, and perhaps his ordination. Reminding a younger leader of his initial calling and commitment is a powerful way to put his future responsibilities into perspective. It is important to reflect on one's early call, when there was such an excitement about future prospects, in order to energize one toward new challenges and opportunities.

In the third chapter of First Timothy, Paul gives a long description of the qualifications of bishops and deacons. (1 Timothy 3:1-13) This would not only help Timothy in selecting other leaders within the church, but it would remind him of the necessity of taking these qualifications seriously for himself. This is a great way to challenge a leader, by reminding him of the kind of people he wants to place into positions of leadership, and that providing a subtle lens through which to view his own requirements. "Timothy, you want to look for men who are blameless, good husbands, under control, hospitable, good teachers, not drunks, not materialistic, not angry, a good parent, with a good reputation." For Paul to say this, the presumption is that Paul himself had demonstrated these kinds of qualities, and that he had observed them in Timothy, which is why he had promoted Timothy's ministry. But this would also serve as a reminder to Timothy, to maintain these personal qualities as he looks for them in other potential leaders.

1 Timothy 4:12-16 contains special exhortation to Timothy as a pastor. He tells Timothy to not let people take advantage of his youth, but to be an example to them of what the Christian life should look like. Then, in some of his most pointed and personal exhortation, Paul tells Timothy to nurture his giftedness and calling. This is to be done by reading, exhortation and doctrine. He is again reminded of his initial ordination to the ministry, keeping a perspective on what that was all about. Paul exhorts him to meditate on all this, and be entirely focused and dedicated to being a better minister. He says, “Take heed to yourself, and to the doctrine.” What a beautiful reminder, from an older pastor to a younger one, that we need to keep first things first. Ministry is to flow forth from a life that is lived well, dedicated to spiritual growth and health.

Paul began his first letter to Timothy by referring to Timothy in familial terms, as a son. In chapter five, he reminds Timothy that the church is all about being the family of God, and we are to treat those to whom we minister with the high regard we would have for treasured family members. He is to treat the older men as fathers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters. He is reminding the younger generation to not look down on the older generation, even as he had earlier told Timothy to not let the older generation look down on the younger generation. This kind of inclusiveness is so important in pastoral transitions. A younger pastor may tend to bring in more young people, but it shouldn't be at the expense of the older people. Great sensitivity needs to be shown to all age groups within the church.

Finally, in the last chapter of First Timothy, Paul reminds Timothy again to fight against anything that threatens the truth, to protect what had been committed to his trust, and to not get distracted by nitpicking little issues that serve only to distract from fruitful ministry.

Paul opens his second letter to Timothy, after the familial greeting, by once again reminding Timothy of his heritage. (2 Timothy 1:5) This time he goes back even further than his ordination at the hands of Paul and others, and he reminds him of his Godly mother and grandmother. He was reminding Timothy that he had been groomed for this, and that he is now living the life he had so desired. On this basis he calls Timothy to be courageous. “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me... That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Timothy 1:13) Paul is essentially saying, “Timothy, you are off to a great start! I believe in you! Now keep it up!”

In the next chapter, Paul exhorts Timothy to be “strong in grace.” (2 Timothy 2:1) Grace is often a quality that comes easier for more experienced leaders. But Paul is letting him know that it is equally important for young leaders as well. He then reminds him to avoid silly arguments, but to instead stay focused on personal righteousness. He tells him to flee the youthful lusts that are so common to younger men, and to pursue holiness. (2 Timothy 2:22) Right living is not something to argue about. It is something to personally pursue.

In chapter three he again warns Timothy about the dangers of false teaching, and demonstrates that the remedy for it is the faithful teaching of the Word of God. He reminds Timothy of Paul's own example, and of the fact that Timothy had been taught the Scriptures since he was a child. The Scriptures are "God-breathed" and profitable and helpful in every situation.

In the final chapter of Paul's swan song, he reminds Timothy to preach the Word, no matter what. (2 Timothy 4:2) Then in a touching ending to the letter, we see Paul in such a vulnerable way, acknowledging his own increasing weakness, and the fact that his race was almost over. (2 Timothy 4:7) Knowing when your end is approaching, and when you need to ask for help, is crucial. He appeals for some help, offers a few personal greetings, and gives God the ultimate glory for all the great things He had done through Paul's life. You get the feeling that he was telling Timothy, "It will sometimes be hard, but it will always be worth it."

Instructions of Jesus to the Churches in Revelation

In the Book of Revelation, in chapters two and three, Jesus speaks directly to the leaders of seven of the churches that had developed during the 60 or so years since He had ascended into heaven. These were some powerful lessons He taught to those who ultimately succeeded Him on earth (although technically it was the Holy Spirit who succeeded Jesus on earth, but the Holy Spirit works through the church.) Looking at the words of Jesus to the First Century church leaders gives us some valuable insights into what a successor needs to hear and be reminded of.

To the first church addressed, the church at Ephesus, He reminded them of the importance of love. They were doing a lot of good things. “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for my name’s sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.” (Rev. 2:2-4) He tells them to repent and do the things they used to do. This is such an important thing for us to remember when considering the succession process. A loving spirit is so much more important than competency or activity. If you lose love you lose everything. As Paul put it, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging symbol. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3) What Paul and Jesus are saying is not that competence, hard work, scholarship and faithful service don’t matter. Just that without love being at the heart of all that, it is all meaningless. Competence, hard work, scholarship and faithful service, when motivated by love are powerful things in a church. Thus, the very first quality to look for in a successor is a genuine love. It isn’t the only qualification, but it is the first. We also need to remember that the entire succession process should be governed by love.

The second church Jesus addresses, the church in Smyrna, gets a different message from Jesus. They were going through some times of great persecution. He doesn't have anything critical to say to them, but rather He encourages them to resist fear, even as they suffer, knowing that there is a crown of life at the end of the road. (Rev. 2:10) This encouragement from Jesus, reminding us that pain and difficulty do not mean that we are doing something wrong, is so important for anyone going through a succession process, whether as predecessor or successor. Jesus is letting His church leaders know, "This isn't going to be easy. But in the end, it is so worth it!" When I personally succeeded another pastor, under very difficult circumstances, I really could have used this word from Jesus. I had no idea how difficult and painful the process was going to be, which caused me to question, for years, whether I had really made the right move. A word from Jesus about a crown of life would have done me good.

The third church Jesus addresses is the one in Pergamos. They were a church that was doing fairly well, apparently, but they had a problem with compromise. They were apparently more interested in pleasing people, and not offending them, than they were interested in the integrity of the ministry. (Revelation 2:12-17) They lived in a tough area, and the area was apparently rubbing off on them. It is so important in all that a church does, and especially in the area of succession, that integrity and truth matter. Every day in the church life there are temptations to compromise, in order to keep people happy. Many incoming leaders are plagued with this problem. They don't want to rock the boat, or offend anyone. They say what they think they need to say to get the job. But we need leaders in the church who will speak the truth, in love, but with integrity.

This same idea of integrity is also addressed when Jesus speaks to the church in Thyatira. They were a church that was working, loving, serving, faithful and patient, and they were growing in all these qualities. (Rev 2:19) But they were tolerating a false teacher, who was involved in sexual immorality, who Jesus refers to as “Jezebel.” Again, there is no place for compromise in the church. And there should be a rigid test for what kind of teaching goes on in the church. The teaching needs to be sound, and the moral life of the teacher needs to be solid. The worst kind of teaching possible would be the type that leads people to live immorally. Apparently this woman was using her talents and giftedness, and her charisma, to seduce the members of the church. One can’t be a good teacher unless their lifestyle backs up their teaching. Careful examination of a person’s moral character, as well as their teaching, should be an important part of any succession consideration. Gifted people who have used their ministry position as an opportunity to fulfill their flesh have done inestimable harm in churches everywhere.

Jesus next addressed the church in Sardis as being a dead church. He says, “You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.” (Revelation 3:1) It would seem that just about all that was left of this church was a fading reputation. Perhaps they had once been a vibrant church, but their fruitfulness is behind them now. Sardis was a church that was living in the past, glorying in what they used to be. Like the movie “Weekend at Bernie’s”, they were pretending to be alive, but they were actually dead. Just going through the motions now. As we get older, and as Calvary Chapel as a movement gets older, this is such a danger we face. We can talk about the glory years and have our identity rooted there. The younger people among us are made to feel like they missed out

on something that will never be surpassed. Like the older people in Israel, when the new temple was completed (Haggai 2) we can mourn the passing of what we used to be, and act like what is going on now can't hold a candle to it. The late Howard Hendricks once said, "When your memories become more exciting than your dreams, the end is near."

The fruitfulness and life of a church is never grounded in the past. If we are truly alive, we need to be alive now, and move forward into the future. Successors, therefore, should honor and respect the past, but their focus should be on keeping a church vibrant and alive now, and moving forward. Movement is a sign of life. Paralysis is a hint of death.

The church in Philadelphia was a faithful church, who received commendation from Jesus, without any rebuke. Because they had been faithful to Him, and with the strength they had, they had held to His word, He declares to them, "I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it." (Revelation 3:8) This speaks of a church that makes the most of what God has given them. When a church maximizes and leverages their opportunities, and stays in the Word, Jesus will open doors for that church. This implies an assessment of assets and opportunities, and a focused effort to maximize their use for a fruitful ministry, centered on His Word. Any transition in a church, and any succession for whatever reason, is an open door for that church, which Jesus has opened. It is so important for the leader who is transitioning out, and one who is succeeding, both see this as an open door, and an opportunity for the Word to be spread in areas where we haven't been yet. What a difference it can make when a predecessor has the attitude that the future is bright, while the successor is excited about walking through new doors that

God is opening. But it only works if the binding agent of continuity is a faithfulness to God's word.

The final church Jesus addressed was the church in Laodicea. (Revelation 3:14-22) This church was outwardly successful and wealthy, but Jesus was standing on the outside looking in, knocking on the door of the church. This seems to be a church in maintenance mode. They have "matured" beyond their former passions, and exist for themselves. They believe they are doing fine, but something is missing. There is no fire or passion. They have become lukewarm, and make Jesus sick to His stomach. The tendency to become lukewarm is quite common, in a church, a movement, or a person's life. When we were younger we had struggles we don't have anymore. But those struggles brought us together, and taught us to depend on God. Now we are beyond that. Our survival isn't on a week-to-week basis anymore. I remember Pastor Chuck once telling me that in the early days of Calvary Chapel, it was easy to discern God's will for the church. If they were praying about something that seemed impossible, and God miraculously provided, they knew it was His will. "Where God guides He provides" was the rule of thumb. But He said, "Now that God has been so good to us, and we have enough money in the bank to do almost anything we think of, it is a lot more difficult to discern whether or not something is actually God's will." Such are the challenges of maturity and success. When it comes to churches, one of the greatest dangers we face is success. But to stay on fire for God, and ready to be freshly used by Him, means that provision can no longer be our prime indicator of God's leading. A genuine passion for God needs to increase as our possessions increase. When we are fighting for survival,

passion is a given. People who aren't passionate run away when things are challenging. But outward success brings in a lot of people who are searching for ease. And ease becomes ultimately lukewarm. In the area of succession, when a church is poor, and has nothing to offer, only someone with a passion for God would even consider taking such a pastorate, so if they are willing, even where it means being bi-vocational, you know you have someone who has a heart for the church. At the same time, if a Senior Pastor wants to stay at a church, and the church is poor, his motivations are likely to be pure. But when a church is financially prosperous, it becomes a greater challenge to discern what is in the heart of an aspiring successor. Are they really passionate and on fire for the church, or do they just see this as a good financial move? Correspondingly, it is very tempting for a pastor who is comfortable in his position, and perhaps worked long and hard to get there, and has no clear exit strategy, to just hang onto a ministry because it is a good job. He is no longer passionate for the ministry, but continues to serve, in a lukewarm way, and refuses to let go of his security, even when there are others who could come in and restore passion to the church. Beware of prosperity. It can lull you into lukewarm.

Summary of Biblical Lessons on Leadership Succession

As we have seen, although the Bible doesn't say anything specifically about the process of transitioning from one pastor to another in a church setting, it does contain lessons that can be drawn that can be of use to us in considering this topic. Here are a few of them:

1. In the Bible you don't really see the concept of retirement. The leaders in the Bible seemed to continue to lead right up until their death, regardless of how long they lived.
2. Although they never retired, sometimes their leadership roles changed somewhat, as more responsibilities were picked up by their younger successors. For instance, once Paul was in prison, his missionary and church planting roles were filled by others, and he focused on his writing ministry.
3. Most of the successors to great leaders in the Bible were not family members. But there were close relationships formed that were like family. (King and priest succession was generally filial, but they were generally not successful.) This isn't to say that a family member should be disqualified. Just that a successor needs more than just a family relationship, in order to successfully succeed a leader.
4. The character of a new leader is of paramount importance, throughout the Scriptures.
5. The older leader has an important role of encouraging the new leader and giving them clear endorsement publically. The people should witness this blessing being passed on.
6. The older leader needs to emphasize priorities to the newer leader, without micro-managing the future.

7. If the incoming leader has a healthy relationship with the Lord, the Holy Spirit will guide him on all the particulars of ministry.
8. The longer the time of transition for succession goes, the better it will be. There is no rush.
9. The newer leader should have the utmost respect for the outgoing leader. They should see their role as a continuation of the ministry of the older leader.
10. A leader shouldn't necessarily be just like his predecessor. But he should share a similar spirit.
11. A successor will benefit greatly by spending a good deal of time serving alongside his predecessor.
12. Clear communication is essential in a succession process of transition. This communication should be not only between the successor and the predecessor, but it should be shared with the people who are being led.
13. A successor should have a history of faithfulness and preparation for ministry. The longer the better.
14. A successor's personal gifts should be obvious to all.

Chapter Three

A Survey of Available Literature on Pastoral Succession

The topic of pastoral succession has become of much interest over the last twenty years or so, and there is quite a bit of published material relaying experiences and evaluating both positive and negative models of pastoral succession. This trend is certainly at least partly due to the rapid increase of larger churches, with the number of so-called “megachurches” exploding on the evangelical scene over the last generation. A church is considered to be a megachurch if it has a weekly attendance of 2,000 people or more. Thom Rainer quantifies this trend by pointing out that in 1970 there were 50 megachurches in the United States. By 1980 there were 150, in 1990 there were 300, in 2000 there were 600, and in 2015 there are over 1600 megachurches in the United States. (“Seven Updated Trends on Megachurches in America” Christian Post, 2015) While pastoral succession is a serious concern for any church, whatever size the church may be, it is especially critical in a larger church. The larger the church, the more likely it is that they have huge assets to manage, a large staff to maintain, facilities that are demanding, and often large amounts of debt obligation that must be met. And also, the larger the church is, the more likely it is that the attenders of the church are coming because of an affinity for the Senior Pastor. If the transition of a large church doesn’t go well, the entire survival of the church can come into question. Large numbers of people may be uprooted, causing trauma in the lives of thousands of people. This isn’t to minimize the challenges that are faced by a smaller church, which may prove to be equally traumatic in the lives of its people. But it is certainly easier for a church of 100 to find a man capable of maintaining and preserving a congregation, than it is for a church of thousands. A smaller church tends to create a sense of ownership amongst its members, whereas a larger

church fosters more of a consumer attitude amongst its attenders. But since the growth explosion of the megachurch era, as these large churches have matured, along with their founding pastors, there is much more interest in, and discussion of, pastoral succession and transition.

As one might expect, there have already been many examples of positive and negative succession experiences from which we can learn. One succession plan that was very deliberate, and by all accounts very successful, was the pastoral succession that occurred at the Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. This was an extremely large church that was led by Pastor Bob Russell. Russell wrote a book entitled *Transition Plan: Seven Secrets Every Leader Needs To Know* on this transition process that is a must-read for anyone interested in this topic. Bob Russell had determined, when he was 60 years old, that he would hand over the leadership of his church when he turned 65. This gave him, the church, and his successor five years to prepare for this challenging handoff. During this five year period, Russell not only mentored his successor Dave Stone, he talked about succession openly, increasingly handed off various leadership functions, involved his successor in all board meetings and management decisions, and his successor shared an increasing load of the teaching responsibilities. In an interview, a year or so before Russell was to step completely aside, he was asked an important question. “Dr. Russell, you are only 64 years old and in great health. Your mind is still sharp, and people in your church say that your sermons have never been better. So why would you step down a year from now, while you are still so effective?” His response was interesting and provocative. He acknowledged that his health was still excellent, his mind

was still strong, and his messages were still effective. But he went on to say, “That is precisely why I am stepping down as Senior Pastor next year. The time to make a decision like this is while your capacities are still strong. I have seen many men who maintain control long after they should have given it up. As they advance in age, they lose their ability to know when it is time to step aside. They often then try to maintain their positions out of insecurity, losing their capacity for self-awareness.” He went on to say that stepping aside as pastor didn’t mean he was retiring. He said he could still teach in a seminary, write books and articles, and speak at other churches and conferences. He just didn’t feel that he needed to run a large church past the age of 65. A part of Russell’s succession plan was that, once he stepped down, he would stay completely away from the church and his successor for a period of one year. This was based on the conventional wisdom that says a departing pastor can pose a real threat to the transition by being close enough to become a challenge to the new pastor. Comparisons are inevitable, and the presence of the previous pastor can galvanize those who would be critical of the new pastor, wanting him to be more like their beloved former pastor. He felt that one way to avoid this was by disappearing from the church for a period of time, cutting off all contact with the church. This is the one thing he did that both he and Dave Stone later said they regretted. Dave said he really could have used Russell as a sounding board and mentor during this period. And Russell said it was so hard to resist just dropping by to see how things were going, and to see the people he had poured his life into for so long. And even though the transition was planned and communicated over a period of five years, it certainly must have been painful and confusing for the people to have their beloved

pastor just drop off the face of the earth. But still, to undergo a leadership transition and succession in such a large church, and to have the previous pastor and the succeeding pastor each have only one regret, and to have it be the same regret, is pretty amazing. So, even though Southeast Christian Church of Louisville, Kentucky has a much different church culture and governance than the typical Calvary Chapel, there is still much that we can learn about succession planning from their successful experience, and Bob Russell's book is a must read when considering these issues.

Another must read is the book, *Too Great a Temptation: The Seductive Power of America's Superchurch* by Joel Gregory. In contrast to Bob Russell's relating his successful experience in Kentucky, Gregory's experience provides the classic tale of a failed succession that happened in one of the more visible and historic churches in the country, The First Baptist Church of Dallas. (Interestingly, Bob Russell was inspired to write his book, and conduct his succession process, after reading Joel Gregory's book.) First Baptist Dallas has been a prominent and visible church for 140 years. This church in downtown Dallas, Texas was one of the first and well-known megachurches when there were almost no megachurches. It was a bastion of Bible teaching, fundamentalist doctrine, and solid ministry that was known around the world. The largest church in the largest American denomination, (Southern Baptist) succeeding to this pulpit, that had been occupied by George Truett for 47 years, followed by W.A. Criswell for 50 years, was considered to be the highest achievement possible for a Baptist minister. So in 1990, when Joel Gregory was designated as the next pastor of this historic church, he was

understandably honored. But Gregory's excitement at receiving this honor quickly turned to horror, as he learned that the succession was anything but a true succession.

According to Joel Gregory's relaying of the story (and his is the only version we have, to a great extent, because Dr. Criswell never really told his side of the story in any detail) when Gregory was installed as the new Senior Pastor, he was under the impression, and had been led to believe, that Criswell was ready to step down and give Gregory the position of Senior Pastor. Gregory had been serving as a Senior Pastor in several other churches, and had proven himself to be successful in these other congregations (albeit none that could compare with the mammoth First Baptist Church of Dallas.) He had been vetted and taken through an extensive candidate process, and believed that he had the support of the congregation, elders, leaders, and Dr. Criswell himself, who was personally involved in selecting Gregory. So when he resigned his previous church, and accepted the job at First Baptist, he assumed that he would be the leader of the church, as Criswell had been, and that Criswell would tip his hat and ride off into the sunset. But to his horror, that didn't happen. Even though Gregory took on most of the preaching responsibilities, Criswell continued preaching in the weekly service that was televised. W.A. Criswell remained very much the face of the church. Criswell kept his previous office, with all the grandeur and prestige associated with it, and left Gregory with a much smaller office. Criswell retained the title "Senior Pastor", giving Gregory the title "Pastor." Criswell continued to sit on the platform in his previous seat, and would periodically get up to address the congregation or make announcements in the early parts of the service. To all observers he was the pastor, who would introduce the special guest

speaker Joel Gregory. Behind the scenes it was apparently even worse. Criswell would summon Gregory to his office, like a child being sent to the principal's office, and would criticize something that Gregory had done. This was usually in response to complaints that Criswell had received from staff members or congregants, thus reinforcing the notion that Criswell was the man to talk to if you had an issue with Joel Gregory. Criswell was essentially Gregory's boss, and he made it clear to anyone who would listen that he wasn't all that pleased with the performance of his employee and successor. Ultimately the succession was an abject failure, and ended two years later when Gregory reached his breaking point. He notified the local newspapers ahead of time, then surprised the church by announcing his resignation, effective immediately, at their regular Wednesday evening service. He left town without having interaction with elders, staff members, congregants, or Criswell himself. Gregory's life was turned upside down, his family was devastated, ultimately his marriage ended, and his pastoral career was over. He was relegated to life as a salesman, selling grave plots door to door for a period of time. He eventually was employed to teach part time at Baylor University, and currently does guest speaking, primarily at churches and conferences for the African American Christian community. Two other pastors succeeded him at First Baptist, each staying for around five years, after which the current pastor, Robert Jeffress took over the leadership of the church in 2007. The church seems to be doing well now, after a rough couple of decades.

