



EVERYONE'S PROBLEM

WE NEED MORE LABORERS

Free Will Baptists need 124 new pastors right now. That number was compiled recently by our state leaders, and it is growing. Two weeks ago, the number was 119. At that time, state leader William Smith noted Georgia had 16 churches without a pastor. However, 20 pastors in the state are in their 60s, another 20 in their 70s, and eight in their 80s. Other state leaders reported a similar situation. These reports are consistent with the 2019 Committee on Denominational Research study that indicated 55% of Free Will Baptist pastors were over 50, and 80% were over 40.¹ **We have a growing need for men who will answer the call to pastor.**

This shortage of pastors could not come at a more inopportune time. It feels as though the world has turned upside down, away from Christian values. People are reeling psychologically and spiritually² as we saw life expectancy in the United States reduced by a year in 2020.³ People need the church to point them to Christ and usher them through this difficult time. Many are weary and scattered like sheep having no shepherd (Matthew 10:36).

It seems Free Will Baptist doctrine has become *more* attractive in this environment. The other day I received a call that went like this: "Our church has been looking at your website, and we have read your *Treatise*. Our congregation believes it is directly aligned with Free Will Baptist doctrine. We are Free Will Baptists!"

"Wonderful!" I replied.

NAFWB

Then they said, “Could you send us a Free Will Baptist pastor?” The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

We need shepherds. More specifically, we need men willing to be Free Will Baptist pastors. Sometimes, when the pastor shortage comes up in conversation, people complain about our colleges. Others complain about our churches, and still others blame our current pastors. Actually, this is an across-the-board (and across all denominations) problem.⁴ In fact, fewer people are willing to go into any vocation with a major service component today (e.g., teaching,⁵ law enforcement,⁶ military⁷). The pastoral shortage is part of an overall cultural shift, and it is everyone’s problem. What can we do?

Pray and Search for Pastors

We must all attack this problem. In reality, this is not a new problem. When Jesus looked at the scarcity of laborers, He said to **pray for more laborers** (Matthew 9:37-38; Luke 10:2). Let us devote serious prayer to asking for more laborers. As we pray, let us familiarize ourselves with the job description and qualifications of pastors (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4). Let us **ask God to identify men He is calling** as we search our ranks for candidates.

We could learn some lessons from the employment recruiters (or headhunters) of our day who search for people to fill vocational positions that require unique skill sets.⁸ We can scan the environment looking for potential candidates who meet the criteria to be a pastor and approach them. This is not to say we negate the need for a man to be called into the ministry. However, it is my suspicion we are not **challenging men to consider the call to the ministry** with the same fervency as previous generations.

For more on this issue, please listen to the podcast “Answering the Call to Ministry” with