Joel Gregory's book is a painful book to read. It is much more gratifying to read of the success story of Bob Russell than the failure in the transition from Criswell to Gregory. Yet there is so much that can be learned from such a visible and profound

failure, and this story should send chills up the spine of anyone who is contemplating a future potential succession. But beyond just the fear of the worst, there are several important lessons that can be learned from this failure. First of all, it is so important that the previous pastor is publically and privately supportive of the succeeding pastor, whether or not he agrees with everything his successor does. Criswell undermined Gregory with the leadership and congregants, putting him in an almost impossible situation. If Criswell didn't have confidence in Gregory, why should anyone else? Secondly, whatever the nature and timing of a transition, there probably needs to be a time when it becomes obvious to everyone that the succeeding leader is now the leader, even if the previous leader remains in some sort of supporting role. At whatever point the transition happens, titles need to change, offices should change, leadership roles should change, and chain of command needs to be adjusted. Perhaps the former leader doesn't need to disappear completely, but the successor needs to take on more visibility, and become the voice of the church. If there are two people riding on a horse, one of them needs to be in front. So also with a church or any organization. A third lesson that screams from this story is the need for clear and honest communication, before, during and after a succession occurs. In this case, no one was clear exactly how the transition would occur, or at the very least, clarity wasn't shared between all affected parties. One might guess that Joel Gregory was so excited to get this prestigious job he may have neglected to kick the tires adequately, and ask the right questions. And perhaps Criswell and the other church leaders were guilty of assuming that Gregory would be so thrilled to have the job that he would follow their lead. By the end, communication had broken

down so much that Gregory felt more comfortable telling the newspaper reporters than he did telling his church and its leaders. That kind of communication breakdown doesn't happen over night, and no doubt there is a lot of responsibility to be shared among all involved parties. But perhaps the greatest lesson to be learned from this story may be the single most important factor in determining the success or failure of a pastoral succession and transition. That factor is humility, and its contrasting opposite, pride. In almost every case of a successful transition, the predominant trait of the outgoing and incoming leader is humility. And in almost every failed attempt at transition, pride in either party or both stands out as a clear factor in sabotaging the transition. Joel Gregory does a good job of describing the pride and arrogance of W.A. Criswell, and he makes a compelling case. But in reading the book, one can't help but notice the pride that existed in Gregory himself. It is a sad but important reminder that if we allow our pride to be offended by the pride of another, when we attempt to bring them down, we will bring ourselves down in an even greater fall. Pride precedes a fall always, but especially when it comes to church leadership, and never more than when leadership undergoes the succession process. The role of pride in the story of First Baptist Church of Dallas is one to which every church leader should pay close attention.

In addition to these two books, that provide good case studies for a notable succession success story and a succession failure story, there are other books that handle the topic of pastoral succession in a more comprehensive way. These books attempt to reach across denominational lines and church government differences, and apply to any type of church that is considering a future succession.

One book that is a must read in the area of pastoral succession is an older book, published in 2004, but it was the only book of its kind until recently, and is still very useful. This book is *The Elephant in the Boardroom- Speaking the Unspoken About Pastoral Transitions* by Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree. The title of the book comes from the unwillingness of most pastors and church leaders to talk about the subject of succession. Pastoral succession is the elephant in the room, looming hugely in significance, with no one wanting to talk about it. The authors pointed out the seriousness of the issue by stating in the preface, “For more than twenty years, we have been consulting with, researching, and surveying hundreds of churches of all denominations, sizes, locations, and theological persuasions. During that time, we have seen many changes, some of them heartening and others not so encouraging. One aspect has been consistent across all these churches; they do not plan for the inevitable moment when their current pastor leaves. Given the intimate connection between a congregation’s morale and its pastor’s worship leadership, we were troubled when we saw that most churches do not have a plan in place to sustain excellence and continuity in succession planning. Writers in the business and leadership world have dealt extensively with the subject, but there are no foundational concepts for handling it successfully in the church world.” While I think that churches as a whole have made much progress since Weese and Crabtree wrote their book, it would seem from surveying Calvary Chapel pastors that our movement has a ways to go in catching up in this vital area.

They suggest that pastors and lay leaders should be reflecting on and answering the following questions:

- Do you have a strategic plan that defines where your church is going and how you are going to get there?
- Do you have a clear understanding of your particular church culture and the specific advantages and risks posed within that culture by a pastoral transition?
- Have you had an honest, structured discussion with your governing board about what is going to happen to the church when the pastor leaves?
- Does your governing board have a clear, Biblically based, shared understanding of the spiritual principles that should inform a pastoral transition process?
- Do you have a pastoral transition plan in place that describes in detail how your church will maintain excellence at the point when the current pastor leaves and a new pastor is called?
- Do you have a crisis plan in place, should something happen that requires the pastor to leave suddenly?
- Have you identified in advance the consultant resources you will need in order to make a successful pastoral transition, and have you made sure they have a proven track record of effectiveness? This includes denominational agencies serving as consultants.
- Has your governing board calculated all the various costs that would be associated with a poorly managed pastoral transition?

These are all difficult and challenging questions, but certainly questions that need to be asked.

There is an excellent section in this book that discusses and assesses the likely financial costs of replacing a pastor. This must include, not just the costs directly associated with a transition process (including severance and/or retirement if applicable) but also the cost of temporary pulpit supply, possibly flying in candidates from other locations, the inevitable drop in contributions, the possible departure of other staff members, either before or after a successor is chosen, and the time it will take for the church to get back to its previous size and income level. Suffice it to say, pastoral

transitions, even in the best of cases, can inflict a serious toll on the finances of the church.

This book goes through numerous case studies, generally categorizing the involved churches by their church culture. While most churches will share various elements of the various church culture types, and each church has its own unique culture, even among churches within a movement such as Calvary Chapel, reading through the various case studies offers valuable food for thought. The more you have witnessed or read about how other churches have both succeeded and failed, the more equipped you are to confront your own situation, and the more you recognize what is at stake.

The best book that has been written on pastoral succession is one that was written recently in 2014 called *Next- Pastoral Succession That Works* by William Vanderbloeman and Warren Bird. (Vanderbloeman is the leader of a ministry that aids churches in pastoral succession and Bird is a writer and researcher for Leadership Network.) When this book was published I had been studying this issue for 2-3 years in depth, in anticipation of writing this book about Calvary Chapel pastoral succession, and as I read *Next* my initial thought was, “If this book had come out earlier I probably would have written on something else, and just told pastors to buy this book.” The book does a great job of covering the issues concerning succession, including numerous case studies, summaries of other available literature, and a Biblical basis for understanding this issue. It is also very readable and practical, while at the same time challenging to anyone who is either considering this issue or who should be considering this issue. It does not deal

specifically with the particular ecclesiology, history and culture of Calvary Chapel, or of the “pastor-led” model most common among Calvary Chapel churches, but the principles contained in this book and the exhortations addressed to pastors personally are extremely valuable for us.

The preface of the book starts with a thought-provoking statement. “Every pastor is an interim pastor.” They go on to say, “Few ministers consider that truth. Few are eager to admit that their time with their present church will one day end. But ultimately, all pastors are ‘interim’ because the day when a successor takes over will come for everyone in ministry. Planning for that day of succession may be the biggest leadership task a leader and church will ever face. It may also be the most important.” The authors acknowledge right up front that, although they studied almost 200 case studies in preparing their book, pastoral succession is far from an exact science, where there is one simple way to have it succeed. They asserted, “Healthy succession is much more art than science. The plan and details must be tailored to each situation. It is also a deeply spiritual process that calls for prayer and recognition of God’s leading.”

This book contains and elaborates on “Ten Commandments of Preparing for Succession.” These commandments are as follows:

1. Read this book with others. (They suggest reading it with a trusted friend or colleague, as well as encouraging your elders to read it.)
2. Set a healthy pace for the long run. (Take days off, vacations and sabbaticals.)
3. Prepare an “emergency envelope.” (It should contain information for your family concerning your personal financial affairs, and instructions as to what should happen in the church if you are incapacitated or die.)

4. Develop a plan for a nonemergency but unforeseen departure. (What is the process in the event of your departure from this ministry position?)
5. Anticipate your (eventual) retirement. (The primary reason many pastors hang onto their job too long is a lack of finances for retirement. Plan early.)
6. Annually evaluate the state of your succession plan. (What are you doing as an ongoing process to develop others who may be eventual successors?)
7. Create a broad culture of leadership development. (A church-wide culture of leadership development will help every ministry, preparing successors at all levels of leadership.)
8. Share the teaching. (Build a well-rounded teaching team. In a smaller church these may be laymen. If the church is dependent on only one communicator, the damage from the sudden departure of a pastor is much greater.)
9. Share the leading. (Include others in senior level decision-making. This is independent from teaching.)
10. Look beyond the baton pass. (Make plans for what you will do after the succession is accomplished. Are there part time ministries you might be passionate about?)

Some of these commandments may or may not be appropriate in every situation, but these are certainly steps that should be considered by anyone who is in a pastoral leadership position. In some of the tough transitions we've seen within Calvary Chapel, as we'll discuss later, some of these steps would have proven to be enormously helpful. We should be open to each of these suggestions.

One of the church case studies that is discussed in *Next* is the story of North Coast Church, in Vista, California. Larry Osborne has served as the pastor of the church for over thirty years. Larry has written several books concerning some of the innovations he has instituted at his church, including multi-site, multi-venue, and sermon-based small groups. Although Larry is a dynamic and visionary leader, he has always tried to share the teaching load with other guys on his staff. In 2004 he named Chris Brown, who is

seventeen years younger than Larry, as one of the Senior Pastors. Larry and Chris share in the teaching and leadership of the church. Thus, the whole succession process is minimized. If something were to happen to Larry or Chris, the church would already have another Senior Pastor in place. Both teachers are willing to do less teaching than they would like, for the overall health of the church. Such a co-pastor arrangement would certainly require a spirit of humility on the part of both men, but it would also seem to contribute to the longevity of both, and to a stable future for the church.

This book also discusses the case of Bill Ritchie and Daniel Fusco, and their transition at Crossroads Community Church in Vancouver Washington. Their church is a Calvary Chapel fellowship, so we will discuss it in a later section, but it was nice to see a Calvary Chapel church used as a positive example of succession and transition.

Next suggests that every pastor should be asking themselves three questions regularly. How will you fund your life after retirement? Where will you spend your energy after retirement? How will you plan for your succession in a way that history will judge it as successful? The first two questions are assuming that a pastor will eventually retire, at least from his current position as Senior Pastor. This assumption is based on the fact that we eventually become less effective, and our churches would benefit from new leadership. There are many Calvary Chapel pastors who remain unconvinced of this, largely because of the example of Pastor Chuck Smith. But we would certainly do well to at least consider the possibility that staying in our current pastoral positions until we die may not be what is best for our churches. A succession that follows the death or

incapacity of the pastor is a difficult transition in any case. As the authors of this book contend, “The best succession typically occurs when the outgoing pastor has lined up a new challenge and is excited about what’s ahead.”

This book really emphasizes the importance of the existing Senior Pastor in the succession process. They state, “In the end, most of the success of a pastoral transition rises and falls on the shoulders of the outgoing pastor.” This is certainly true, and it is why successions are so difficult when the outgoing pastor isn’t involved, such as the cases of a sudden death or disqualification and dismissal of the outgoing pastor. A typical problem that occurs often with the outgoing pastor is when he has a hard time letting go. The authors state that the least likely successions to go well are those that involve a first generation, founding leader, passing the mantle on to second generation leaders. In such cases, they state, the transition can become more like a divorce than a wedding, because it is so hard for an outgoing founder to let go, and he can become a bigger part of the problem than the solution. Since Calvary Chapel has traditionally been a church planting movement, and such a large number of Calvary Chapel pastors were founding pastors, this is something we really want to keep in mind. I don’t think anyone wants to hurt the church they’ve worked so hard to develop, but this can easily occur if we aren’t consciously aware of the danger.

One of the case studies that this book covers extensively is the sad case of The Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California. This story is an important one for every pastor to be aware of, because in one generation a church grew to be one of the most

influential churches in America, then when the succession process went bad, the church completely dissolved, while the founder was still alive, and the property was sold off to the Roman Catholic Church. Most people are somewhat familiar with this story, but this is the most detailed and accurate writing I've seen on it, without a particular bias either for or against the church and its pastor Robert Schuller. As there are quite a few very large Calvary Chapel churches, we would do well to be humbled and warned concerning how quickly a huge ministry can fall apart, when succession isn't handled well. "The bigger they are, the harder they fall."

This book has a section on the lifecycle of a church, discussing the tendency for churches to rise and fall with a generation. They point out that as the pastor gets older, the congregation gets older too. "The average age in a congregation tends to be the pastor's age minus about five years- unless certain exceptions are put into place. Those 'age diluters' might include a younger worship leader, a mixed-age teaching team, a worship host who is a very different age from the senior pastor, or other young faces who are regularly on the platform." Keeping a church multi-generational requires a conscious effort to provide opportunities for younger people to be seriously involved in ministry, long before the older leader steps aside. If you wait until the transition occurs, there may not be much of a church left to transition, and the few older people who stay through the transition to a younger leader will feel out of place, since they aren't used to young people being on the platform and teaching.

This book describes many different case studies, and just about every type of transition imaginable. Everything from a pastor dying unexpectedly to a moral failure forced resignation to a pastor leaving under pressure and going to start another church nearby, and so many more. In each case, they suggest a few lessons that can be learned from each succession. There is a wealth of succession experience that comes from the authors' combined studies and experience.

Again, of all the literature currently available on pastoral succession, *Next* is the one book that covers the subject in the most comprehensive way, while still being very readable. It was researched well, and is a must read for any pastor or church leader.

In addition to these books that are specifically directed to the whole subject of pastoral succession and transition, there are several other books that are more about church leadership in general, but contain valuable sections concerning the subject of pastoral succession. One of these books is one of the classic Christian leadership books by John Maxwell entitled *Developing the Leaders Around You*. Maxwell has an entire chapter called "Reproducing Generations of Leaders." In this chapter he says,

"Most people believe that each new generation of leaders is born rather than developed. They think that new leaders come out of the womb as leaders and simply wait until they are old enough to take their rightful place in society. As a result, many leaders are willing simply to produce followers, expecting new leaders to show up on the scene when their time comes. Those types of leaders have no idea how much they are limiting their own potential and the potential of the people around them. As I have said before, a leader who produces followers limits his success to what his direct, personal influence touches. His success ends when he can no longer lead. On the other hand, a leader who produces other leaders multiplies his influence, and he and his people have a future. His organization continues

to build and grow even if he is personally unable to carry on his leadership role.”

Then he goes on to say that those you develop must themselves go on to develop others.

“True success comes only when every generation continues to develop the next generation, teaching them the value and the method of developing the next group of leaders.” Establishing a culture of mentoring in this way would certainly go a long way in minimizing the challenges of succession, and smoothing the transitions.

Another excellent book that has a chapter on succession is the book *The 7 Practices of Effective Ministry* written by Andy Stanley, Reggie Joiner and Lane Jones. Of the seven practices of effective ministry, number six is “Replace Yourself.” In this chapter Andy talks about the day in 1974 when Hank Aaron hit his 715th homerun, surpassing the record set by the legendary Babe Ruth. Then in 1998 when Mark McGwire shattered Roger Maris’s record for most homeruns in a season. Andy says it caused him to think, “No matter who you are, how famous or powerful, one day somebody will replace you.” He then makes this sobering statement. “It’s sobering but unavoidable. One day it will be over. One day someone else will be doing what you are doing. One day you will be replaced. Whether you have an exit strategy or not, you will ultimately exit. And on that day, everything you’ve done, everything you’ve dreamed, and everything you’ve built will be placed in someone else’s hands.” He says you really have only two choices. You can either desperately hold on to your job until someone inevitably replaces you, or you can prepare someone to do what you do and strategically replace yourself. He says, “The first option gives you limited input in what happens in the

future of your organization; the second allows you to leverage your influence with the next generation who will one day lead your organization. When you attempt to hold on, you encourage your organization to be built around a personality; when you strategically replace yourself, you allow your organization to be driven by a vision. Learning to effectively hand off leadership to the next generation is vital to the longevity of any organization, especially the church.” Later he points out that if you fail to develop a strategy to replace yourself, you will “force talented individuals to remain in the wings, cause potential leaders to exit the organization, stifle needed insight from valuable team members, hinder your ability to recruit volunteers, and limit the growth of your programs and ministries.” These are consequences of failing to enable others to begin to move into positions of greater participation in the mission of the church that most pastors don’t really consider. When a large church with many staff members doesn’t have anyone who would be a good candidate to take over the leadership of the church, should the Senior Pastor leave, perhaps this is an indictment on the willingness of the leader to prepare others properly. A large church with several long-term loyal staff members, none of whom could take over the senior leadership of the church could be okay. The stability is certainly desirable. A large church that has staff members who regularly go out to plant other churches is probably even more desirable, however, because you are at least developing another generation of leaders. But it would seem that the most optimal situation would be for a church that maintains a stable staff, over a long period of time, where those gifted staff pastors are increasingly taking roles of leadership within their home church. Such a church would be ideal in confronting the inevitable succession and

transition challenges, as the Senior Pastor is less able to continue in his role over the long haul. It would not only increase the potential longevity of Senior Pastors, but would also insure an even richer future after he is no longer in the picture. Even in a smaller church without additional staff pastors, this mentoring and delegating could take place as future church leaders and pastors are developed. And no one is more familiar with the culture and DNA of a church than someone who is serving in that church. There are certainly times when there isn't an internal candidate who is qualified to succeed a pastor, and the church has no other choice than to look outside the church family. But in such cases it may serve as an indictment against the lack of a priority that the pastor has put on leadership development and delegation. Since internal candidates for succession tend to be the most successful, this is definitely worth consideration. The only reason I can think of for a pastor to not do this would be the pastor's insecurity, having a fear of being upstaged or replaced, or his delusional thinking that no one can do the job as well as he can. Definitely something to consider.

Another book that has a chapter on pastoral succession is *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make* by Hans Finzel. The ninth of his top ten mistakes leaders make is "Success Without Successors- Planning Your Departure the Day You Begin." This book was written more than twenty years ago but still contains many of the principles that are being discussed today regarding pastoral succession. Finzel begins with four fundamental principles. First, "Pride tightens the grip on leadership; humility relaxes and lets go." Secondly, "Finishing well is an important measure of success in leadership." Thirdly, "Letting go of leadership is like sending your children away to college: It hurts, but has to

be done.” His fourth principle is, “Mentoring is a nonnegotiable function of successful leadership.”

Finzel quotes Lyle Schaller as saying that the two most common leadership transition mistakes are, “Leaders tend to stay too long in a position rather than not long enough” and “Leaders who stay too long do much more damage than those who don’t stay long enough.” Most of us have seen examples of pastors who stuck around much too long for the good health and growth of the church. That should frighten us.

Finzel says that we should always be involved in an ongoing search for our eventual successor. As he describes this, he says, “Sometimes as I speak to our younger staff, I look into their faces and think, ‘One of you will replace me someday!’ That thought excites me and motivates me to pave the way for them. They are not a threat, but the ultimate completion of my leadership.”

He also describes some of the common reasons contributing to failed leadership successions. These include:

- The organization just doesn’t like the new person.
- The new person just doesn’t like the organization.
- There is a corporate culture conflict: Values and beliefs don’t match.
- The leader fails miserably in his newly assigned responsibilities: He lacks either the ability, capacity, experience, or knowledge to do the job.
- The old guard sabotages the efforts of the new leader.
- The old leader sabotages the efforts of the new leader.
- The old leader fails to leave, or reappears.

- The new leader lacks persistence to implement change.
- The new leader is recruited away by a better offer or challenge.
- The new leader fails to win a following because of poor interpersonal skills.

Many of these dangers can be mitigated in the screening of a succession candidate, and in the thoughtful attention to the transition process. Each of them is well worth considering.

Another valuable section in Finzel's book is his list of the reasons why leaders have a difficult time letting go. His suggested reasons are: Job security (What am I going to do next?), Fear of retirement (Me, retire?), Resistance to change (The saddle is so comfortable), Self-worth (This role is my whole life), Lack of confidence (Who else can do this job like I do?), Love for the job (I really love my leadership role) and Loss of investment (I've put too much into this group to let it go.) What pastor can't relate to many of these thoughts as we consider the possibility of stepping aside from our current roles? But each of these reasons involves serious denial of the reality that we won't live forever, and can't continue to lead at an optimal level forever. Pastor Chuck Smith once said that he felt the Lord speaking to his heart and saying, "Chuck, whose church is it anyway?" to which Chuck responded, "It's Your church, Lord." As we consider the difficult questions regarding succession, we would do well to ask ourselves the same question: "Whose church is it, anyway?"

As pastoral succession becomes an area of growing interest, there are more and more articles that are written on the subject. I will discuss a few here, but there are several others contained in my Bibliography.

One interesting article I found was very relevant to the whole question of whether or not a pastor's son should succeed his father as Senior Pastor. Bethany Church, a large non-denominational church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, is led by Jonathan Stockstill, who took over the church that had previously been pastored by his father. Ironically, Jonathan's grandfather had founded the church in 1963, and Jonathan's father Larry had taken over the leadership of the church from his father when Larry was 30, and Jonathan took over the church from Larry when Jonathan was 30, in 2011. Prior to that, Jonathan had been the worship leader at the church for 12 years. Larry Stockstill had always had a heart for missions, so when Jonathan took over as Senior Pastor, Larry became the missions pastor. When asked about the advantages of family succession in ministry, Jonathan had some interesting thoughts.

Growing up in the local church that I would eventually pastor gave me such an historical perspective of where we come from. I know every inch of our facilities. I know the culture of our city. I know the people who have been such an integral part of our ministry through the years, and I know our characteristic strengths and weaknesses. I can pull from an archive of memories about the things that worked and the things that didn't work. I was by my dad's side as an assistant pastor for 12 years and saw every business transaction that took place. I also witnessed the thousands of people who came in the front door of our church and eventually moved into different seasons of their lives somewhere else. In a way, you could say that the church is as familiar to me as my own family. Any disadvantages are miniscule at best. One criticism we have had, as with any other family succession, is nepotism. Some people forget that God often worked in families in the Bible, and the same is true today.

Another interesting article from Church Executive Magazine was written by Joy Roberts. In this article, called *Three Keys to a Seamless Pastoral Transition*, the pastoral transition that occurred in March of 2015 at Lenexa Baptist Church in Lenexa, Kansas was described. This was a large Baptist church with 6,000 members and several sites. The

Senior Pastor, Steve Dighton, who had pastored the church for 25 years, was stepping down because of health problems. Chad McDonald, who had been leading one of the satellite churches, became the successor. The succession went extremely well and the attendance and giving at the church continue to grow. Roberts identifies three key components to this successful transition. The first key is Preparation (building out a timeline.) Their five year succession plan was clearly delineated and communicated, and included the fifth year where Dighton served for a year as “senior pastoral adviser.” The second identified key is Partnership (involved lay and ministry leaders.) Lenexa Baptist formed a transition committee, comprised of members with various expertise, who could aid in the smooth transition process. They helped both men prepare for the transition, and also helped prepare the congregation. The third key presented is Provision (assure that finances are in order.) This involved the handing off of financial and other administrative leadership of the church from Dighton to McDonald, under the guidance of the executive leaders. It also included the financial preparation for Pastor Dighton, including his retirement package. These three points, preparation, partnership and provision provide a good outline for beginning discussions on the succession and transition process, and Lenexa Baptist sets a good example of how this can be implemented.

Another excellent and thought-provoking article is one written by Warren Bird for Christianity Today in 2014 called *Putting Success in Succession*. Dr. Bird, who is the research director for Leadership Network, opens his article with the profound statement, “Every pastor is an interim pastor.” In a movement where we are used to long term pastorates, we don’t think of this very often but it is true. Even a pastor who remains in

the same church for 40 years or more won't be there forever. There was a pastor at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa before Chuck Smith and there has already been one since he has gone to heaven, and there will no doubt be others. All pastors need to keep this perspective. We are temporary.

Bird talks about some notable failures in succession, then talks about the “no plan” plan, which is the predominant plan among Calvary Chapel pastors, at least at this point. Even though Jerry Falwell, from Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia was 73 years old, and had many medical challenges and other risk factors, when he died from cardiac arrest in 2007, and his son Jonathan ultimately took over the church, they had never really discussed succession in any meaningful way. Jonathan said that his father died with his boots on, as he desired, but he said, concerning succession, “I wish we had talked about it.”

He then describes the four predominant models for pastoral succession, with examples of each. The four models described are the family plan (where a pastor is succeeded by a relative), the denominational plan (where the succession is conducted by a denomination), the process-only plan (where the outgoing pastor helps set up a process, then gets out) and the intentional overlap plan (where the predecessor and successor work together for a period of time.) Research has shown that each model can work, if the model matches the church culture.

In a sidebar to Warren Bird's article, he lists the five reasons why successions fail. The reasons he lists are "Pastors don't let go", "Pastors wait too long", "Multiple candidates fight it out", "Change comes too quickly" and "Pastors hit hidden landmines."

Bird closes his article by saying, "The only thing that's certain? It's an inevitable need in every church. And we hope to move it from taboo to normal." He has done much to bring awareness to this difficult issue, and the church of the future, should our Lord tarry, will be better off as a result.

Business writing.

Even though the business world is different in many ways from the church world, there are a lot of lessons that can be learned from the business world when it comes to leadership succession. Businesses have to be considering succession all the time, and can't afford to ignore it or get it wrong. They have a huge financial stake in the process, and shareholders, investors and lenders to answer to. Most businesses can't afford to go through a year or two of losses before a new leader finds his stride. In business you are held accountable every day for profits and losses, and an uncertain future can destroy a business. When a business starts, from day one, they need to demonstrate a clear plan for leadership succession should something happen to the key people in the business. Without that no one would invest in the business. And if a business goes public, the scrutiny is magnified infinitely more, not only from potential investors but also from governmental authorities. Businesses generally are run on debt, so they need to show a stability moving forward.

Most churches never undergo this level of scrutiny when it comes to succession planning. The shareholders of the church, if there are any, would generally be the congregants. (Many Calvary Chapel churches don't have a formal membership, but all churches are supported by the offerings contributed by those who attend, and the church can only survive as long as those people continue to contribute. Thus they have a stake in the church.) The congregants rarely ask anyone about the succession plans of the church. There may be some questions, but it is much different than an annual business meeting for a large corporate entity like Berkshire-Hathaway, for instance, where everyone demands to know what will happen when the aging Warren Buffet is gone. And churches don't generally borrow money for operational expenses, as most businesses do. When churches borrow money it is usually in order to purchase real estate, or to build on existing real estate. Such loans are secured by the property so concern about succession is minimal. Most lenders will ask the church to take out an insurance policy on the Senior Pastor (called "key man insurance") which will minimize the chances of a church going bankrupt in the event of the sudden loss of a leader, but the concerns are much less than they are with a business. A church isn't supposed to have a profit requirement, as most of them are legally incorporated as non-profit corporations. A business exists for the purpose of profit, and a business can quickly fail if it isn't turning a profit for sometimes even months. If a church's revenue dips, and its attendance suffers, they can generally absorb the losses for quite some time by cutting personnel and services. A business going through difficult times can't just run the business by using volunteers. Churches do that all the time. Of course, the bigger a church is, the more at risk they are of a downturn. If

their facility expenses are high, and their employees are technical and specialized, their ability to cut expenses is more challenging than in a smaller church. But in general, since businesses have more to lose from a failure to plan a workable succession process, they have tended to work on these processes much more than churches have, and there are certainly things churches can learn from the business world in the area of leadership succession.

Perhaps some of the most important lessons churches can learn from businesses are when successions have gone wrong. Since businesses have so much at stake, and work so hard to get this right, when a succession plan goes wrong for them it can be especially informative. It isn't surprising when a church succession plan fails. Our plans are often conceived by people who have no accountability, and often have a personal bias and stake in who succeeds them. Quite often a church succession plan is overseen by amateurs who, however well-meaning they may be, have little to no experience even in running a church, much less in seeing one through a transition process. On the other hand, when a business undergoes a leadership succession, it is generally conducted by those who are foremost experts in their field. These are people who either have years of experience in the particular company or industry, who are working together with members of the company's Board of Directors, who are the smartest people they can find to sit on their board. Many of them are Chief Executive Officers of other huge corporations. So, when these teams of brilliant people occasionally fail, we should really take notice and learn what we can from their failure.

One of the most notable failures in leadership succession in the world of business was when the J.C. Penney corporation replaced their CEO, 64 year old Mike Ullmann, with a new incoming CEO, 52 year old Ron Johnson. Johnson lasted a little over a year at J.C. Penney, during which time the corporation lost over a billion dollars in cash, and was relieved of his duties, only to bring back Ullmann, who remains as CEO today. The whole story is told and analyzed in an article written for Fortune Magazine by Jennifer Reingold in 2014.

The article begins:

“When you find a savior, you don’t quibble over details. So it was that J.C. Penney, the long-stagnating mid-tier department store chain, announced in June 2011 that it was hiring Ron Johnson, the man in charge of Apple’s wildly profitable retail stores and a Steve Jobs acolyte whose golden halo also included past triumphs as an executive at Target. The news sparked euphoria, but conspicuously absent from the media coverage was any mention of how Johnson planned to save this faltering retailer in a fading industry. That’s because there were no plans. His mandate could be reduced to a single word: *change*. What that entailed would be figured out later.

Reading the account of Johnson’s massive failure should frighten anyone considering this matter of succession. Certainly J.C. Penney had fallen behind the times, as a business. Their clientele were getting older, and the business was on its way to a predictable decline. Everyone agreed changes were in order. Many first generation Calvary Chapels could relate to J.C. Penney’s predicament. Churches that began during the glory years of the Jesus Movement have by now experienced gentrification. The young cool hippie pastors are now old men. While Calvary Chapel was known as being a radical trendsetter in the 70’s and 80’s, there are now younger, hipper churches. Young

people today tend to see Calvary Chapel as “old school” and behind the times. “Cutting edge church” is no longer identified with the Calvary dove.

As soon as Ron Johnson arrived, the message communicated was clear. “This is not your grandmother’s J.C. Penney.” They rebranded everything. Everything was now “JCP” instead of the antiquated “J.C. Penney.” The headquarters were extravagantly redecorated. They held company events that mimicked the kind of energetic, party atmosphere celebrations common at Apple. Famous lesbian comedienne Ellen DeGeneres was chosen as the company spokesperson, and appeared in all their television advertising. They featured a same-sex couple in their Christmas circular. Bold and risky moves were the rule of the day. As Reingold describes it, “With nary a whisper of opposition, the 109-year-old retailer had decided to abandon not only its strategy of many decades but arguably its fundamental way of doing business.” As Johnson describes it after the fact, “I came in because they wanted to transform. It wasn’t just to compete or improve.” And Reingold observes, “He and his team did indeed transform Penney- from a sleepy behemoth known for serving the needs of Middle America into something quite different: an ambitious wannabe startup that fancied itself cool, with a radical pricing and merchandising model that had never been pulled off before. The outcome was doubly disastrous: Penney alienated its traditional customers without attracting new ones.” After 16 months, and a billion dollars in cash lost, Johnson was out, the previous CEO Ullmann returned, and everything reverted back to the way it was before. Their results have improved of late, but some observers are still predicting bankruptcy for this company.

Currently there are a lot of Calvary Chapel churches that are either contemplating or are in the process of turning the church over to the next generation. As the original founding pastors are in their sixties and seventies, it is sinking in that something needs to be done about the future of the churches. In many cases the sizes of the churches are in decline, and there is an awareness and desire to attract a younger congregation. This is certainly wise to consider moving toward the future of the church. However, this transition needs to be handled with caution. Just turning the control of the church over to younger people, and abandoning the older congregants isn't generally the wisest move. As in the case of J.C. Penney, alienating the more mature base of supporters, in favor of an attempt at attracting a new generation of younger people, can prove to be disastrous for several reasons. First of all, it is disrespectful to the generation of those who built what now exists. Discarding older people as obsolete may be acceptable in modern Western culture, but it is certainly not what the Bible teaches us about how the church is to operate. In the body of Christ, both young and old have much to contribute. Secondly, the older and more established people in the church are frequently those who are willing and able to contribute the most to the church, both financially and in terms of volunteer service. They often are the ones who have the greatest resources, including time and money. Younger people are just trying to live hand to mouth, and they generally have no concept of tithing. They think nothing of spending \$6 on a cup of coffee, but aren't as compelled to contribute money to a church to pay the salaries and utility bills. Thirdly, just from a practical perspective, it is virtually impossible to completely change the perceived identity of a long-established organization. No matter what you do to try to

update the identity of a church, perceptions die hard. If you put a 30-year-old guy with tattoos, frosted hair with a faux hawk on the platform of an established church with a history, it tends to just look like a desperate attempt at pretending to be something you aren't. An older church will never become the "young hip church" again. There will always be someone younger and more radical than you, holding services in a dumpy old theater, making you look like a wannabe. J.C. Penney will never become Apple, and it was foolish to try.

This doesn't mean that young and upcoming ministers should have no place in the life of an established church. They should be given opportunities to grow and flourish in ministry. Their input should be included on an ongoing basis in every facet of church life. And they should be involved in everything that goes on, including on the platform on a regular basis. But to just turn things over to them probably isn't wise. Changes in church work best when they are gradual transitions. Congregations have a rough time with paradigm shifts, especially when they are generational.

There are many great books and articles from secular business sources that offer much that is helpful for those who are considering the matter of pastoral succession and transition. Some of them are listed in the bibliography. But perhaps the most interesting and relevant secular source, from a business expert, is a conversation that Pastor Chuck Smith had with Peter Drucker. Peter Drucker, who died at the age of 95 in 2005, is considered to be the "founder of modern management." When it comes to business management and leadership there is no one bigger than Drucker. The author of over 40

books, long time college professor at Claremont Graduate School, and winner of the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2002, his influence on modern management and business practices is unprecedented. In 2003, Dr. Chuck Fromm (the publisher of Worship Leader Magazine, and nephew of Pastor Chuck Smith) set up a meeting with Pastor Chuck and Peter Drucker, to talk about pastoral succession. This historic meeting (attended by Pastor Chuck Smith, Chuck Fromm, Peter Drucker and Chuck Smith Jr.) dealt with many crucial issues concerning succession. Chuck Fromm recorded the discussion, and provided me with his notes. I have included an abbreviated transcript as an appendix at the end of this paper. But there are several points that are worthy of discussion here.

One of the strongest statements Drucker made had a great impact on Pastor Chuck. Drucker said, “The likes of you don’t retire, and shouldn’t retire.” Drucker based this on the fact that he was convinced Chuck’s primary authority was personal rather than institutional. Peter went on to say that Chuck should be releasing institutional control, but maintaining his personal authority and position. Of course, coming from a man who was still teaching advanced University classes in his 90’s, you can see why this encouragement was inspiring to Pastor Chuck. Drucker especially emphasized the need to release authority over the movement, and the other churches to others, while maintaining his personal leadership over his own church. These were certainly the seeds to what became the Calvary Chapel Association structure.

The two men had an interesting back and forth debate concerning the differences between a movement and an institution. Drucker's contention is that institutions live on, while movements die. Pastor Chuck contended that institutions die, while movements live on. Drucker argued that denominations last longer than movements. He said they are almost impossible to kill. Chuck used the fact that Harvard and Yale aren't turning out many pastors nowadays, to which Drucker responded that those institutions are still very strong, but they have changed, and any institution has to change to survive.

Peter Drucker told Pastor Chuck, "No one can succeed to a charismatic role... so a certain amount of institutionalization is necessary... The main benefit of institutionalization is that it allows an organization or an entity to survive mediocre leadership, and mediocre leadership happens to be the rule not the exception." This is probably something that needs to be contemplated by every pastor or leader who is approaching the subject of succession. As a charismatic leader, you probably will not be able to pass the baton to someone of equal charismatic connection with the people. So institutionalizing some of your roles may make it more likely for a successor to succeed. That way they don't have to be you in every way.

Drucker had very strong opinions about family members and succession. He stated, "One thing I can say very bluntly: family succession and churches are incompatible. Family succession does work well in many other things, but not in the organization in which the decisive unit is local, and fundamentally in the church the decisive unit is local." Drucker also felt strongly that a successor is better to be drawn

from the outside rather than the inside, because if one of your assistants succeeds you, people will always think they only succeeded you because of their relationship with you. He further asserts that the closer a person is to you, the more they will try to be like you, and being like you will never work. Of course, many people would disagree with Peter Drucker on matters of family or internal succession, but it would be wise to at least consider what he is saying. After all, he is Peter Drucker!

One thread that seems to run throughout this succession discussion between Peter Drucker and Chuck Smith is that change is necessary for survival, and leadership change is a natural opportunity for this necessary institutional change. If our primary goal in the succession process is the continued propagation of our existing way of doing things, we may actually be presiding over the eventual decline of our ministries. Because we believe in the fact that God's Holy Spirit is ultimately wanting to lead us into a future that is uncertain to us, as Jesus builds His Church, then we can't hang onto the past, as exciting as it's been. We have to be open to the possibility that God's purposes for our church's future may be different than its past and present. My church looks almost nothing like it looked 10 years ago, and neither does yours. Ten years from now, our churches will be a lot different than they are today, whether we are still leading them or not. So any time we contemplate succession, we should remind ourselves of whose church it really is, releasing it to Him to determine what it becomes in the future. My goal as a pastor is not to establish and preserve my own legacy. It is to cooperate with Jesus and to flow with Him as He perpetuates His legacy.

Chapter 4

Some Calvary Chapel Succession Stories

It isn't enough to just describe succession in our movement using percentages from an anonymous survey, as helpful as that might be. To really have a helpful picture we can benefit from some actual stories of how succession has been experienced in Calvary Chapel churches. Some of these stories are great success stories, while others involve various levels of failure. There is much to learn from each type, and hopefully helpful principles we can form as a result. My purpose in recounting these succession stories is neither to extol those whose plan worked out well, or to impugn those whose plans were lacking. I believe that everyone in these stories did what they believed was best. Some plans, however, are better than others. We can either learn from the resultant transitions, or be doomed to a random process that we just blindly hope works out. So here are some of our Calvary Chapel succession stories to consider.

Calvary Chapel of Santa Barbara

Ricky Ryan had been the Senior Pastor of Calvary Chapel of Santa Barbara, on the coast of Southern California, for 20 years. Prior to coming to Santa Barbara he had pastored a small Calvary Chapel in Maui, Hawaii, from 1980-1990. Having led CCSB from being a small church to being one of the largest and most influential churches in Santa Barbara with several thousand regular attenders, it would have been easy for Ricky to just maintain and enjoy a thriving church of people who loved him. The church was healthy financially and had a vibrant ministry. But being in his 60's, Ricky was beginning to question whether or not he was the right person to lead his church on into the coming years. Ricky is one of the most energetic and enthusiastic pastors in the Calvary Chapel

movement, but for the first time in all his years of ministry he wasn't feeling a vision and excitement for the days ahead. He knew that God had a new and fresh work for his church, and that the trajectory of the church was exciting and powerful. He just wasn't sure he was the man to lead the church where God wanted to take them next. He had seen men who lost their fresh vision and excitement for what God had in store for their churches in the future. Many of these churches either leveled off and went into maintenance mode, fighting to preserve what they had, or headed into decline, looking back on the "good old days" and their past glory, and moping about how those days are gone, and you had to be there to understand. So Ricky talked with his church leaders about what should come next.

Ricky and his board members began to pray about what kind of man would be ideal to move the church forward in the next generation. They didn't want someone just like Ricky, but they wanted to find someone who could pick up where Ricky led them, and lead them into the next chapter of what God wanted to do in their body. (And there really wasn't anyone in the movement who was just like Ricky anyway.)

One of the names that came up right away was David Guzik. David had served as Senior Pastor for 14 years in Simi Valley, California in a small Calvary Chapel church, but had transitioned out of that church as he felt a call from God to go to Europe as a missionary. He was in Europe for 7 years, and had started and led the Calvary Chapel Bible College in Seigen, Germany. David is known as being one of the most outstanding Bible teachers in the Calvary Chapel movement. His through the Bible commentary has

been used by thousands of pastors, and is featured on the Blue Letter Bible website and on many other computer Bible study programs. His careful scholarship and thoughtful exposition of the Word are respected by Calvary Chapel pastors everywhere, and by other pastors outside our movement as well. At the time Ricky was praying about leaving Santa Barbara, David had just recently felt God calling his family to leave Europe and return to the United States. David didn't have a plan for what the next chapter of his life of ministry would be, but he was just praying and ministering at various churches, conferences and colleges as the Lord would lead.

David was surprised when he heard that Calvary Chapel Santa Barbara was wanting to talk with him about coming to take over for Ricky as Senior Pastor. No one knew that Ricky was leaving, and no one really expected someone who had led his church into such a thriving season would ever step down. In the Calvary Chapel movement, most successful pastors stayed until they couldn't possibly continue. And David and Ricky were two very different people. Ricky was outgoing and has the style of a motivational speaker. His face lit up constantly with a giant smile whenever he would see anyone and his energy level was boundless. His laugh is contagious and the power of his personality is overwhelming and disarming. David, on the other hand, is much more reserved. He is warm and friendly, but has more of a "still waters run deep" appearance. He is a man of few words, but when he speaks it is generally profound. He certainly possesses a sense of humor, but when it comes to God and His Word, he is deeply serious. His careful scholarship is reflected in messages where every word is well thought out, and no words are wasted. Both men are passionately in love with Jesus, but they

have very distinct styles of teaching and ministry. So the idea of David succeeding Ricky was surprising to almost everyone, including David himself.

After talking extensively with David, Ricky recommended to the church board that David Guzik be called as the next pastor. But this was only a recommendation. Ricky told them that the decision was theirs, and he pulled himself out of the process. The board would need to decide whether to call David as their next pastor, or whether they should consider other options. As soon as the board confirmed that David should be their next Senior Pastor, Ricky stepped back into the picture and led the way in transitioning the church into its next chapter.

Ricky announced to the congregation that God was leading him to leave Santa Barbara, and to return to the little church he had founded in Maui, Hawaii. He told them that he had given them everything he had, but that he didn't feel like he had the juice to lead them into what God had for them in the future. He then announced that he felt David Guzik was God's man to take the baton and lead the church in ways that Ricky couldn't. He said that David could teach them at a level that he couldn't, and that he was the best man to lead them from here to where God wanted to take them next. The congregation responded very positively and enthusiastically. David was still teaching some Bible College classes at the time, and didn't feel it would be right to drop his commitment to those students, so during the transition time he flew to Santa Barbara to speak at least once a month, until he was able to move there permanently. Ricky moved on to Kumalani Chapel in Maui, where his ministry started so many years before, and continued to love

that little group of people until the Lord told him otherwise. (At the time of this writing Kumalani Chapel is now undergoing another transition as it becomes a satellite campus of Harvest, the church pastored by Greg Laurie, but that is another story.)

Although there have certainly been bumps in the road along the way, the process of succession in Calvary Chapel Santa Barbara has been successful by any measure. Attendance and giving are healthy, new people are coming every week, people are getting saved, and a new emphasis on Bible teaching and missions is taking the church into a whole new and exciting season. And Ricky is out paddling his surfboard in Maui.

There are several lessons that jump out from this succession story. First of all, it is inspiring to see how each of these men, independently, were hearing from God and willing to respond, not knowing what the future would hold. Secondly, Ricky Ryan's refreshing honesty in acknowledging and recognizing that he wasn't the man to lead the church into the next season is exemplary. Recognizing something like this is so unusual for pastors who typically don't possess the level of self-awareness, and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit to see themselves objectively. But recognizing it and acknowledging it are two different things. There are probably many pastors who have an awareness, on some level, that they don't have the energy or vision to lead their church into a new chapter. But they typically just settle for "good enough" and go into maintenance mode. When younger people come along with new ideas, these ideas are resisted by the tired pastor who just can't push himself to take the kinds of risks he took when he was younger. But Ricky Ryan is a shining example of a man who knew when to hang it up, and did it.

Knowing when to transition, then actually doing it, is a rare accomplishment in ministry. Ricky is an inspiration in this respect (even though there are worse things than having a backup plan in Maui.)

Another great lesson from this success story involves the supportive role Ricky played in the succession process, and afterwards. Numerous studies indicate that the single biggest factor in having a successful transition is the role that is played by the outgoing pastor. Ricky Ryan used all of his powers of persuasion, all his enthusiasm, and all the good will he had built up over the years and put them all behind David Guzik. And the people in the church believed him. They trusted Ricky enough to accept David as being God's choice to pastor their church, and they expected it to be a positive move forward because Ricky said it would be. They expected David to take them to another level because Ricky said he would. Ricky set David up for success, in every way he could. Then it was up to David to hear from God and lead the church into the next chapter of its history. Ultimately David would be judged based on his own performance, but Ricky gave him a great boost coming in, which no doubt made a huge difference. Not many incoming pastors have such an enthusiastic endorsement from the outgoing pastor. In our survey of Calvary Chapel pastors who had followed another Senior Pastor into their current position only 40% of them reported that the previous pastor was any help at all in aiding the transition. We all can't be the kind of cheerleader Ricky Ryan is, but we would all do well to aspire to do everything we can, regardless of the circumstances of our succession, to support the incoming pastor. Even when a pastor has been forced out of a ministry, a considerable number of people in the church still care deeply about their

pastor. What a difference it would make for those people to hear that their previous pastor has faith in the next pastor to lead them forward.

But perhaps the biggest lesson to learn from the Calvary Chapel Santa Barbara experience is a lesson that underlies all the other factors we have mentioned. It involves what is probably the most important factor in pastoral succession, and that is the quality of personal humility. Doing succession right, just like pastoring a church right, can only be done as humility is the rule of the day. Pride will destroy the best laid plans, no matter how informed they may be. A prideful person can certainly lead a church that is outwardly thriving, and God can legitimately be working in the lives of the people in such a church. But when it comes to successfully handing off the leadership of the church to another, pride will sabotage the transition every time. A proud outgoing pastor will send subtle messages implying the inferiority of the incoming pastor. It can sound like the church is starting over, and will someday reach the level of its glory years, while the pastor is moving on up to greener pastures. The outgoing pastor can assure the people that he will always be available to them, then he can be a magnet for all the things they end up not liking about their new pastor. The former pastor may then agree with them, feeding dissension in the church. By the same token, an incoming pastor who is prideful will take subtle jabs, and even not so subtle jabs, at the previous pastor. A new pastor tends to be a magnet for all the disgruntled people in the church, who think they know how the church needs to change. And a quick way to gain the support of these negative people is to let them know there is a new sheriff in town, and things are going to change now. "I'm not like him" is a subtle implication, and even "My way is better than his."

And the new pastor ends up building his support base from people who will never be satisfied, and the people who were happy and supportive of the previous pastor now feel disenfranchised. In a worst case scenario, where both the outgoing and incoming pastors are prideful, battle lines are drawn, and the church is divided. Each man is subtly, or even not so subtly, tearing down the other. Everyone loses in this scenario. But when both men are humble, as I believe Ricky Ryan and David Guzik to be, you have the best opportunity for a successful transition. I'm sure there are things David has done that Ricky wouldn't approve of. And I'm sure there are things about the way Ricky led the church that David had issues with. But after talking with both men extensively, I haven't witnessed anything other than total support between them. And that humility is inspiring and exemplary.

Crossroads Church in Vancouver, Washington

The pastoral succession story at Crossroads Church is a fascinating one that has caught the attention of many, even those outside the Calvary Chapel movement. It may provide a model that could be feasible for many Calvary Chapel churches, especially those that are large enough to have multiple pastors on staff. It is a model whereby the Senior Pastor transitions into a different position within the church while a younger man assumes the role of Senior Pastor. In our survey 41% of Calvary Chapel pastors said that this sounded like an attractive idea.

Bill Ritchie, the founding pastor of Crossroads Church, had a PhD from Claremont Seminary, and planted his church originally in 1972 as a denominational church. As his theology developed, and he became more open to the Holy Spirit, he realized that his church had become more like a Calvary Chapel than a typical church in his previous denomination so he affiliated with Calvary Chapel. Bill served as Senior Pastor of his church for 39 years, and it grew to several thousand regular attenders. As Bill grew older, and faced various health challenges, he began to consider the future of his church. It was still growing and thriving, but he wanted to look beyond its current state, and to consider the church's next chapter, and his own personal next chapter. Bill is a brilliant man who reads voraciously, and thinks outside the box. Even though he was in his 60's, Bill remained as contemporary as most men in their 20's. In the Calvary Chapel movement, Bill was known as the resident scholar and iconoclast. He has an amazing network of people he corresponds with, including many younger pastors who he encouraged along the way. To have a conversation with Bill is always refreshing and challenging, and you always come away with several book recommendations. And he isn't like most older pastors, many of whom recommend books that have been out of print for 20 years. He stays on top of new books that have just come out. And the books he recommends are not just theology books. He is well read and conversant in psychology, sociology, biology, history, neuroscience, health and fitness, aging, political science and just about every other field of study you can think of, and he passionately integrates all this knowledge with the job of a pastor and Bible teacher. Bill seemed like the man Bob Dylan wrote about in the song, *Forever Young*. He has the kind of

contemporary soul, residing in the body of a mature man, that you rarely see. So when Bill began to contemplate his pastoral succession, you expected him to come up with something unique, and he didn't disappoint.

Daniel Fusco was in many ways a polar opposite to Bill Ritchie, at least on the surface. Bill looks like a conservative, mature gentleman, like Ward Cleaver, Beaver's dad on the 60's show "Leave it to Beaver." Daniel Fusco, a bass player in a jazz band, looks like a 30 something Rastafarian, with a full beard and long dreadlocks. By all rights there should be a huge generation gap between them. Not only that, their ministry styles differ greatly. Bill had remained in one church for 39 years. Daniel had planted several churches, one on the East coast and several in the San Francisco Bay area. He always saw himself more as a church planter and a nomad than as a guy who would settle down.

But in other ways the two men were very similar. Both of them love Jesus passionately. They both have smiles that can light up a room. Each of them is ridiculously hyperactive. Both men are brilliant, and think originally and freshly. Both men are very open, friendly and down to earth. Each of them loves to interact with those with whom they differ, soaking up perspectives that differ from their own, learning from a wide variety of sources. And both of them are men of vision.

Bill and Daniel met first by interacting online, then met personally at a Calvary Chapel Pastor's Retreat. They hit it off immediately, each soaking up the energy and thinking of the other. Despite their differences, they shared the same passionate heart. A

radical mature pastor met a radical jazz musician church planter with dreadlocks, and a deep relationship and connection was formed.

Eventually Bill decided that Daniel would be the ideal man to succeed him in the church where he had invested his life. He knew that Daniel was the kind of energetic communicator who could appeal to the younger generation in the Portland/Vancouver area, while combining a solid commitment to Scripture without being a cookie cutter Christian. Daniel was, in some ways, what Bill had become. Daniel was still young, and could use some mentoring, but Bill was a great one to take on the role, and Daniel was a great admirer of Bill, as a man and a pastor.

So Daniel resigned from his church, handing it off to someone else, and moved to Vancouver, for what was originally intended to be a two year transition. At first Daniel would teach periodically, then he regularly shared the preaching duties with Bill. The people in the church were informed of the transition plan, and things were going so well that Daniel assumed the role of Senior Pastor after a year and a half. Giving and attendance hadn't been showing any decrease on the weeks that Daniel would preach, and more young people were coming, which excited Bill, and there was no reason to delay the handoff.

But what made this transition unique was the role that Bill took on. During the time of transition, Bill began a ministry to the baby boomers in the church. The ministry was called nxtSTP (Next Step) and was addressed to the needs of those in their fifties, sixties and beyond. Many of these people were retired, or were approaching retirement,

and were looking for what to do next with their lives. Some of them had sufficient assets, and sufficient time and energy, to devote to ministry. But they needed to be led in a direction for their next season of life. Bill, being in this same situation personally, was the perfect person to reinvigorate this generation, motivating them to be activated in new directions. They are being led in various outreaches, both internationally and locally. They are being given opportunities for education in various fields of interest, including health concerns of mature adults. Their needs for financial planning information and other relevant topics are being addressed. And they are establishing new and fresh ways to be involved in ministry, both within and without the church. Bill himself is using his vast knowledge and experience to aid the community in ways that he never had time for when he was a Senior Pastor. Bill's ministry is as fruitful as ever, while Daniel's ministry is flourishing in ways that would have otherwise taken him many years, if at all, to match.

The lessons to be derived from the Crossroads succession are many, and their example may eventually become a common model. The greatest thing about this succession model is that the church doesn't have a sense of loss. They didn't lose their pastor. He is still there. So often, pastoral succession means the church loses a beloved pastor, but gains a new pastor. If it goes well, you break even. But given our tendency to remember the past in an exaggerated positive way, it is a real challenge for a new pastor to ever live up to the memories of his predecessor. But with this model, there is no sense of loss. Bill is still there. And the people who have been there the longest can now have even greater contact with him than they ever did when he was the Senior Pastor. Now he

is theirs. And now they have Daniel also. The younger people have a pastor they can connect with, drawing the next generation into the church. And the older people seem fine with Daniel because they figure if Bill likes him, he must be okay. So this model has the potential to be a win for all generations.

A second benefit of this model is that it provides something for the previous Senior Pastor to do. Many pastors tend to hang on too long to their position simply because they don't know what to do next. That almost always leads to decline within the church. We have all seen that happen. Sometimes this is simply a matter of economics. Many pastors just can't afford to step aside. So many Calvary Chapel pastors have opted out of Social Security, and have no savings for retirement. So even if they feel the need to step down, it just isn't financially feasible. But to take on a different role in the church, even at a lesser salary, might free up older Senior Pastors to release control of the church, and find something within the ministry to revitalize their passions and energy.

In addition to the ministry related benefits, there could also be financial benefits to the church. For most churches that are built mostly around young families, finances are a serious problem. Young singles and young families are trying to get their lives started, and although they bring energy and vibrancy to a church, they often aren't able to financially support the church in any significant way. Those who have already raised their families tend to be more established financially, and are thus more able to contribute to the ministry. You typically have either older, dead churches, with a pile of money, or young and energetic churches that are broke. This model might provide both.

But once again, the most important factor in this kind of transition, as in any other kind, is humility. Many pastors who I've talked to can't imagine serving in their church in a "lesser" role. Their identities are so wrapped up in being the "Senior Pastor" that it would kill them to stick around and watch some young guy changing everything. Only humility could allow a man to continue in the same church while submitting to a younger man. And from everything I've seen or heard, Bill Ritchie had been able to handle this situation in a humble way. It means he has to tell people who complain to him about things, that he isn't the Senior Pastor anymore, and they'll have to talk to Daniel. That has to be difficult. Especially when there are no doubt times when Bill agrees with the criticism. Taking this lesser role of leadership, after leading the church for so many decades, necessitates humility. A prideful man shouldn't even consider this model. At the same time, Daniel also needs to have humility. Many new pastors would be totally threatened to have the previous and founding pastor still in the building. Many succeeding pastors have been undermined by their predecessor even when the man doesn't stay in the church. Only a humble man could be secure enough to work with his predecessor in ministry, honoring the past and leading forward into the future. But for those who can, this model could be incredibly beneficial. The previous Senior Pastor can continue serving the people he loves while the current Senior Pastor has a built in resource that is priceless. But unless both men are humble, this plan would be a disaster.

Crossroads Church in Denver, Colorado

Crossroads Church in Denver is a Calvary Chapel affiliate church that is led by its Senior Pastor, Tom Stipe. Tom was involved with Calvary Chapel since the earliest days, both as a musician in various musical groups, and as a pastor. Tom served at Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa for several years before leaving to plant his church in Denver in 1976. Tom was not only one of the leaders in the Calvary Chapel movement, but he was also involved in the founding and leading of the Vineyard Churches, before returning to being again a leader in Calvary Chapel. Tom is currently a member of the Calvary Chapel Association, a group of pastors who were charged by Chuck Smith with leading the Calvary Chapel movement into the future. Tom remains the Senior Pastor of Crossroads Church as of the day of this writing.

Although Tom has not handed off the leadership of his church completely, he is an example of someone who has been actively in the process of sharing the responsibilities with another pastor, with the idea that he is preparing the way for his eventual transition from his Senior Pastor role. He has no plans to retire, but recognizes that the day will eventually come when he is no longer able to perform all the duties that he once performed, and wants to make preparations for that eventuality.

When I first interviewed Tom on the subject of pastoral succession, he was deep in the process of his plans for succession. He had a man on staff who Tom felt would eventually succeed him. This man was sharing the teaching responsibilities with Tom,

and was there to take various responsibilities of leadership when Tom was unable to be there. Tom went through some medical challenges and it was so comforting for him to know that the church was being attended to in his absence. It seemed like a beautiful model of transition where the people of the church became used to having two senior leaders who were teaching and leading them. In the eventuality of an extended absence by Tom, or even if he was no longer able to continue in his capacity, someone was already in place to move into the Senior Pastor position.

But over the last year something came unraveled in this seemingly exemplary plan, and the intended successor has started a church nearby, with a number of people from Crossroads, including some former staff members. This has understandably had a serious impact on the Crossroads Church, and Tom's dreams of a smooth succession have crashed and burned. There are always at least two sides to every story, but the point is a cautionary one. Even a great plan can go horribly wrong. This story gives us a graphic reminder of the importance of both men involved in a succession being on the same page, communicating clearly issues like timing and mechanics of transition. Humility is essential for both men. And both need to anticipate possible scenarios, and how those potential eventualities will be dealt with. And it is a somber reminder that even the best plans can go wrong.

Tom remains committed to the principles of succession, and the need to prepare the church for him eventually being unable to do what he's always done. But he has had

to start over in his quest, and figures he must have some more strong years in him because God has changed his plans.

Calvary Chapel South Bay

Calvary Chapel South Bay, which is located in Torrance, California, was pastored by Steve Mays for almost 35 years. Under his leadership the church grew to become one of the largest churches in the country with over 9,000 attenders. In 2014 Steve unexpectedly passed away at the age of 64. Steve had just undergone back surgery and seemed to be on the road to recovery until a blood clot took his life. Even though Steve had suffered from numerous medical challenges and surgeries over the years, no one was really expecting him to die. By all accounts the church had virtually no emergency succession plan in place, and no potential successor identified. Although they had many faithful pastors who had served with Steve for many years, apparently none of them was considered as a potential successor. After considering and approaching several men concerning possibly succeeding Pastor Steve, the board ultimately selected Jeff Gill, a good friend of Steve's, who had been pastoring a much smaller Calvary Chapel in Running Springs, California, in the mountains near Big Bear. It is certainly too early to ascertain how the succession will ultimately work out but Jeff Gill is a good, Godly man, and although he doesn't have experience leading such a large church, there are many good signs so far. It will take time for the church to transition, certainly, and I'm sure many lessons will be learned.

The effects of Steve's seemingly untimely death reach out much further than just to the church in Torrance. When Steve died it caused many other pastors and church leaders to think about the whole area of succession. There are many Senior Pastors who are in their sixties who hadn't really considered the fact of their own mortality. When Steve died, one of the first questions people would ask was "Do they have a succession plan?" It brought attention to the fact that we don't necessarily have years to plan for succession. Succession can come at any time, and it is wise to be prepared for it.

Poimen Ministries

One exciting ministry that has arisen within the Calvary Chapel movement is called Poimen Ministries. Poimen is a ministry that has been set up by a group of retired Calvary Chapel Senior Pastors who have the desire to assist the various Calvary Chapel churches. This ministry is directed by Bill Holdridge, who was the long time Senior Pastor of Calvary Chapel Monterey. He is joined by Al James, Bob Claycamp, Gillett Doggett, John Cowan, Pat Kenney, Phil Evans and Trip Kimball. The ministry continues to grow. They are available for pulpit supply, counseling for pastors, church consultation, and other areas of help, but they are also especially valuable in helping in church succession and transition. They have each been through successful transitions and have much experience to draw on. They have all been involved with Calvary Chapel for 30 years or more so they understand the Calvary Chapel culture. They have been involved with large and small churches and understand the differences. In the event of an

unexpected need for succession, they can come right in and fill the pulpit while helping the leaders of the church go through the process of identifying the next Senior Pastor.

So often pastors don't like to think about letting go of their role as Senior Pastor because they are afraid they will have nothing to do. Poimen Ministries is giving some of our best pastors the opportunity to continue to contribute to church ministry in the Calvary Chapel Movement without having to carry all the responsibilities of running a church. And they are making a huge contribution by investing their gifts, experience and knowledge in the future of our movement. This is one of the best ways to finish strong.

Calvary Chapel Pacific Hills in Aliso Viejo, California

Pacific Hills Church, also known as Calvary Chapel Pacific Hills, is the church where I currently serve as Senior Pastor. The church was originally founded by Danny Bond in 1983. It began in Fountain Valley, but eventually moved to South Orange County and began to thrive. It was one of the first Calvary Chapel churches in South Orange County, and at its peak it was a megachurch, with over 2,000 in attendance. The church endured various trials including the departure of some key staff members and the problems were greatly compounded because of the marital problems of the Bonds that became increasingly apparent to the congregation as they separated and ultimately divorced. The church dwindled to under 400 people and the pastor became withdrawn as he struggled with losing his family. The people who remained at the church held out hope that their pastor and his wife would reconcile, but when he surprised them at a midweek

service in 2002 by announcing that he had married again, to a woman they didn't know about, the church and staff were shocked and confused. Every pastor but one resigned, as did the office staff, many ushers and children's ministers and other volunteers, and the church was in disarray. Ultimately Danny resigned and moved to the Chicago area to get a fresh start. Since I had spoken at Pacific Hills several times, and knew many of the people there, Pastor Chuck asked me to go speak there the following Sunday. At that time I had no intention of leaving Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, where I had been serving for almost thirty years. But as I talked to the people who were left at the church that first Sunday my heart was touched for them. They were hurt and confused, like sheep without a shepherd. There were less than 200 people left but they were precious people. The challenge was enormous. There were now less than 200 people and the rent on the facility was almost \$50,000 a month.

I ultimately accepted the call to lead the church and have been serving as Senior Pastor there ever since. The church is very healthy now. We were able to purchase our own building and expand it, and God has blessed the ministry in great ways. But it hasn't been easy. For the first six months I didn't receive a salary, and there were many days when our survival was uncertain. It took at least three years before it felt like the church was healthy and stable. It certainly would have been easier to plant a new church than to take over this one. As pastoral succession stories go, mine was a rough one, but one I ultimately survived, as did the church. But looking back on the transition, there are many lessons I've learned, and many things I would have done differently.

Succeeding to a pastoral position as a result of a forced resignation by the preceding pastor, whether through moral failure or some other unforeseen event creates unique challenges to a transition process. You don't have time for transition. It just happens overnight. You certainly don't have the problem of the previous pastor undermining you, and comparisons are less prominent. In fact, there is a certain honeymoon period where people are just glad that you've managed to keep their church in operation. You ride into town on a white horse to rescue the church to the applause of the people. But there can be many pitfalls to such a situation.

One of the prominent temptations in such a case is to be overly reactionary. The easiest way to please people who have been hurt is to take on a "I'm nothing like the last guy" persona. While it is true that no one is just like their predecessor, in the case of a forced succession, people don't want you to be anything like the previous pastor. And it is a cheap way to please people if you deliberately, or even subconsciously, make yourself as different from your predecessor as possible. I think in the early days I was too reactive to the traditional practices of my predecessor, and in trying to prove that I wasn't like him, (and thus was trustworthy) I failed to honor the positive legacy of the church, and probably made people feel like they had been foolish and ignorant for having been at the church prior to my coming. Each pastor has to seek the Lord and hear from the Holy Spirit as to the direction of the church, including any changes moving forward. It is wrong to do things just because it is the way we've always done them. But it is equally wrong to avoid doing something just because a now discredited person did it that way. No matter what has gone wrong, you can always find things to honor and celebrate about the

past. Continuity is crucial to effective transition. I could have led a more gentle transition than I did. (I did try, by hiring three of the former pastors for a few years, but I could have done more.)

Another potential pitfall for a pastor who succeeds another in a forced resignation is the temptation to give undue credence to those who seem the most excited to have you come. Quite often the people who welcome you with open arms are the people who felt undervalued and marginalized by the previous pastor who wasn't doing what they wanted him to do. They see a new pastor as a fresh chance for them to work their angles and push for their causes. When you are the new pastor you are anxious to make connections and form new friendships. The fact that there are people in the church who really seem to appreciate you is comforting, especially when you are already getting a pile of problems. You are just glad to see friendly faces in the crowd. Many of these people weren't really close to the previous pastor but they want to be close to you. And they are more than happy to share with you about all the shortcomings of the previous pastor. They jump right on your reactionary bandwagon. And at first they seem so happy that the church is finally having God's priorities. All that works great right up until the first time you don't do things their way, or they find some other pastor who they think can be even more useful to them. Then they head out to greener pastures to find another ministry they can "help." In ministry you get used to having people come and go. But when transitioning into a new position, it is wise to be skeptical about those who rush to support you. If they are talking against your predecessor, it is just a matter of time before they will be talking against you. When I took over the leadership of my church the people I was most drawn

to, who seemed most supportive, turned out to not be the ones I could count on. And ironically, some of the people who seemed most reserved in their support when I came in turned out to be some of my most faithful people over the years.

You can't go back and redo a succession and transition process but if I could there are a few things I would have done differently. First of all, I would have done everything I could to try to involve the previous pastor in the process. It would have been better for everyone if Danny had blessed us moving forward and we had done the same for him. No matter what the failures of a pastor have been, there should be plenty of things to appreciate about their time of service. And it would be good for a church to hear their departing pastor express his appreciation for them as he leaves. I know there are some situations where this is not realistic, especially where a pastor is being forced out under hostile circumstances, but even when a pastor has been disgraced for some moral failure, it would still be nice to try to make as graceful a transition as possible. Secondly, I would have tried to maintain the church's sense of identity as much as possible. I would have brought about changes in a much more gentle way, honoring the past of the church. I wouldn't have acted like "the new sheriff in town." And thirdly, I wouldn't have been too quick to judge the character of the people in the church. I decided who the "good guys" and "bad guys" were much too quickly. It takes time and discernment to really ascertain the true character and motivation of those who wish to be involved in the church. "Lay hands on no man suddenly."

Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa

It would be an incomplete study on pastoral succession and transition within Calvary Chapel without addressing the specific case of Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, and the transition they went through when Pastor Chuck went to be with the Lord in 2013. It is certainly with a degree of trepidation that I even broach this particular case, and yet it is probably the most important case for us to examine when discussing this subject. Chuck Smith was the model for most of us concerning pastoral ministry, and it is the rare Calvary Chapel pastor who doesn't see Pastor Chuck as a huge influence in our lives and ministries. And Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa was the original Calvary Chapel, from which sprang an entire movement that includes well over a thousand affiliated churches. And in addition to the Calvary Chapel churches, Pastor Chuck and Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa influenced countless other churches, within many denominations, as well as in other non-denominational churches throughout the world. Chuck Smith was held in high regard by hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people. Billy Graham said that he considered Chuck Smith to be his pastor. And for me personally, Pastor Chuck was a man who was like a father to me, in addition to being my boss, mentor and friend for 40 years. So the last thing I would want to do is to say anything about Chuck that would be disrespectful or that would seem like an attack on his character. At the same time, to gloss over the transition at Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, and cover up the ways in which it could have been handled better, would ultimately be even more disrespectful of Pastor Chuck and his memory. So, with fear and trepidation, we will look

at what happened at Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, and try to draw some helpful lessons that can help all of us.

At the time of this writing it has been about 3 years since Pastor Chuck went to be with the Lord, and was succeeded by his son-in-law Brian Brodersen. It is probably too early to make a complete assessment of the transition and its results, given the short amount of time that has passed. The church certainly faces some of the challenges one might expect, including a drop in attendance and in contributions. At the same time, there is a fresh energy at the church, and the feeling from many old timers that things are now being done that have been long overdue. Since we can't objectively evaluate and quantify the specific results yet, we will attempt to discuss the process, to see what was done right and what could have been done much better.

There has certainly been a lot of confusion, and more than a little animosity, since Pastor Chuck's death. Pastor Chuck's oldest daughter has filed a lawsuit, on behalf of Chuck's widow, his estate, and his media ministry, against Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, Brian and Cheryl Brodersen, all the church board members, and several church employees. There are a variety of accusations contained in the lawsuit, but most of them involve the succession and transition process, and whether or not what happened reflected the wishes of Pastor Chuck, and the agreements that he had made with the church board. The lawsuit alleges that a group of people, including Brian Brodersen and certain other board members conspired to take over the church and push Chuck out, against his wishes. This lawsuit was released to the TV networks, and the local

newspapers, and created quite a stir. At about the same time, Chuck's brother, Paul Smith, who had worked with Chuck off and on for most of their adult lives, published a video on the Internet where he addresses Pastor Chuck's intentions for succession, claiming that Chuck never intended Brian to succeed him. Paul also alleged a conspiracy, and stated that Brian and the board had gone directly against the stated will of Chuck when they named Brian as the new Senior Pastor of Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa. Clearly, when a succession results in lawsuits and public allegations from the family of both Chuck Smith and the Brodersens, something has gone wrong. There are enough challenges for any pastoral succession, without having a divided family publicly contending for the throne.

In order to get a perspective on this entire situation, it is necessary to survey the events that led up to this eventual succession. As was discussed earlier, when Chuck was younger, in his sixties, he used to talk about retiring quite openly. But as he got older, he became less interested in discussing the subject. However, when the Brodersens moved to England, to plant a church in 1996 Chuck was devastated to have his favorite daughter and her children move to Europe. At this time Chuck began approaching Brian about coming back to Costa Mesa and eventually taking over the church. Brian repeatedly told him that he wasn't ready to do that. Eventually Pastor Chuck was giving up on Brian ever coming back, so he began to talk with Skip Heitzig, the pastor of Calvary of Albuquerque about the possibility of him leaving Albuquerque and coming to Costa Mesa, to help Chuck and eventually take over. Chuck then told Brian that he had one last chance, and if Brian didn't come, Chuck would have Skip take the job. Brian felt that the Lord was calling him to eventually take over the church, so he agreed to return in 2000.

Almost from the beginning Chuck expressed doubts about Brian's abilities to take over the church. He gave Brian a lot of responsibility, but very little opportunity to institute significant changes, which frustrated Brian and confused everyone else. Then, in 2002 Pastor Chuck surprised everyone by asking Jon Courson to leave his church in Oregon to come and take over for Chuck. At the same time Chuck asked Don McClure, who was pastoring a church in San Jose, to return to Costa Mesa to help Pastor Chuck. Jon and Don both quickly turned their churches over to their sons, and joined the staff of Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa. This "Dream Team" of Chuck, Jon, Don and Brian worked together to pastor the church. Chuck was really happy about the arrangement, and loved having the other guys around. The church really loved Jon, and almost immediately he was teaching three nights a week to a packed house. At the beach baptisms, Jon had a line of people that was much longer than Chuck's line, and Chuck seemed really blessed by this. But the arrangement quickly unraveled. All three of the guys had been told when they came that Chuck was ready to step aside. But clearly he had now been energized, was loving the feeling of teamwork, and had no intention of retiring. Don left, breaking up the team. Then Jon left shortly after, in 2005, which devastated Pastor Chuck. His plan was coming unraveled.

Once Don and Jon left, I suppose Chuck felt like he needed to come up with another plan, and turned again to Skip Heitzig. Skip had left his church in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 2004, to come and pastor a church in San Juan Capistrano, Ocean Hills Community Church, that needed a pastor. Skip moved to Orange County and took over Ocean Hills, telling the people in New Mexico that he was moving to California to be

closer to his aging mother, and to help Pastor Chuck. In 2005, after Jon Courson had left California to minister at an orphanage in Mexico, Skip agreed to come teach at Costa Mesa on Sunday nights. Sunday night's through the Bible study was hugely important to Chuck, and when Jon Courson left, Chuck took it over again, but he was clearly having a harder time teaching three services on Sunday morning, one service on Sunday night, and one midweek service. Skip began to teach the Sunday night service, which he did during 2005 and 2006, when he left to return to Albuquerque. Skip had turned his church in New Mexico over to Pete Nelson, one of his assistants. Skip still remained as the chairman of the board of Calvary of Albuquerque, and it wasn't clear to many people if he would return or not. Eventually it became clear that Chuck wasn't any closer to retiring than he was before, and Skip left Ocean Hills and Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa and returned to Albuquerque, again becoming the Senior Pastor there. Pete Nelson left with a good deal of pain from the ordeal, and Ocean Hills Church went through a series of failures before the church was taken over and made a satellite campus of Mariner's Church in Newport Beach. The Albuquerque church ultimately recovered from the debacle, and is growing and thriving under Heitzig's leadership, but the transition there, from Skip to Pete to Skip was a succession nightmare, with lots of collateral damage, and the situation at Ocean Hills Church was a nightmare from which recovery was impossible. But in observing the transitions at Calvary of Albuquerque and at Ocean Hills, few people really consider that those problems were simply a subset of the Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa succession plan. Ultimately, had Pastor Chuck dealt with succession in a better way, the Calvary of

Albuquerque and Ocean Hills churches, and Skip Heitzig, Pete Nelson and countless others would have been spared a lot of grief.

After Skip returned to New Mexico, Brian Brodersen was again the last man standing. After seeing what Jon, Don and Skip had gone through, it wasn't likely that any other pastor would leave their church to come alongside Pastor Chuck to "help" him. But even at this point, for the last several years of his life, Pastor Chuck couldn't bring himself to endorse Brian as the next pastor. In 2012 at the Senior Pastors Conference, Greg Laurie and Bob Coy publicly asked Chuck about succession, in front of over a thousand Senior Pastors. Greg asked Chuck, "Chuck, as Bob and I were talking to you a few minutes before this session, you told us that you haven't picked a successor yet. Is that right?" Chuck began to cry and refused to answer. When handed a microphone, he weakly responded, "It isn't my church. It is the Lord's church." Brian Brodersen, who was on stage with Greg and Bob, then responded by saying, "I'll tell you who the next pastor of Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa will be. I have been the co-pastor of this church for over 12 years, and I will continue to be the pastor for a long time forward." Chuck didn't say anything in response.

During all the years Brian worked with Chuck at Calvary Chapel, Chuck would never acknowledge that Brian was his choice to succeed him, right up until the end. In fact, it was quite the opposite. Chuck would tell people over and over again that he didn't think Brian was the one. Instead of endorsing and supporting Brian, Chuck was still reaching out to Jon Courson, Skip Heitzig and others, ostensibly to try to recruit his

replacement. But if Chuck really didn't want Brian to succeed him it would have been quite simple to make that happen. Until the day he died, Chuck had the authority to fire Brian, but it never happened (except for one time when he fired Brian for one day.) And until the end of Chuck's life, right up to his final board meeting, the night before he died, the board would have honored whatever Chuck wanted them to do about succession. But Chuck said or did nothing to prevent Brian from succeeding to his position. So, when Chuck died, the board voted to select Brian as the next Senior Pastor, and the congregation voted overwhelmingly in support of that decision. Brian finally took the position that he felt for years would one day be his.

What happened at Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa has already happened, and as a church they are moving forward, seeking what God has for them in the future. But in considering this subject of pastoral succession, one can't help but reflect back on how much better this all could have been handled, and how much more Pastor Chuck could have done to assure a smooth transition, and to give his successor the greatest chance to succeed.

One of the first things that could have helped this situation immensely would have been some simple clarity. If Chuck had been willing to discuss the topic openly, things would have been so much easier. If he had clearly said, "I believe that Brian Brodersen is called to be the Senior Pastor of Calvary Chapel" or "I don't want to be involved in the succession process. The board needs to work out a plan" or "Here is a list of names I would consider to be excellent candidates. You guys need to decide and recruit the one

you feel God has chosen” or any variety of other clear directives, the succession process would have been so much smoother. If Chuck had just been clear, the lawsuit that was filed against the church, and the video of his brother Paul concerning Chuck’s wishes for succession, would never have existed. Clarity could have been a huge help in this process, for everyone.

A second thing Chuck could have done to greatly aid in the succession process would have been to support Brian. Chuck told Brian he wanted him to come back to Costa Mesa to become the next pastor of the church. As it turned out, that was exactly what happened. But how different could the process have been had Chuck been openly supportive of Brian? If Chuck had just announced, “Here is my eventual successor” what a difference it could have made. 12 years of fighting over succession could have been prevented. Everything Chuck said and did caused people to question Brian as the successor. Chuck also could have shown his support by giving Brian more teaching opportunities. Chuck eventually let Brian teach one Sunday a month, but Chuck usually didn’t even attend on that Sunday, and instead took speaking engagements himself at other churches. What a difference it would have made had Chuck allowed Brian to take more of the teaching, with Chuck listening to the teaching, then commenting later by saying things like, “As Pastor Brian was saying last week, and I loved the way he put it, ...” it would have sent a message that the people are in good hands with Brian in the pulpit. And you can’t help but admire Chuck for his faithfulness in preaching through physical adversity, but when it got to the point where they had to wheel Chuck out to the pulpit with an oxygen tank, to give his messages, one’s admiration for Chuck also begs

the question, “Did Chuck really believe that he couldn’t just stay in bed and let Brian teach for him?” It was like making a statement that, “even in this condition, Brian can’t do what I do.”

Another thing Chuck could have done, that would have greatly aided in the transition, would have been to respectfully listen to Brian, and allow him to make some decisions by sharing authority with him. Brian is 30 years younger than Chuck. He is also very bright, and well read. Brian has ideas that could have greatly aided Chuck. The church had gentrified, to a great extent, had been in decline for years, and really needed a younger perspective. But Chuck, as is typical for octogenarians, wasn’t open to any of Brian’s ideas. At one point Brian suggested to Chuck that instead of wearing suits, perhaps the ushers could get matching polo shirts. Chuck’s response was adamant. “This is not a youth church!” So sad and ironic, in a church that was once known as “the hippie church.” Once Chuck died, Brian instituted a lot of changes in the church, and received quite a bit of criticism for it. But how much smoother could the transition have been if Chuck had allowed Brian to institute gradual change, over the last ten years of Chuck’s life, and Chuck had endorsed them? Change is inevitable for all of us. If a church doesn’t change, it will die. But having a long time leader support the changes will help the change process to be as smooth and seamless as possible. Chuck and Calvary Chapel missed that opportunity.

A final opportunity that Pastor Chuck missed in this pastoral succession was the opportunity to establish a mentoring relationship with Brian, which would have greatly

helped the church through the succession and transition process. If Chuck had worked harder at establishing a relationship of trust and respect with Brian, both men would have benefited, and the church and its congregation would have been the ultimate benefactors. If Chuck had made the effort to become close to Brian, instead of keeping him at arm's distance, their last years together could have been rich and rewarding for both men, and it would have helped the transition process greatly. Chuck lived most of his life without letting people get too close to him. His usual relationship dynamic was quite dysfunctional. But if he had only made the effort, in the relationship that would most effect his ministry legacy, to really become a dad to Brian, a dad who believed in Brian, he could have transferred his own personal good will to one who could carry on his legacy. When you are approaching the end of life, and we all are to one degree or another, it is so critical that we learn new relational tricks, making connections that will impact others well beyond our lifespan. I didn't see Chuck make that relationship adjustment, but this should inspire all of us to contemplate this opportunity.

I realize that some people reading this will feel like I am being disrespectful and dishonoring to Pastor Chuck's memory by pointing out his shortcomings in the area of succession. My intention is quite the opposite. I have the highest possible regard for Pastor Chuck, and loved him deeply. I have learned more from Chuck than any other person I have ever known, by far. I wouldn't be the man I am without his influence in my life. But Chuck acknowledged regularly that he was far from perfect. So although learning from all the great things that Chuck did, and all that he meant to us, is so important, it is perhaps even more important to learn from his shortcomings. After all, the

best way to continue someone's legacy is to learn from his shortcomings and flaws, and do better. In a track meet, when a teammate passes you the baton, you carry it running forward for the next leg of the race. You don't turn back and re-run the leg they already ran. You cover territory they didn't cover. And as Pastor Chuck often said at New Years Eve services, "Hats off to the past, but coats off to the future." We have work to do moving forward, so that we can build on what we've learned from Pastor Chuck, positively and negatively, and advance in ways he wasn't able to.

Chapter 5

Survey of Calvary Chapel Senior Pastors

For the purpose of this study, and in an attempt to assess the current state of pastoral succession planning within the Calvary Chapel movement, I prepared an online survey and invited Calvary Chapel Senior Pastors to respond to it. It isn't easy to get Senior Pastors to set aside time to respond to a survey but the invitation went out to around 1,000 of them, and 267 of them responded by filling out the survey. The survey had three parts. The first section was to be completed by all Senior Pastors. The second section was to be completed by all those who had experienced succeeding another pastor to the position of Senior Pastor. The third section was to be completed by those who had transitioned out of a Senior Pastor position at some point in their lives. (The complete survey, with results, can be found at the end of this study in Appendix A.) The participants in this survey represented a pretty good cross section of Calvary Chapel pastors. Geographically, 32% were from California, 15% were from the South, 13% from the Pacific Northwest, 16% were from countries other than the U.S., and the remainder from the North, Northeast, the Central United States, and Hawaii. Their length of service in their present church varied, with 21% responding that they had been in their present assignment for less than 5 years, 31% from 5 to 10 years, and 48% have been in the same church for over 10 years. This points out a unique tendency among Calvary Chapel pastors that almost 80% of them have been serving in their present Senior Pastor position for over 5 years, and almost half over 10 years. When you consider that the average tenure among Protestant clergy is less than 5 years, Calvary Chapel pastors seem to uniquely remain in their churches for a long time. In fact, 65% of the respondents were the founding pastor of their church. It is pretty obvious that Calvary Chapel is a church

planting movement. The ages of the respondents were spread out fairly broad. There was only one man who was under the age of 30, which perhaps makes a statement about the future expansion of the movement. But 42% of the respondents were between 30 and 50, while 51% were between 50 and 65, and 7% were over 65. This reinforces what one sees at the Calvary Chapel Senior Pastors Conference, where the vast majority of participants either have gray hair or bald heads. This is a movement that happened among the youth culture in the 1970's, so one would expect that a majority of its pastors would be over 50 now. Because the size of the church is a significant factor in considering succession, the survey queried them concerning the Sunday attendance of their churches. 45% said under 100 attenders, while another 44% described their churches as having between 100 and 500 attenders. 5% of the respondents have between 500 and 1,000 people, with the remaining 7% reporting over 1,000 in regular attendance. So, again, I think our surveyed group of pastors represent a pretty good cross section of our movement as a whole.

One of the most critical questions we asked on the survey yielded the most sobering response. When asked if they had made any plans at all for their eventual succession, 67% of the pastors responded that they hadn't. This figure jarred me, realizing that most Calvary pastors and churches are not really doing anything to prepare for a future succession. This means that most of the churches are not ready for the inevitable. We can certainly tell ourselves that we have no plans of leaving to go anywhere else, that we don't expect our church to run us out of town, that we don't anticipate falling into moral or financial sin, and we have no desire to retire. But in a movement where the majority of our Senior Pastors are over 50 years old, and many are

over 60, do we really think that we won't die? Seeing this response really prompted me to realize what a need we have within the Calvary Chapel movement to consider this question of succession.

When asked at what age the pastors would consider moving aside and retiring the responses varied widely. 6% said they would consider stepping down before they reached the age of 50. 21% said they would consider stepping down between the ages of 51 and 64. A full 55% said they wouldn't think about retiring until they were between 65 and 75, and another 19% said they would never retire at all. So, the vast majority of the pastors who participated in the survey plan to continue in their ministries until well after the age of 65. Perhaps this is one reason why there are less young Senior Pastors in the Calvary movement. There is no place for them to go.

When asked who would be likely to fill their role, once they depart or are unable to continue, almost half of them said it would probably be a current staff member, while a few said either a pastor from another church, or a relative, with the other 46% responding that they aren't sure.

The next set of questions in the survey asked them to express the level of involvement in the pastoral succession process from the Senior Pastor, the board members, and the congregation. When it comes to the involvement of the church board in the succession process, 28% said they should take the lead, 62% said they should play a supporting role, 8% said they should have the final word, with a little over 2% saying the board should have no involvement in the process. When asked what role the congregation

members should play in the succession process, less than 4% said the congregation should be actively involved, while 56% thought the congregation should provide support and input. 5% thought the congregation should have final approval, and a whopping 36% feel the congregation should play a minimal role. As one might expect, Calvary Chapel Senior Pastors lean heavily toward major involvement from the existing Senior Pastor in the succession process. 30% believe the existing Senior Pastor should select his own successor, while 41% see the Senior Pastor working with others to find a successor, and 27% suggest that the existing pastor should nominate the next candidate and let the board and/or congregation ratify. Only 2% of the pastors thought the existing Senior Pastor should stay out of the process. Thus, 98% of these respondents see the existing Senior Pastor as playing a vital role in finding a successor.

In the survey, we also inquired about their reaction to the possibility of transitioning out of the Senior Pastor position, and remaining at the church in a different role. 41% saw this as an attractive possibility, with 44% saying they weren't sure if it would be good for the church. Another 4% said it wasn't financially feasible in their situation, while almost 12% said "when I'm gone, I'm gone." We will discuss this possibility a little more in depth later in this study, but it is interesting that a significant number of respondents were at least open to the possibility.

The next group of questions was addressed to those who are currently in a Senior Pastor position that they succeeded to, following a former Senior Pastor. 65% of them have been in this current position for over 5 years, with 34% more than 10 years past

their succession. 62% of them took over the leadership of a church with fewer than 100 members, 33% of them came into a church with 100-500 members, with the other 5% succeeding to churches with over 500 members. Almost half of them came into a ministry because the former pastor had moved on to another church or ministry, and 18% succeeded at a result of the former pastor's retirement or incapacity. 31% were in the unenviable position of following a pastor who had been forced to resign. In 22% of the cases the succeeding pastor said that the previous pastor had been outstandingly supportive. 18% said the former pastor was helpful but could have done more, while the rest either said the former pastor was a hindrance, or did nothing to help. 63% of the respondents felt the process went reasonable positive, while the rest saw it as from negative to devastating. 70% of the succeeding pastors say that within 5 years church attendance had surpassed the previous attendance level before the transition. The others still haven't reached the previous level.

The other questions on the survey were asked to those who had previously transitioned out of a Senior Pastor position, handing it off to a successor. 70% had participated in this transition within the last 5 years, with the other 30% having transitioned more than 5 years ago. 50% of these churches had an attendance of less than 100, at the time of transition. Most of the rest of them had between 100 and 500 attenders. 13% of these pastors had transitioned on because of health issues, but 79% moved on to other churches or ministries. 74% of these pastors felt the process went well, with the other 26% saying that it didn't go as well as they'd hoped. A little over half of

them report that the church attendance has risen beyond its previous level, before they left, with the rest stating that the church is smaller than it was before the transition.

So, what kind of reasonable assumptions and conclusions can we draw concerning Calvary Chapel churches from this survey? Of course, the scope of this survey was limited, and although the sampling of participating pastors was fairly significant, and well-distributed in various demographic categories, there are still many Calvary Chapel pastors who didn't participate, so we certainly can't make absolute statements about an entire movement of churches based on this limited study. However, it is fair to at least attempt to draw certain generalities, which may hopefully prove to be helpful.

One of the things to point out by way of perspective is that the succession process within Calvary Chapel is working fairly well. A significant number of Calvary Chapel pastors are serving in positions to which they succeeded. And most of these pastors and churches seem to be doing well.

A second thing to point out is that, although Calvary Chapel has an unusually high number of large churches, it is still made up of many more small churches than large churches. Perhaps if you add up all of the people who attend a Calvary Chapel church you'd find that the vast majority of them attend a large Calvary Chapel. But when we add up all the Calvary Chapel pastors, the vast majority of them are serving in smaller churches. So when talking about pastoral succession, which happens one church at a time, the smaller Calvary Chapel churches are a major consideration.

The ages of our Senior Pastors is also interesting and important. Given the fact that online surveys would generally be expected to skew younger, the fact that such a large number of participating Calvary Chapel pastors are older is surprising. (Again though, not too surprising to those who have attended the conferences.) And with so many Senior Pastors expressing their intentions to remain in the pulpit past the age of 65, this causes one to wonder about the future of the movement. Young men who feel called to be Senior Pastors may have limited options. They can either become assistant pastors and youth pastors, hoping that something eventually becomes available, or they can plant churches. Church planting is a great choice for some, but it can be a rough road for many, especially as property becomes more and more difficult to acquire. All this is exacerbated even more by the current trend in large churches to create satellite campuses instead of church plants. There just isn't a lot of room for young guys to get Senior Pastor opportunities. Things have changed since the 70's when young 20 something new believers could go anywhere and plant churches. The most well-known Calvary Chapel pastors wouldn't have had a chance getting started in this day and age.

But by far the most alarming result of this survey is that most Calvary Chapel pastors don't seem to have made any significant plans for succession. Perhaps we think that if we trust the Lord He will take care of it. Perhaps we think that because Pastor Chuck didn't plan much for his succession, and ministered well into his 80's, that we will do the same. But as we will discuss later, we should plan to do a better job of succession than Pastor Chuck did. He has passed the baton to us and we need to run the race before us, not repeat the leg behind us. And not planning for succession is a good way to make

succession less successful. Hopefully this study, and some of the sources I cite, can spur our pastors on to think, pray and plan in a way that will be blessed in our future. That is my prayer.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Recommendations

Every church, and every pastor, needs to come up with a succession plan that works for them. Even though there are similarities between Calvary Chapel churches, we are all distinct in different ways, so pastoral succession and transition doesn't come in a "one size fits all" plan. But below we have suggested some practical steps to take in contemplating this important subject. Wherever you are, in your church's life cycle, or in your own personal development, just taking a few steps on this journey can be crucial for your future, and the future of your church. Just reading this study, and thinking about these things, can have a vital impact on the future ministry of your church and yourself.

Are you willing to honestly face the issue of succession?

This seems like a trivial question on the surface, especially to people who have already read this far in my study, or who even went to the trouble of acquiring it, and skipping to Chapter 6 to see what the bottom line is. When I began to study pastoral succession I didn't think it would be that difficult for me. I mean, I am certain that I have many years of fruitful ministry left, and my church is going extremely well. I thought I could just approach this subject objectively and academically, then file it away to be applied in the distant future. But the more I dug into this topic, the more this topic dug into me. It was painful to even consider my own mortality, or to face the possibility of diminishing capacities and capabilities. This paper was the hardest thing I've ever written. It just loomed over me. It felt like I was writing my own eulogy. And I had to wrestle with the secret conviction I have that there is really no one who can do my job better than I. And beneath the surface of the feeling that no one is good enough to take

over for me lays an equally disturbing fear that someone might actually be able to pastor my church better than me. Am I an antique, a dinosaur, a relic, a dying breed?

Contemplating succession is not a subject that everyone is prepared to tackle. Many pastors I've talked with about it are notably uncomfortable with the subject. And ironically, it seems that the older a pastor is, the more uncomfortable he is with talking about succession. Young pastors can talk openly about it, but pastors in their 60's and 70's shy away.

For me, I had a kind of breakthrough one day as I was thinking about how Pastor Chuck said God asked him, "Chuck, whose church is it anyway?" to which Chuck replied, "It's your church Lord." To seriously contemplate succession, I needed to let go of "my church" and acknowledge that it is really His church. This changed the thrust of how I looked at the question of succession. I didn't need to feel that I must insure that our church would stay as large as it is, or to have a pastor who was as much like me as possible, or to have our financial strength remain the same after I'm gone. If it is the Lord's church, not mine, then the church should end up looking like whatever He wants it to look like after I'm gone. But as the current pastor of the church, I have a serious obligation to steward the church in a responsible way as long as I am here, and to keep a loose hold on it as far as the future is concerned. It would be irresponsible to have a church stewardship entrusted to you and not consider such questions as, "How can I do what's best for this church in the long run?" As a Senior Pastor I am the leader of a church, but it isn't my church, and I won't always be the leader of this church. To be responsible now means to also consider what will be best for the church in the long run.

To do otherwise is to basically acknowledge that, as far as I am concerned, this church is really about me, not about Jesus, and not about the people who Jesus wants to reach in the future through this church. Many people refer to our church as “Dave Rolph’s church” which is understandable, since I am the most visible person in the church, but I can’t afford to actually believe that it is my church. If it is really my church then it will die a slow death right along with me. We are all in the process of dying. Do we want our churches to die with us?

So, again, you need to ask yourself if you are really ready to honestly consider this question of succession. It will be painful, almost certainly, but it is also necessary, if we want to be faithful stewards to the end.

Pray about succession

Once we are committed to honestly face the question of pastoral succession, it is vitally important to commit this to the Lord in prayer, passionately and regularly. Pray for yourself, that God will give you wisdom on how to proceed. Pray for those God may be raising up to come alongside you to alleviate some of your burdens. Pray for the long-term fruitfulness of everyone who is serving with you. Pray for the people who will be attending your church fifty years from now, if the Lord tarries. Pray that the witness of your church will last longer than the memories of you. Pray that after people have stopped listening to your messages, God will be inspiring new messages for a new time, with the same Gospel truth and power. Pray that you will do everything you possible can, while you are able, to invest in the future of the church in which you are serving. Pray for

your family, and the impact changes will have in their lives. Pray for your wife, that God will be preparing her for a different phase of life and ministry, if that is what God wills. And in all your prayers, above all, release the church to the One who really owns it. Release it all to the Lord who is building His church.

Start reading

If you haven't read my entire study yet, I'd encourage you to read it in its entirety. Obviously if there are sections that you have absolutely no interest in, or you think don't apply to you, you can skip those sections. But reading this study, I am convinced, will help open up your thought processes. Wrestle with the parts with which you disagree. Ask yourself why certain parts are hard to read. But interact with what is contained in this book. It is ultimately a distillation of the impressions of one Calvary Chapel pastor who spent several years mulling over this issue, reading extensively about it, and talking with many other Calvary Chapel pastors about their own experiences and struggles.

If my writing whets your appetite for more, by all means, check out some of the books found in my Bibliography. I would start with the book *Next: Pastoral Succession That Works* by William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird. They are currently the two foremost experts in pastoral succession and their book is very readable and helpful. Although they are not writing from a Calvary Chapel perspective, and some of what they say may not apply to your situation, there is so much that will apply, and this book is one I consider to be a must read. After you have read what I have to say, and what

Vanderbloemen and Bird have written, if you would still like to read more, my bibliography lists a lot of books and articles that might prove to be useful to you.

Don't just read to learn information. Read to interact with this entire challenging topic. The ultimate goal of reading is to spur your thought processes. So read and think.

Include others in the process.

Once you have wrestled with some of this information and these ideas for awhile, the next step is to include others in meaningful discussion. If you are married, it would be a good idea to share it with your spouse first. By having your wife read this book she will know some of the things you are wrestling with, and can offer valuable perspective. Pastoral succession will affect pastor's wives as much as it affects pastors, maybe even more. And your wife knows you better than you know yourself, and can offer helpful perspective as you contemplate the future of your ministry. Your grown children might also have an interest.

You may also want to include some of your fellow Senior Pastors to read on this subject and get together with you to discuss it. They will understand what you are going through, as you face your future, more than anyone else will, and perhaps you can help each other get this issue out into the open and give it some serious contemplation and prayer together. Perhaps you can encourage each other (that is, help give each other courage) to face things that are uncomfortable to face alone. Maybe you can even host a group of pastors in your region to read and then get together to discuss this topic.

It would also be a good idea to begin a discussion with the leaders within your own church. If you have assistant pastors or elders or whatever your leadership team looks like, they should be involved with you, talking about the future of the church, and of your ministry in particular. You should take the direction in these discussions, and not just open it up to whatever they think, (because some of them may just be waiting for you to move over and let them take the reins) but they are all invested in the church themselves, and are presumably Godly men who deserve a voice. It would probably be a good idea for you to have some ideas before meeting with them, so that you can suggest a few different approaches that you may feel the Lord leading you toward. But having them read and discuss some of these issues will allow them to not only offer their wisdom and insight, but will also help them to feel a buy-in as plans are formed in the future.

I think a great idea would be to hold a leader's retreat in the mountains somewhere, to discuss and reflect and pray about the long term plans for the ministry. It is not a very threatening process if you are just brainstorming what a five year, ten year and fifteen year vision for your church might be.

This whole area is much too important for you to handle on your own. Include others in the process.

Form an emergency succession plan.

While formulating a succession plan for replacing a pastor due to retirement is quite threatening and challenging, it is much less volatile and personal to talk about a hypothetical emergency situation that might force the church to replace the Senior Pastor.

That is why forming an emergency succession plan is a good place to start when considering the bigger picture of pastoral succession. Most people can agree that having an emergency plan in place is prudent, even though none of us think we will ever have to actually use it. The truth is, any of us, at whatever age, could be incapacitated or die at any time, and this would leave our church in dire straits. And we don't like to think about it but many pastors have fallen morally who never thought it could happen to them. A church should have a plan to replace a pastor at any time. And it is important that this plan is in writing and that all the leaders of the church are well aware of the process. The more you leave ambiguous, the greater the likelihood of creating a damaging mess when and if it should actually be needed.

There is probably a section of your corporate bylaws that addresses what happens if the Senior Pastor is no longer able to continue in that capacity. But have you looked at it lately to see if it is up to date and relevant to where your church is currently? It would be good to look at the written plan, if you have one, and clarify it as much as possible. Anything left vague will be up to your board of directors to decide on, and laymen are typically ill equipped to make decisions on pastoral replacement. And I'm sure many church board members would find this to be offensive but I have seen many pastoral successions that were seriously messed up when good board members had the newfound power of being in the position to decide who the next pastor should be and they really weren't equipped or trained to lead that process. The more you can establish a clear process for emergency succession the better it will be for your church.

Some churches have clearly designated a group of pastors from other churches who are supposed to step in to help in an emergency transition. This can certainly work, but it can also have certain drawbacks. Often these guys who are expected to step in may not really have the time or inclination to get involved in another church's crisis. And if they are friends of the departing pastor it may put them in a serious conflict of interest as they are torn between their friend and his church. Even when a pastor has unexpectedly passed away, their friends are mourning him themselves, and may not be the best ones to provide healing and clear guidance for those who remain.

The easiest emergency succession plan is when there is already someone ministering at the church who is the clear successor, and can step right in to take over the leadership. If that person has already been sharing in the leadership of the church, and has already been sharing the teaching load, it can be a really smooth transition for them to just slide into the Senior Pastor's role. But these are things that need to be made clear ahead of time, and clarified in writing. It isn't enough to just assume that if something ever happened to you, your son or your assistant or your friend would take over. Come up with a plan that your key leaders can agree on and get it in writing.

One easy way to plan for emergency succession is to just specify that in the event of an emergency a call should be put it to Poimen Ministries and one of their veteran Calvary Chapel pastors could come in to serve as an interim pastor while everything else is sorted out. They can also oversee the whole process of transition, if necessary, in

conjunction with whatever church leaders you may designate. But again, get it in writing and make it clear.

The best thing about talking about and formulating an emergency succession plan is that everyone realizes it is a good idea, and it can be done without a lot of emotion because no one thinks it will ever happen. But it is a great way to broach the subject of succession without it being about the fact that you will someday be old and ineffective. Once everyone has agreed on an emergency plan, it is a natural progression to then talk about other succession possibilities.

Compile a list of characteristics of the ideal pastor of your church.

It is much easier, and more objective, to think about the “kind” of person who should pastor your church rather than to think about who that person might be. Often when people think about a successor they are limited by only considering those closest to them. Broadening the field by focusing on character qualities rather than personalities might open up a much wider set of possibilities. And there are certainly more important qualities for a pastor than just, “he reminds people of me” or “he reminds people of someone else they love.” I once knew a church board member who was a huge fan of Alistair Begg. Alistair is an amazingly effective pastor and teacher who happens to be from Scotland, and speaks with a distinct Scottish brogue. When this board member was in a position to help select the next pastor for his church, he pushed really hard for a Scottish man who was on the staff at that church. His sole appeal was that when he spoke he sounded a lot like Alistair Begg. Ultimately he was selected as Senior Pastor, but after

a few weeks most of the people realized he was no Alistair Begg. The only trait he shared with Alistair Begg was his accent, and he ultimately destroyed the church.

In compiling a list of desirable character traits of a pastor for your church, start with the Biblical qualifications for an elder, found in 1 Timothy 2 and Titus 1. Then add some of the traits associated with wisdom in James 3 such as humility, gentleness, reasonableness and peacefulness. Next add the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. This is already a pretty extensive list of what any pastor should aspire to be (and should pretty much disqualify everyone, if not for the grace of God.) But to this list you would want to add particular traits that might be beneficial in your particular church. These might include such questions as “what is the ideal age of a candidate who would pastor our church?” (A younger pastor for a church that is predominantly senior citizens might not work, and an older pastor for a church full of young people could be problematic, unless you are Chuck Smith in the 70’s.) You should also look at the cultural demographics of the church, including educational background. If your church is in a college town, for instance, a pastor who is more intellectually stimulating could be more effective at reaching younger intellectuals. (Timothy Keller, at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City is an interesting case here. He is an older man, reaching an audience that is primarily young, cultured and intellectual. He connects with them because he is brilliant and well read. His intellectual approach trumps his age, and his age probably works in his favor because they see him as a wise professor image. In the same way, I suppose, Chuck Smith, with the heart of a hippie, was able to reach a generation of young hippies, even though he was old and bald.) If your church is in a community that has

gentrified, it might be hopeless to try to attract young people to your church, when what you need to do is reach the older people in your community. In the same way, if your church is in a community where there has been a shift in the racial makeup of the community, you may want to consider the benefits of a pastor who connects with the racial and cultural makeup of your community. Churches who fail to do this tend to become landlords for all kinds of other diverse cultural groups, as they rent their facilities to those who can't afford their own building, but are otherwise thriving.

And remember, when you are considering the desirable characteristics of a pastor, don't limit your analysis to the people who currently attend your church. Think of the community that surrounds your church. You don't want to just reach the people who are already there. You want to reach the people in your community who God wants you to reach.

This list can't be too long. Come up with everything you can think of, and ask your staff members and other leaders in your church to do the same. Then put the exhaustive list together and begin to prioritize the characteristics. List the most necessary characteristics first, followed by the other desirable traits.

Once you have this prioritized list, make it a matter for reflection and prayer. If you tend to fit the higher priority traits then you can see why you have been, and still are, a good fit for your church. That's great! But you may also see some key traits that you don't possess. In some cases this may provide a plan for you to know what you need to personally work on in your own personal development. But there are other traits, such as

being younger, that you may not be able to do anything about. Getting hair implants, Botox and tattoos rarely helps a pastor attract a younger crowd. You also may notice some traits on your list that seem contradictory. For instance, if you have a number of senior citizens in your church and community and a number of young families, you may conclude that you need a younger and older pastor. These are cases where it will take more than one person to meet the needs of a diverse congregation and community. It may well take a team of people to begin to satisfy all the needs of your church and community.

As this picture begins to develop, you will at least have a concept of the kind of person who would be effective in an eventual pastoral succession and transition. If you set out to hire someone before you have compiled a thorough job description, you are likely to hire based on personality, looks or adeptness with interviewing skills. But the more comprehensive your job description is, the more likely it is that you will recognize the right candidate when you meet them.

It is important to remember also that this is a long-term process, if done well. You may not need to find the ideal candidate right now. But if you can identify candidates who have the potential to develop into an ideal candidate, you now have your work cut out for you to develop those who possess the most important character traits into mature individuals who possess more and more of the desired and needful traits. But it starts with the needs of your church, not with an individual. Start your list now.

Are there possible candidates already in house?

Once you have a prioritized list of desirable character traits and competencies for a pastor, the next step is to consider any potential candidates that might already be in your church. If you have a staff with multiple pastors, consider the positives and negatives of each of them. If you don't have other pastors on staff, consider men in your church who show leadership potential, and who you think might make good pastors eventually. There are probably many more lay people in our churches who have ministry potential than we might initially think. Pray about every person who is presently serving in your church in any capacity. How do they measure up to the list of desirable characteristics? Sometimes a person who has spent most of his life in the business world, or in education, might have more potential than someone who has been working in formal ministry. Look for people in your church who others respect, look up to and follow. There are gifted leaders in every group of people if you really look for them. Of course, if you've had guys go out from your church to pastor or plant other churches they should probably also be considered, as long as their departure was positive and your relationship with them remains solid. If there are pastors of other churches you are close with, you might also consider them, although having someone who has served at your church, who knows and understands the DNA of your fellowship, and who knows many of the people, has a distinct advantage.

One benefit to compiling a list of individuals who may line up with your list of desired characteristics is that you can immediately eliminate certain people from

consideration. Scratching names off your list of possibilities narrows the field, and clarifies the potential candidates. You should never tell people that they've been eliminated from consideration, and why. You only need to say that you have a list of potential candidates, and their name didn't make the list. (And that would only be if they asked. No one really needs to know about this list until it is narrowed down to a few possibilities, and then the only ones who should know about it are those involved in the decision making process.)

At this point, what you do next would depend on the process you've decided on for succession. If you have chosen a process where you will simply make a recommendation to a group of leaders who will then conduct a final selection process, or if that is your emergency plan, then you may be finished. But if you still see succession as a distant process that you will be directing, your list at this point may remain private. At any rate, this list of potential successors should become a subject of continual prayer. These men should also be objects of special efforts on your part to help them develop the skills that would serve them well as a Senior Pastor someday. You don't need to tell them that they are potential candidates to succeed you. You only need to tell them that you see potential in them, and want to help them develop into men who will be able to lead a church, should God open that door. And remember, you aren't just investing in their lives because they might be able to pastor your church someday. You are investing in their lives so that they can pastor some church, someday. If that church ends up being your church, great! But if they go on to pastor another church, that's just as great. If you develop several pastors, chances are one of them will succeed you successfully.

What parts of your ministry could you currently be sharing?

When you plant a church, or take over a small church, you basically have to do everything, between yourself and your wife. You probably had to write up the incorporation papers, open a bank account, acquire a facility, set up the chairs, create a website, print the bulletins, do the announcements, lead worship, preach the sermons, answer the phones, clean up and tear down after the service, and store everything in your garage, while working a second full time job. All this while your wife balanced the books, taught women's ministry, directed children's ministry, ran the greeters ministry (or WAS the greeters ministry) answered the phone while you were at work, if she herself wasn't also at work, not to mention raising pastor's kids who wouldn't embarrass you and your flawless pastoral image. But you did it all with a good attitude because you were so excited to finally be "in the ministry." Over time, thank God, He raises up other people to take on some of the ministry load, and you are able to hand off some of these tasks. But as you do, you tend to take on other tasks. Once you don't have to set up chairs you now have more time to write blog articles. As you no longer need to be bi-vocational you are now free to go on missions trips or take seminary classes. Whatever roles you release, others come along to take their place. As your ministry expands, you tend to release roles that you don't need to do anymore, and take on roles that you now need to do, that seemingly can only be done by you.

Andy Stanley has an axiom that he uses to talk about delegation and efficiency in leadership. He says, "Only do what only you can do." In other words, delegate every task

that someone else is able to perform, and only do the things that only you can do more effectively than anyone else. This is certainly a good concept for any pastor to wrestle with, because if we spend our time and energy doing things that could be done better or more efficiently by others we will be less effective at our more important tasks. For most Senior Pastors this means that our focus is on preaching our Sunday messages, without which we wouldn't have a church to pastor, and to delegate most everything else. For most Senior Pastors this primary preaching role is combined with a more nebulous administrative role of leading the organization, vision casting and doing public relations as the CEO of the corporation. This arrangement makes some sense, since the preaching role and the leadership role certainly consist of the most important tasks that a church depends on, and the Senior Pastor is generally the ideal person to perform those roles.

Of course, pastors who only perform leadership and teaching roles run the risk of losing touch with the people of the church. Pastors who never counsel or marry or bury or show up to a work day or play with babies after church or greet newcomers or help serve at a potluck or pick up trash on the grounds tend to be seen as royal prima donnas and are no longer really functioning as pastors or shepherds. But pastors who become consumed by menial tasks become burned out, and are less effective at the roles they most importantly and uniquely fill. Someone has to say, like the apostles in Acts 6, "someone else has to do some of these things so we can devote ourselves to prayer and the Word." Pastor Chuck was notorious for always serving in the small ways. Until almost the end of his life he was picking up trash in the Calvary Chapel parking lot. I once pointed that out, with great pride, to a friend of mine who was a successful business owner and

entrepreneur. He seemed rather unimpressed. When I asked him why, he asked me how me how much Pastor Chuck was getting paid. At the time Chuck was making around \$250,000 a year. My friend said, “The way I see it Calvary Chapel is paying a janitor a quarter million dollars a year.” I guess there is a balance.

It is certainly good, as your ministry develops, to give various responsibilities away, so that you don't have to do everything. But when it comes to succession planning, there is an even more important discipline. Are you willing to let go of some of your most important and central roles, maybe even some of your favorite roles, for the good of the future of your church? For instance, you may very well be the best person to administrate your church. You know it best, have been there the longest, and are the spiritual leader of the church. But if you won't let go of some of that administrative and leadership role, how will other leaders develop their gifts and skills? Some day you won't be there. Will the church be better off with people who are completely unprepared to lead, or with people who have had the opportunity to lead, making mistakes while under your tutelage? The same thing goes for preaching and teaching. You are, most likely, the best speaker in your church. Most people probably come to your church because they like your preaching/teaching. But how are other people going to learn to be more effective if you don't give them opportunities? They may not be as good as you are today, but are they as good as you used to be when you were starting out? When I was a young pastor at Calvary Costa Mesa, Pastor Chuck would never bring in a guest speaker to cover for him when he was gone (which wasn't very often.) When he was on vacation, or in Israel, or leading a cruise or other trip, he would always allow the assistant pastors to fill his pulpit.

I had many opportunities, through the years, to speak from that pulpit that had changed my life. And I'm sure my sermons were terrible. I know I wasn't as effective as Chuck. But I would not be the preacher that I am (for whatever that's worth) without those opportunities. How are other preachers going to develop if we don't give them opportunities?

Frankly, this is an area that is extremely difficult for me, for several reasons. First of all, I love my job, and hate to give up any of it. Secondly, I feel guilty if I'm not there on a Sunday, or if I'm not involved in a decision. I compare myself to Pastor Chuck, who seemed to always be there doing everything. His voice resonates in my ear as I heard him comment on those he felt were slacking off, and as he reinforced my obsessive devotion by telling me that Romaine and I were the only men he could count on. (Ironically, when Chuck was younger he wasn't nearly as compelled to be there every week. As he got older and more frail you couldn't keep him out of the pulpit.) But perhaps the main reason why I have a hard time even occasionally letting go of my teaching role in the church is that I'm afraid the church won't survive without me. I think that if I am gone two Sundays in a row, or if I announce ahead of time that I am going to be on vacation, people will stop showing up, and stop giving, and the church will die. On the rare occasions when I am gone, I often hear from people who say, "We listen to you on the radio every day and wanted to come to hear you in person and meet you, and we were so disappointed you weren't there on the Sunday we visited." I don't want to disappoint someone who comes to our church on a Sunday.

What I have begun to face is that someday people will come to Calvary Chapel Pacific Hills and I will never be there again. But the church will, Lord willing, continue. And if the church really needs me to survive, then whose church is it anyway? And if I have developed a church full of people who will leave the church in disappointment if I'm not preaching every week, how healthy is that church? What have I really built? The Church of Dave? Maybe I should drop the Dove logo and design a Dave logo.

Years ago I had major neck surgery. I had the surgery on a Tuesday, and missed my midweek service because I was still in the hospital. I got out of the hospital on Friday and preached three services on Sunday. I was in pretty bad pain, had my neck in a brace, and had to bend at the waist to see my Bible. My throat was incredibly hoarse and I'm sure the message was terrible. But Pastor Chuck told me he was proud of me, so I was proud of myself. Looking back, I am no longer proud of that performance. I am embarrassed by it. Whatever made me believe that I'm that indispensable?

Be honest with yourself. Is it possible for you to begin to share even your favorite parts of the ministry? Even those things you are best at? Jesus ultimately turned His ministry over to a handful of confused men whose only qualifications were that they had hung around Him for a couple years, asking Him stupid questions. But He trusted the Holy Spirit to help them change the world. Someday you too will be gone. You can either start the process of transition now, or force your church to wake up one day with no clue as to how to do church without you. And, by the way, whose church is it anyway?

Are there other things you'd like to do?

As a Senior Pastor, your plate is probably full most of the time. But what if you were doing less than you currently do? Are there ideas you have as to how you could spend that reclaimed time? It is so important to think about this because many pastors refuse to let go of even a portion of their role simply because they aren't sure what they'd do with their time. Retirement is not a Biblical concept. As leaders got older in the Bible sometimes their roles would change, but they would always be involved serving God as long as they were able. The priests, as they got older, spent their time training younger priests. Men like Moses delegated more and more of the leadership responsibilities to Joshua but Moses didn't retire until he died. When Bob Russell was in the process of transitioning out of his church in Kentucky he made it clear that he wasn't retiring. He just felt like he didn't need to run a large corporation for the rest of his life, and decided to devote himself more to teaching, writing and guest speaking. So, are there things you've been wanting to do but just haven't gotten around to it yet?

Maybe you've always intended to write but never had the time. Maybe you have a heart for missions but haven't been able to spend much time on the mission field. Perhaps you have the desire to teach in a Bible College, or to start a School of Ministry. When was the last time you took a decent vacation? Are there classes that you've always intended to take or books you never got around to reading? It is important to think as broadly as possible at this point. What you are looking for are general categories of things you might want to do with your time, energy and talents, if you had the opportunity. The

idea is, you don't need to think that your life will be over if you were to ever stop doing some of the things you are now doing. Even a slight modification in your ministry responsibilities can open some new and exciting doors for other exciting ministry, while at the same time giving someone else the chance to take a fresh approach to something that you used to do. The more you make this a process, the less painful and more exciting it will be.

This thinking may lead you to a whole new venture, such as joining Poimen Ministries to help various Calvary Chapel churches, or spending a few years on the mission field, or helping a younger guy plant a new church somewhere. Or it could lead you to discover a whole new role in your existing church, as in the case of Bill Ritchie in Vancouver, Washington, who started a ministry to baby boomers in the church he had founded 40 years ago. But it could also just mean doing your daily ministry a bit differently, such as taking more outside speaking engagements, writing a blog, teaching a class or mentoring some promising young future pastors. You may find that lightening the load of what you are currently doing, and taking on new challenges actually invigorates you and brings you into a whole new season of greater fruitfulness for the Kingdom. And in the process you will be allowing others to experience the blessings of ministry that you've enjoyed for so long, and investing in the future of the church.

All of this starts with sitting in a quiet place and asking yourself the question, "What else could I possibly be doing?" Don't be afraid of this question, or these thoughts. Just because you think about something doesn't mean you have to do it. But if

you don't think about these things your life and ministry can easily stagnate. Life, and the opportunity to serve Jesus are way too valuable to let that happen.

Is it feasible for you to remain at your church in some role other than Senior Pastor?

The possibility of a long time Senior Pastor remaining at his church, but taking a role other than Senior Pastor is an enticing one for many, and has lots of positive things to be said about it. First and foremost is that the people don't lose their pastor. In fact, in some ways they get more of him, as he is freed up from many of the roles he used to play, and is theoretically more available as a result. Secondly, the veteran pastor is still available to the new pastor as a resource and friend. Thirdly, it would probably make it more likely that a pastor would feel comfortable stepping aside from the lead role if he knows he has something else to do. It is much easier to be called "to" something than to be called "away from" something.

But despite the potential blessings of such an arrangement, there are also considerable potential pitfalls, and when contemplating such a move, it is important to carefully consider all the ramifications and potential problems, to discern whether you and your church would find such a succession to be the best thing for you, your successor and your church.

Probably the first thing you would need to consider would be how financially feasible it is for your church to take on an additional salary, namely yours. If your church has healthy finances, and several staff members, this may not be a problem. But if you are currently the sole full time staff member, you'd really need to consider whether the

church is ready to take on another full time employee. Finances alone could be a deal killer for this type of an arrangement.

But equally important as the financial question is the humility question. Do you really believe you could handle fulfilling a lesser role in your church? Could you avoid being a magnet for criticism of the new pastor, even when it is people very close and dear to you who are complaining, and you agree with them? Can you support a younger man as your pastor? Can you be a team member in an enterprise where you know more than any of the other team members, have the most experience, yet submit to the leadership of others? How much will it bother you to have someone dismantle much of what you've devoted your life to building? Can you support their right to do so? Can you support their mistakes? Can you forgive their sins? Because if you can't do all of this, with a great and supportive attitude, then you do not have the humility necessary to remain in your church in another position, and to attempt to do so will prove to be disastrous for your church, and for the succession process. The second half of the humility question has to do with your successor. Do you have a successor who will be capable of having someone with your experience, knowledge and longstanding relationship with the people of the church working for him? Will he be threatened by your presence? Does he have the stomach to handle when people throw "how you did things" in his face, and not have it affect his support for you in your new role? Is he the type of person who is likely to guide the change process in the church in a way that will not make it too disruptive, and will make it easy for you to support? Does he have the kind of candor and integrity that will make it easy for the two of you to maintain honest and open communication? If a potential

successor does not possess all these qualities it does not mean he will not be a good successor. It simply means that he needs to grow in wisdom and humility, and God is very good at doing that in a pastor's life. But it also means that you may be asking for trouble by attempting to become a member of his staff at this time, and if you are turning your church over to a guy like that, you'd probably be better to move on to some other ministry.

Another question to ask yourself, when considering such a ministry adjustment is, "Do I really need a change of scenery?" If you have been working and serving in the same place for a long time, changing your role in that ministry may prove to be exhilarating, renewing and energizing. It might feel great to pull in the driveway in the morning, or walk into the Sanctuary on Sunday, knowing that most of this is not your problem anymore. But for some people, experiencing that kind of a fresh start really requires a change of scenery. You might be better off in a whole new place. If you are tired in your present role, maybe you've lost your edge, and are feeling the need for a change, perhaps a fresh start will be easier somewhere else. Sometimes it is easier to just walk away.

Clearly this is not a simple decision. If you are even contemplating a move that would ultimately position you in a different role within the same ministry, with another man assuming your previous position of leadership, some real soul searching needs to take place. This can be a beautiful and fruitful way to transition leadership within a

church, but it also has the potential to create deep problems. Be open, but proceed with caution.

What financial plans have you made for the future?

Anytime you are considering the subject of pastoral succession, it is important to face the financial realities of any plan you may pursue. Even if you have no intention of ever completely retiring it would be prudent to have an emergency financial plan in place, just in case you should ever become incapacitated, either physically or mentally, where you would no longer be able to work. Hanging onto a church because you can't afford to let go is a horrible motivation for ministry, but it is perhaps even worse to get to the point where you can no longer perform the duties of your job and your church goes bankrupt trying to support you.

Every church should certainly investigate the various options for insurance on their key employees and retirement accounts as well. If a church employee becomes disabled or dies unexpectedly, most people in the church would expect the church to continue to take care of the disabled employee, or the survivors in the event of a death. But such an expectation may prove to be very expensive and perhaps impossible for a church to be able to afford. If a church loses its Senior Pastor, the church will certainly take a big financial hit, which may put the church in a financially vulnerable position. If the leaders of the church fail to provide for a pastor or other employee that is likely to bring about an even more significant drop in revenue, but if they attempt to absorb these additional expenses, plus pay a new pastor to take the place of the last one, it can create a

financial crisis that the church may not be able to survive. If the church provides their employees with life insurance, plus disability insurance, they can minimize the financial impact of such an event, usually at a reasonable cost.

But in addition to life insurance and disability insurance, it would seem to also be prudent for a church to contribute to some kind of retirement program, at least for its Senior Pastor and other long-term employees. Setting up a 403b program, either funded solely by the church, or in conjunction with employee contributions, is a good way to establish a source of future revenue for someone who gets to the age where they are not able to work full time, or their revenue opportunities are much less. There is an instrument called a Rabbi's Trust that can serve a similar purpose. If every church would set up such a plan when their Senior Pastor is young, the pastor would have a lot more choices as they get older. But even setting it up after a pastor is older is better than nothing. Such an investment in the pastor is not only honoring to the man that God has used in the church, but it is insurance that protects the church from having to bear the burden of supporting someone who is no longer able to contribute to the ministry of the church any longer. It also can make it possible for a pastor to set money aside in the event that he continues to minister at the church in some other capacity, even part time, with a much lower income than he once received.

Another thing to think about is Social Security. Most people who retire depend, at least in part, on Social Security income. But it is quite common among Calvary Chapel pastors, and other pastors as well, to opt out of Social Security as conscientious objectors.

(Pastor Chuck explained this to me by saying, “I conscientiously object to putting my money into a bankrupt system.”) Being exempt from Social Security is nice from the standpoint of keeping us from having money taken out of our check every month, and saving the church from paying the employer’s share. But as you approach the age where you are at least considering the possibility of working less, or retiring, it presents a problem. Not only will we not receive a monthly check from Social Security, but much more important, we won’t be eligible for Medicare, which can be a huge problem that most people don’t think about until it is too late. There is a way to address this, but it takes some action. The pastoral exemption for Social Security only applies to ministry-related income. So, if you worked a secular job for years, before you went into full time ministry, you may have already paid enough into Social Security to qualify for retirement benefits and Medicare. But if you haven’t, it isn’t too late to begin to generate some non-ministry related income, and pay Social Security on that. While your monthly payment from Social Security is tied into a percentage of your most recent income, the amount of income doesn’t affect your eligibility for Medicare, which is much more important and expensive than the actual retirement benefits. Social Security has a website where you can very easily put in your Social Security number and they will show you your whole history of payments, and what your benefits would be if you were to retire today. It will also tell you how many quarters you are short of qualifying for benefits. There are a minimum number of quarters (one fourth of a year) that are required to qualify, and it isn’t really all that many. So if you are currently short of the required quarters paid into Social Security, all you need to do is begin to generate non-ministry income and pay

Social Security on it. How you generate this income doesn't matter all that much. Just that you claim it on your taxes, paying tax and Social Security on it. You can write books that aren't explicitly Christian and sell them on the Internet, you can work for a minimal fee as a consultant to a business, or you can start selling the junk in your closet and garage on Craigslist, as long as you claim the income and pay Social Security on it. The important thing is that you generate non-ministry income and pay Social Security on it for at least the number of quarters required to qualify for minimum benefits. (I'm not a tax attorney so you might want to run my ideas by an accountant or attorney just in case.)

I know a lot of churches, especially with founding pastors, have a section of their bylaws specifying that in the event of the pastor's death or incapacity, his salary will continue to be paid to him or his surviving widow. That might work, especially if a church is very wealthy, but it is generally a bad policy to depend on the stability of your church, after you are gone, to provide security for you. The church may be much less stable after you are gone, and having to continue to pay you may be untenable. I know of one church where the pastor was physically and mentally unable to continue as Senior Pastor, but the church continued to pay him an income as well as covering his medical benefits, for ten years after he was gone. During much of that time the new Senior Pastor was serving without compensation so they could continue to pay the former pastor. (How many new pastors would, or could, agree to such an arrangement?) Not only that, the former pastor was sharing on social media about how broke he was, so many people in the church were giving him money instead of contributing it to their church. When the agreed upon term had expired the man acted like the church and its new pastor had

treated him unfairly. It is best to have your retirement income not be just sourced by your former church. Even in the case of Pastor Chuck, (and certainly Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa could have afforded to pay Chuck his salary for the next 50 years) they set up a separate account for his retirement, and didn't just commit to indefinite future funding.

These financial questions should be considered by every pastor, and every church board, no matter how old the pastor is, or how long he intends to remain in his leadership position. It is simply prudent. The earlier these plans are considered, the more options pastors and churches will have in the future. It may seem carnal to discuss such things, but failing to discuss them can lead to much more carnal consequences that can be minimized or avoided.

How and when will you decide your future timetable?

The subject of pastoral succession, which is of vital consideration for both you and your church, is much too important to just work it out on the fly. There are a lot of areas in life where it is fine to just "wing it" but in this case, too much is at stake. If you think you will "just know" when the time is right you might be fooling yourself. As we get older our identities are much more wrapped up in what we do everyday, and in what people think of us. It would seem like that wouldn't be the case but in general, those who are aging, and facing deteriorating capacities, become more insecure, and they tend to become blind to their own faltering capabilities. And while it is always important for us to be aware of our own capacities in the present moment, it is also important for us to

make some decisions about the future as far ahead of time as possible, to avoid the lack of objectivity that can come with fading capacities.

What this means is, now is the time to begin to consider the questions, “How long should I continue in my present ministry capacity?” or “At what point will I begin to cut back?” The answers to these questions probably aren’t even as important as the questions themselves. The dates and times that you decide on, and the criteria you may choose as indicators can vary greatly from one individual to the next. One pastor may feel that, based on his present health and energy level, he will be able to continue to perform at a high level until he is 70, after which he will slow down somewhat. Another pastor may be 60 and feeling tired, with various health issues, and he may feel like he needs to begin a slowdown now, and be practically retired by the time he is 65.

What we want to avoid is being blind to reality and holding onto a position for our own wellbeing and security, even to the detriment of the church. We have invested our lives in our churches and the people in them. We don’t want our final act to be destroying what God used us to build.

Once we have reflected on potential timetables for our ministry longevity, we also need to ask ourselves, “How will I know when the time has come to let go?” A pastor who is 50 can easily decide that he will be strong until he is 75. But if he gets to be 70, he may still be assuming he has another 5 years of effective ministry but he may be blind to his own deteriorating capabilities. Ideally we should all have a few people we trust who can be relied on to give us an objective perspective on our own ministry effectiveness. It

would be a great practice to form a team of advisers who know you well, including family members, friends, colleagues, and members of your church, and each year after a certain age ask them, “How do you think I’m doing?” These discussions could include evaluation of your interpersonal relationships, your health, your level of joy, your sense of humor, the clarity of your communication, and the sharpness of your thinking, as well as the quality of your sermons and the health of your ministry. Choose people for these roles who have the integrity to be honest with you, the love to communicate in a way that won’t injure you, and the wisdom to recognize and observe your capabilities. Someone who is predictably negative is not a good candidate for this role, nor is the person who will always say that you are as sharp as you’ve ever been.

Remember, you can’t expect to always be at your peak, nor should you decide that you should slow down or retire at the first sign of decline. The process of living is the process of dying. The second law of thermodynamics says that everything is moving from a state of order to a state of disorder. That includes your body and your abilities. You will slow down. But there are also benefits that come with age. You may not have the energy to work like you used to but you may have the wisdom to work smarter instead of harder. Someone with your gifts and experience functioning at 80% capacity may still be more effective than a much younger person who lacks your wisdom and credibility. But there will always be a point of diminishing returns, where your diminishing capacities overshadow your gifts and wisdom. There is probably no easy way to determine what that point is, or how close you are to it, but we at least need to ask ourselves how we will know when it happens, and when it is likely to happen. And a

gradual release of ministry responsibilities is much less traumatic, for you and your church, than a sudden collapse or a constant deterioration.

Document and memorialize your plans with your leadership team.

As you wrestle through all the various issues and factors concerning pastoral succession, and as you discuss them with key people on your leadership team, it is really important that you put the plans down in writing, and that all key leaders know exactly what has been decided. You will, no doubt, have hundreds of conversations with many different people, whether board members, staff members, friends or family. But if something happens to you, or even if it doesn't, you really don't want a lot of different people with different recollections of what was decided and determined. Put the plan in writing, and date and sign it. You can certainly modify it later, if circumstances change, but this is too important to leave up to conflicted and hazy memories. Going through the exercise of putting it in writing will also force you to make very specific plans, which is good for everyone. And it will be a load off your mind, and the minds of others, to have the plan in concrete form.

Your written plan only needs to be as comprehensive as you want it to be, or as extensive as the conversations you've had up to this point. It can be as simple as, "When I feel the need to slow down, the various men on this list will begin to share in the teaching responsibilities of the church. I will continue as long as I am able, and when I am no longer able, the church board will select one of the men who has been teaching to assume the Senior Pastor position. It will need to be a unanimous selection, confirmed by

a vote of 75% of the regular attenders of the church.” Even a simple statement like this is better than nothing. Obviously the more detailed the written statement is, the better it is for the church. But you can start with what you know today and expand on it as you study, pray about and discuss the issue further.

Putting a plan in writing doesn’t mean you aren’t trusting the Lord, or that you aren’t trusting people. Putting it in writing is simply being a good steward of what God has entrusted to you. Be responsible with that stewardship.

Decide what to tell your congregation.

It is certainly more important that key leaders know what the succession plan is for the church than that the average attender knows. Especially where you don’t have a Congregational form of church governance, and the people of the church play a minimal role in the process. However, it is still a good idea to have information available to those who attend the church, and contribute to it. Once you have a plan in place, it might be a good idea to write up a simple statement concerning what the plans are, and how they will be implemented. Most people would never think to ask, but those who have been through a bad experience in the past are more likely to want to know what your plans are, and it would be good to have something ready for those who ask.

But it may also be a good idea to speak openly to the congregation about such matters, especially if you are close to the point where changes will be occurring. If the people in the church notice that different people in the church seem to be playing greater roles they may wonder what is going on, and will probably talk amongst themselves.

They may even conclude that since the pastor is preaching less, maybe he has serious health problems or maybe he has personal problems. Explaining the big picture is a very respectful way to keep the people in your church informed and in the loop. If you leave it to their imagination they may imagine something way worse than it actually is.

Sometimes these topics may work their way into a message, where appropriate with the text. Other times it may be a good idea to have a special meeting, perhaps at the end of the year, to give a little “state of the church” address. The more you talk openly about these things, the less you and others will need to whisper.

I understand that some pastors want to avoid this subject like the plague. The fear is that if you start talking about a future without you, or with less of you, the people will start to see you as getting old, and they may feel insecure about the future of the church. This is especially a concern if your likely successor is someone they don't like. But the truth is, they've already noticed that you are getting older. And if they see that you are comfortable talking about the future, they will feel more comfortable about the future. The question is, “Do we face the inevitable change fearlessly, or do we pretend things will never change, even though we know better?” Jesus came to bring light into a dark world. As we represent Him, the more we are honest and open, the more faithfully we represent Him. If you are afraid to talk about these things, you should probably be asking yourself, “What am I really afraid of?”

Write out a personal plan for what you can do immediately to aid the succession plan.

Succession isn't just about what you will do in the future. Succession is about what you will do now that will impact the future. Once you have gone through the questions and ideas we have suggested, the next thing is to break it down into specific things you can be doing now. What can you do today that will be a step in facilitating pastoral succession? What can you do this week, or this month, or this year?

One thing you can purpose to do every day is to pray about this. Perhaps you can make a list of specific things to pray about each day. For instance, on Monday pray that your heart will be sensitive to whatever God has planned for you and your church in the future. On Tuesday you can pray for those who will be coming to your church after you are gone. On Wednesday you can pray for your eventual successor. On Thursday you can pray for your family as they eventually or gradually deal with the prospects of your role in the church changing or ending. On Friday you can pray for the timing of the whole process. On Saturday you can pray for the leaders in your church who will eventually be involved in this process. On Sunday you can pray for opportunities to prepare your congregants for eventual succession. You can look at your entire calendar for the month and come up with a unique succession prayer request each day.

Today you can also choose to reach out and mentor ministers, or potential ministers, who are younger than you are. Make a list of guys who would welcome your reaching out to them. Invite one or several of them to have breakfast with you once a

month to talk about ministry. Offer them book recommendations and forward Internet links to them that you think might be helpful. Go through your library and see if there are books you don't use anymore that you could pass on to those who are just beginning their ministry libraries. Pray about incorporating some of these guys into a regular meeting to discuss the passage of Scripture you will be teaching on this week. They can provide some valuable perspective on the passage, which can help you greatly, while they will gain insights into how you approach a passage and prepare to teach it.

Another thing you can do right now is to look at your calendar for the year and see when you are going to be away on a Sunday, or a Wednesday if you have a midweek service. Look for vacation days, but consider other possibilities too. Maybe you should consider taking your wife away for the weekend for your anniversary or her birthday. If you are one who customarily gets back from vacation or ministry trips by Saturday night, so you can drag yourself out of bed on Sunday morning to teach, give yourself some breathing room and don't preach the first day you are back in town. Free up some Sundays and/or Wednesdays when someone else can fill the pulpit for you. And don't just hire guest speakers to come in from the outside. Use the guys you have already in your church, or some of the guys who have gone out from your church to plant churches elsewhere. No matter how young or how old you are, and no matter where you think you may be in a succession timetable, it is always a good time to allow young guys with ministry potential to get some teaching experience. Some of them may end up being used greatly by God, and maybe one of them will eventually be the one who takes the baton from you and continues the race you started. But it will also give the people in your

church the chance to see how they can be fed by someone other than you, and that the church isn't just about you. And as a side effect, it may actually increase your longevity in ministry, as you realize that the church doesn't fall apart just because you take a Sunday off.

Another thing you can do right now is to begin the discussion about pastoral succession. You can start with your wife, if you are married. Tell her what you've been reading and suggest she read a bit of it herself. You may be surprised to learn that she is more interested in this than you thought. (Of course, you may already know that your wife would love to talk about this. Most ministry wives do.) Another good early step is to talk to another pastor friend of yours. You can talk frankly with another pastor, from another church, much easier than to begin the discussion with your own staff or leadership team. Maybe you can set up an informal meeting with a few pastors from your region to talk about this. It is always beneficial to get the perspectives of others, but the perspectives will be much more fruitful if they have already been doing some reading and thinking on the subject. If you get together with a group of pastors who haven't already been considering this issue you may just hear, "I just want to die with my boots on" or "I'll worry about that when I'm older" or "I'm leaving that up to the Lord." Reading and thinking ahead of time, however, can lead to some very fruitful discussion.

Another good thing that you can do immediately is to talk with those who have already transitioned out of a position. Set up a lunch meeting with one of the pastors who works with Poimen Ministries. Even a phone conversation will be fruitful. Any of those

pastors would love to discuss this with you, in complete confidence. You may know some retired ministers. Talk with them and pick their brains. Ask them how they knew when it was time to slow down or step aside. Learn from their experiences. You may have retired business leaders in your church, or in your circle of acquaintances. They can be a vast source of wisdom. But find someone safe and talk with him. The more you talk about this the less threatening it will be.

In the future there will be a number of steps you can take to begin to facilitate your future succession plans. But it is important to get started immediately, and these are some steps you can begin to take right now.

Conclusion

There is no one perfect blueprint for pastoral succession that will work for everyone. Every church is unique and every pastor is unique. But there is one thing we all have in common. Unless Jesus returns soon (and I pray that He does) we must all realize that one day someone else will be doing the ministry that we are currently doing. Denial won't change that. We all have an expiration date on this earth, known only by our Lord. And as our lives have expiration dates, so do our capacities to perform our ministries. None of us is getting any younger.

We have all been a part of an exciting move of God's Spirit called Calvary Chapel. Seeing what God has done in our generation is simply stunning, and God should get all the glory. But Pastor Chuck, who was used by God in all of our lives in such a unique way, had a strong desire for our movement, God's movement, to continue after he

was gone. We know that God will continue to move, and that Jesus will continue to build His Church, but whether or not Calvary Chapel is a significant part of that, in the long run, will depend on whether or not we can continue to move with the Spirit as He moves. We will either transition into a new generation, or become an interesting footnote in church history. How we handle pastoral succession will play a major role in determining whether our movement continues to move with the Spirit, or whether it comes to a grinding halt. Let's face the future with confidence and clarity, laying a foundation for greater things ahead! May God bless you as you consider these things.

Appendix A

Survey of Calvary Chapel Senior Pastors

Note: This survey was conducted by Dave Rolph in 2014, and was completed by a total of 268 Calvary Chapel Senior Pastors. The survey was in three sections. Section A was to be answered by all Senior Pastors. Section B was to be answered only by those who had succeeded another Senior Pastor at some point. Section C was to be answered by those who at one time had been succeeded by another Senior Pastor.

Section A: For all Senior Pastors

Question 1- In what region of the country is the Calvary Chapel you pastor?

California- 83 (32.55%)

Pacific Northwest- 33 (12.94%)

North Central- 8 (3.14%)

Central- 28 (10.98%)

South- 38 (14.9%)

North East- 17 (6.67%)

Hawaii- 5 (1.96%)

Alaska- 2 (.78%)

International- 41 (16.08%)

Question 2- How long have you been the Senior Pastor of this church?

Less than five years- 54 (20.85%)

Five to ten years- 80 (30.89%)

Over ten years- 125 (48.26%)

Question 3- Were you the founding pastor?

Yes- 168 (65.37%)

No- 89 (34.63%)

Question 4- What is your current age?

Under 30- 1 (.39%)

30-50- 107 (41.31%)

51-65- 132 (50.97%)

Over 65- 19 (7.34%)

Question 5- How many people attend your Sunday morning church service?

Under 100- 115 (44.4%)

100-500- 114 (44.02%)

500-1000- 12 (4.63%)

Over 1000- 18 (6.95%)

Question 6- Have you made any specific plans to prepare for a transition to allow someone else to eventually take over your present role as Senior Pastor?

Yes- 84 (32.68%)

No- 173 (67.32%)

Question 7- Does your church have an emergency plan in place, in the event of your sudden, unexpected inability to continue as Senior Pastor?

Yes- 138 (53.7%)

No- 119 (46.3%)

Question 8- Has your successor been identified?

Yes- 62 (24.51%)

No- 191 (75.49%)

Question 9- At what age, if any, would you think you may move aside to let someone else take the lead?

50 or under- 16 (6.4%)

51-64- 51 (20.4%)

65-75- 137 (54.8%)

Not at all- 46 (18.4%)

Question 10- If you have made some succession plans, who is likely to fill the role at your church as the next Senior Pastor?

A current staff member- 118 (49.58%)

A current Senior Pastor from another church- 5 (2.1%)

One of your family members- 6 (2.52%)

Not sure- 109 (45.8%)

Question 11- What role should the church board have in the succession process?

They should take the lead- 70 (27.45%)

A supportive role- 159 (62.35%)

The final word- 20 (7.84%)

A minimal role- 8 (2.35%)

Question 12- What role should the congregation have in the succession process?

Actively involved- 9 (3.54%)

Support and input- 141 (55.51%)

Final approval- 12 (4.72%)

Minimal role- 92 (36.22%)

Question 13- What role should the existing Senior Pastor have in the succession process?

Personally select his successor- 77 (30.2%)

Work with others to find candidate- 104 (40.78%)

Nominate a candidate, then let board and/or congregation ratify- 68 (26.67%)

Stay away- 6 (2.35%)

Question 14- What would be your reaction to the possibility of staying in your current church, filling a different role, after turning over the Senior Pastor role to someone else?

Sounds attractive- 102 (40.64%)

Not sure it would be good for the church- 110 (43.62%)

Not financially feasible- 10 (3.98%)

No. When I'm gone I'm gone- 29 (11.55%)

Section B: For those who have succeeded a Senior Pastor

Question 1- How long ago was it that you succeeded the previous Senior Pastor?

Less than two years ago- 8 (9.09%)

2-5 years ago- 23 (26.14%)

5-10 years ago- 27 (30.68%)

More than 10 years ago- 30 (34.09%)

Question 2- What was the weekly attendance at the church when you became the Senior Pastor?

Under 100- 56 (61.54%)

100-500- 30 (32.97%)

500-1000- 4 (4.4%)

Over 1000- 1 (1.1%)

Question 3- What were the circumstances under which the succession took place?

The pastor retired or was physically unable to continue- 16 (18.18%)

The pastor moved on to another church or ministry- 43 (48.86%)

The pastor was forced out of his position- 27 (30.68%)

The pastor took a different role in this church- 2 (2.27%)

Question 4- How helpful was the previous pastor in aiding your transition?

Outstandingly supportive- 19 (21.59%)

Helpful but could have done more- 16 (18.18%)

He was a hindrance to the transition- 20 (22.73%)

He was not involved- 33 (37.5%)

Question 5- How would you rate the transition process you went through as far as its impact on the health of the church?

It couldn't have gone better- 16 (18.18%)

It was better than I expected- 39 (44.32%)

It was worse than I expected- 21 (23.86%)

It was devastating to the health of the church- 12 (13.64%)

Question 6- How long did it take for the church attendance to begin to increase beyond its previous level following the transition?

Almost immediately- 24 (27.59%)

Less than 3 years- 25 (28.74%)

3 to 5 years- 12 (13.79%)

It still hasn't reached that level- 26 (29.89%)

Section C: For those who handed off the leadership of a church to another Senior Pastor

Question 1- How long ago was it that you handed a church off to another pastor?

Less than 2 years ago- 7 (30.43%)

2-5 years ago- 9 (39.13%)

Over 5 years ago- 7 (30.43%)

Question 2- What was the weekly attendance at the church when you left your position as Senior Pastor?

Under 100- 12 (50%)

100-500- 11 (45.83%)

500-1000- 1 (4.17%)

Over 1000- 0 (0%)

Question 3- What were the circumstances under which the succession took place?

I retired or was physically unable to continue- 3 (12.5%)

I moved on to another church or ministry- 19 (79.17%)

I was forced out of my position- 0 (0%)

I am still at the church, in another position- 2 (8.33%)

Question 4- How would you rate the transition process you went through as far as its impact on the health of the church?

It couldn't have gone better- 9 (39.13%)

It went better than I expected- 8 (34.78%)

It was worse than I expected- 6 (26.09%)

It was devastating to the health of the church- 0 (0%)

Question 5- How long did it take the church attendance to increase beyond their level at the time of succession?

Almost immediately- 4 (17.39%)

Less than 3 years- 6 (26.09%)

3-5 years- 2 (8.7%)

It still hasn't happened- 11 (47.83%)

APPENDIX B

Notes On a Private Meeting Between Pastor Chuck Smith and Peter Drucker, Discussing Pastoral Succession

Documented by Dr. Charles Fromm, December 3, 2003

Introduction: The following are excerpts from a discussion on pastoral succession between Pastor Chuck Smith and management guru Peter Drucker. The meeting, which took place at Peter Drucker's home, was arranged by Chuck Fromm, and attended by Chuck Smith, Peter Drucker, Chuck Fromm and Chuck Smith Jr.

Nature of Chuck's Authority

Peter: And now let me ask you the question that really intrigues me. What would these people succeed to? Your authority is entirely personal, and not institutional. *(This is not entirely true in that Chuck's authority is also legal as chairman of the Calvary Chapel Corporation.)* You have structured it so far for each of the churches being an independent entity by taking the church and building it, and you are available to all of them, and occasionally kick them hard. But it's their church not yours, and they don't contribute financially to the mother church. So you are a movement and not a denomination? So basically what you have is purely a personal authority.

Retirement

Peter: The likes of you don't retire, and shouldn't retire. *(Drucker was very strong on this point!)*

Extent of Authority Over Other Churches

Peter: Now let's say that one of the big successful churches within your group went insane, or went astray and did something that you and the rest of your people considered quite out of tune with the basic spirit of the movement. One of the churches became a church for gays only, or you had a big scandal in one of the churches, a big embezzlement or what have you. What would your role be?

Chuck: We would take the name off the list, and we would ask them to remove the name of Calvary Chapel from their church.

Peter: But other than that you have no disciplinary powers?

Chuck: No.

Peter: You just have the copyright.

Chuck: We would of course do what we could to help.

Succession

Peter: Now there are two, and only two answers to your succession question. One is that if and when the succession problem comes up either because you raise it, you may say in four years, “look my friends, I’m going to keep on being a pastor at the mother church but that, it’s not informal but it is not organized, that the movement needs another active administrative help, and I nominate so and so.”

Peter: Don’t shoot so fast. It is certain, not probable, certain, that when you are gone there will be changes. Nobody can succeed to a charismatic role. And then I think you know it as well as I do, maybe much better, one way to go is to institutionalize, and it’s an easier way to go because institutionalization makes possible, not certain, but possible survival and continuation beyond charisma.

The other way is to become, I wouldn’t say social, but a club basically. With sixteen hundred churches worldwide, or two thousand or whatever it is, a certain amount of institutionalization is probably necessary for the movement to survive.

Peter: You want the name Calvary Chapel to become something. The way you get across to me I can only react to what you tell me, the basic discipline you have beyond your own personal authority is the right to the meaningful name.

Institutionalization

Let me say, the main benefit of institutionalization is that it allows an organization or an entity to survive mediocre leadership, and mediocre leadership happens to be the rule not the exception. What you have done cannot be perpetuated, cannot be handed on. This is very much the known. I didn’t become a musician but I almost did and there was strong pressure on me to do so. Musical giftedness is usually not handed down. There is only one example in my family where music would be handed on. Mozart had no successors. Both his sons were middle musicians. Beethoven didn’t even have children. And so on. It cannot be handed on.

Institutionalization makes possible two things. It makes possible continuation despite the mediocre leadership, and it gives the emerging leader a legitimate place.

It isn’t that the office makes the man, but the office enables the man. I don’t know your convictions, whether you do think what you have built, which is a very big enterprise with close to two thousand churches should and could be perpetuated. In which case a

minimum institutional structure would be required, not a matter of the succession to you, because let me say very bluntly that cannot be organized in the sense of that the good Lord bestows these gifts, and nobody else can do it.

What can be perpetuated is the structure that enables people who want to perpetuate it, to structure it.

Family Succession

Peter: One thing I can say very bluntly: family succession and churches are incompatible. Family succession does work well in many other things, but not in the organization in which the decisive unit is local, and fundamentally in the church the decisive unit is local.

Structure

In your system the individual church is the unit, and there is no authority above it except charismatic, personal, spiritual authority. You cannot appoint the pastor, and you cannot expel a pastor. You can only approve or disapprove; it's a moral judgment.

If you decide that the movement needs to be organized for perpetuation and survival then you're really talking about what constitutional structure is needed, and if the structure in which you think that you train and develop a simple, I wouldn't even say authority, but a central reference, or whether you think that this is something that you see, you work out with the senior group in your structure. That's already a constitutional question. So I would not start out with people, I would start out with the structure.

The way I listen to you, you have to afford your fifty senior pastors who are accepted within the group, and who are an executive committee and already functions as such.

Chuck: They pretty much also oversee the churches that are in the general area where they serve.

Peter: They want to see how they do it, but they have no legal authority but considerable moral authority?

Chuck: That's it. That's exactly it.

Peter: Your normal succession, you have two succession challenges, and they may be solved by one and the same person, or they may not.

But accept the fact that they are different. You are talking of your own church, and I'm going to shock you. That succession problem you cannot, and will not solve.

As long as you were there, you are that church, and you can have assistants but you can't have a successor.

They will come when you are gone, okay? You may be the nicest, and gentlest man in the world, but I don't think you are.

One doesn't get where you are being that nice and that gentle, but you are too big.

That is the truth. As long as you are around you can have assistants, and one of them may even turn into your successor, though it's unlikely. The likes of you are best succeeded from the outside.

Being the successor if one of your assistants succeeds you the entire movement will always say that he became the successor only because of Chuck Smith, and if he tries to be like you it won't work. It will be an outsider. _

((it better be somebody who did know Joseph, but it's not one of the brothers.))

Moses did not grow up as one of the brothers, and there is something by the way to that very old Jewish tradition that Moses was not a Jew but an Egyptian, a convert.

Chuck: Oh really!

Peter: Look, we are talking over partnership, and you are the senior partner, and the rules for the succession to the senior partnership have been known for a very long time.

They don't start out the way you started; they start out with you as the senior partner, and don't make it a group.

Chances would be that you can come up with two or three possible candidates. But don't be too sure; listen to those who to your surprise would not pick one of the three, but will name that pastor in New Brunswick of whom you never thought. But listen to them. You're hurting the partnership when there is not an openness, or if you manipulate the process too much. And then no matter who you select, ask "what do you think of these three?"

It is irrelevant where that senior partner of tomorrow is located. It doesn't have to be in Orange County, but what is likely that they will be there, though let me say from what we know of partnerships you are eager for your successor, it is almost certain who it will be in Orange County. His successor twenty-five years later is unlikely to be in Orange County. It's going to be somebody who emerges anywhere.

Chuck: True.

Peter: Your authority you have is not a legal authority, but it's personal authority, and no one is going to have your authority, nor can anybody, and your balance between spiritual, personal, and competent authority. Twenty years hence you may have somebody twenty-five at the head of the movement who is seen by the senior people primarily as a spiritual leader, and not very much of a teacher or administrator. That's a matter of personalities.

The alternative for them, and you will probably turn it down immediately is to institutionalize where you create a governing structure, which is convert the partnership into a denomination pretty much.

Beyond a certain point you have to institutionalize it or it becomes unmanageable, and the founder can handle a big organization, still I think like a very small one, because of his personal authority. But also everybody still knows you, and you still know, probably you don't know as many as you think, but you still know most. That will not be true of your successor.

Father Figure

Chuck: I think there is another issue also. Most of the men of the inner core, you might say, are in their fifties. They look to me as a father figure; they can't look at each other as father figures.

Peter: The Father figure cannot be inherited.

Chuck: No!

Peter: The next person is a functionary, not a father. Let me say, not, that it cannot happen if twenty years hence your movement has a very severe crisis, the chief executive officer who handles this crisis right and turns the movement around, and gives it new life becomes again a father, a new founder, but he is not a successor. The successor, though, certain things one cannot inherit.

One can inherit function and title, but not position.

Preparation For Succession

Peter: My strong suggestion to you is that you use those fifteen years you have to create responsibility for the movement in the senior group, no matter how well you plan, the senior group will make the movement perpetuate it or not. The way you tell me, I can only know what I hear, your senior group is responsible for the churches they themselves lead, they look down, and they don't look up. The job of the next few years is to make them look up.

So make it your business I would respectfully suggest, find out the leaders, but you know these people. Whenever you meet them individually don't make it a conference or a group affair, or seminar. This is something where you say, "Jim I need your opinion", to help them think through their responsibility for the perpetuation of the movement. When

it comes to your church in Orange County that's one issue. When it comes to the movement it's another.

I'm not saying it's preferable, but it is quite conceivable that you may find to your great surprise that of those forty or fifty people a large number see the successor not in Orange County, but that they see one of their own members standing out. It is not likely, but it is possible to happen. Or it may very well be that they come to you and say, "when you are no longer the head of the movement, we think there should be a small but clearly defined designated group, an executive committee that is available to work with the sixteen hundred pastors we have plus the thousand pastors we train that can handle, things when one of those big churches of your's gets into trouble in your movement.

Peter: So accept the fact that you already have an elementary structure, within your own church and within the movement. If you don't mind my saying so, keep the two apart. The two are too different. If you combine them in one person what is important then for your own church, may not be what is important in the movement.

Chuck's Most Important Role

What is your most important contribution to your own church?

Chuck: It is teaching the word of God.

Peter: Preaching?

Chuck: Yes.

Peter: So you are looking for a preacher, but it's a very big church so you also need somebody who can handle the administrative side?

Chuck: That's what's going to have to happen, yes.

Concern For CCCM More Than Movement

Chuck: Yes, very definitely. Let me say this, I think that I am more concerned with the church that I pastor than I am the movement. I think that the movement is such that each of the men is independent; they're going to go on. And whether or not it adheres together is not as important to me as the church that I pastor, that it continues to be an effective tool of God in reaching Orange County.

Peter: Which are also two different tasks, and the priority is clearly the way you talk of the church you have founded, and there the role is reasonably clear.(yes) Now you have been around long enough to know that there may be disappointment, but the role is clear. You know what succession to you and Calvary requires.

You have created the church of clear distinction, but at the same time this is my impression centered on making a difference to the individual.(yes)
Just because you say yes, it is not necessarily accepted by everyone. I may be old and you know better than I the liberal Protestant movement of the early twentieth century was basically focused on making a difference in the community, and not on the individual, but that is not your design?'

Chuck: No, changed people change a community.

Peter: Yes. But if I may sound like an old fashioned theologian, which I am, that's a by-product.

Chuck: Yes. The changed community is the by-product of changed people.

Two Goals

Peter: So, one thing is true, build a strong, proud example of a functioning and effective church, and unless that is done the rest is meaningless. (true)

And the second thing is to infuse your small group of senior executive pastors with a sense of responsibility for the movement. Make sure that they see this is their responsibility. You can help them; in fact they will probably make excessive demands on you. They are used to delegating things upstairs. My hunch is that they will be very much surprised if you get this across to them. They don't think that way.

Denominations Versus Movements

Peter: Denominations survive and movements die. Movements don't survive, only denominations do, for the simple reason that movements require, perhaps genius is too much, but the likes of you. Denominations require faithful, conscientious hard work. Movements require passion, and passion cannot be created.

Chuck: My feeling is that denominations die; movements live.

Peter: Denominations, unfortunately they are amazingly resistant. A few institutions, universities are fabulously long-lived, almost impossible to kill them.

Chuck: But they are not the same as what they were founded to be.

Peter: Of course not, they wouldn't survive if they were.

Chuck: How many pastors is Harvard producing in a year, or Yale?

Peter: Very few, I'm sure, and yet those original features are immediately long-lived for better or worse. I think institutions themselves are tremendously resistant. Even if they have absolutely no visible reason to exist they keep on. Whether they can keep on with movements, or whether they have to become institutionalized sooner or later I think you only survive if you become institutionalized. But that's an issue too.

Priority of Preaching

Peter: You have made a commitment, one would say commitment to the inerrancy of the Bible, but you are not alone in that, and fortunately that's enough that a good many wrongs in the church can be prevented. But it's also a commitment to preaching.

Preaching is a commitment to changing the individual, if it's of any effect at all.

My hearing is so poor that when I go to church I don't hear the sermon, but I don't think it makes any difference judging by the quality of our sermons. That's not why I go to church, but that's why you expect your parishioners to come, because it changes them. There is a commitment I think to a very active congregation. That's very important. And it's a part of your success because that is a difference between my generation as parishioners and the forty-five year olds today. My generation definitely expected it, a purely passive congregation. Not just one where you go on Sunday and write a check, though I believe there is nothing wrong with that, but the church was a social institution when I was younger, which is not true of your congregation, and that is essential, and I think that is what needs to be maintained.

Chuck: You're right, I would agree.

Timing For Succession and What Comes Next

Peter: You have, or believe you have moved pretty far towards providing for the succession to yourself in your own church. One that means within a few years you personally will have the choice to decide what is my vote.

Chuck: I think three and a half years.

Peter: And I hope you don't mind my saying, be sensitive to the need for your continued involvement as an authority figure. I've been through this a few times, and it works if you accept the fact that the important job, unless you totally disappeared either because you died or because you moved to Patagonia, is to continue as an inspirational leader. Don't

move to Florida because the airlines work. You cannot just disappear. That is not within your power. You are the authority.

Think Through “If I step out what are the tasks I will still do?”

I’ve been through this now with several organizations, not all businesses, a number of businesses, with a strong and powerful person who built the organization and it is impossible to pretend that you don’t exist. In any crisis they come to the founder if he’s around, but even without a crisis if he is still makes a comment it carries much too much weight. Accept it, the fact is, as long as you are around you will still play an important role. And don’t start out with what’s right for my successor. Start out with what’s right for the church, and then comes what’s right for me, and then comes what’s right for your successor. As long as you are around you are going to be the dominant personality. You can be as humble as you please, it doesn’t change that.

That’s a common problem, and the smart thing is to accept it, and to think it through. “If I step out of being the chief executive officer, what are the responsibilities and the tasks which I myself will still do, and what am I accountable for? That’s a leadership role. The question to ask yourself is, “What is it that I can do best to make the best contribution to the church? What is the area in which I can make the bigger contribution?” It may be still as the preacher, it may be as the one who works with the volunteers, it may be as the one who works with those sixteen hundred churches worldwide. In the other areas you will have to learn to say “look, leave me alone. This is no longer my area of concern.” That isn’t quite as easy as it sounds.

Aimee Semple McPherson

Peter: Take Aimee, perhaps the most powerful personality in American Protestantism in the twentieth century. She did not create the denomination or in that sense a movement but fundamentally a lot of the developments you see are the children or the grandchildren I would say.

Chuck: In a sense I’m a grandchild of Aimee

Peter: I don’t know enough about her life but I have a feeling she was quite deliberate in not wanting to create succession, I think so.

Chuck: Right, I couldn’t agree more.

Peter: She did not want to create the dominant denomination, and did not want to create one because she was a very self centered person, and could not imagine anybody succeeding her, and in part nobody could have because she was unique, for better or worse.

Chuck: That's one of the things that caused me to be concerned because I saw, when she died, Angelus Temple that she founded, had no one that could fill the bill.

Peter: But fifty years later we have the grandchildren, and a very healthy set they are. But she did not do what you did; she did not start sixteen hundred churches. In fact she didn't start a single one did she?

Chuck: Yes, there were some.

Peter: But basically Aimee was centered on herself.

Chuck: True.

Peter: So, who are your grandchildren?

Chuck: Well, The Vineyard came out of Calvary.

Peter: I know that, and they are very conscious of the fact that they are creating a denomination. They have made that decision for better or worse. They are very active, as you know in Brazil, for instance. You can or you may move in the way where the seeds sprout wherever they land, where they are not being sown. But don't you feel that this is your responsibility? That is very much the responsibility of your inner circle partners. OK?

Chuck: Very good.

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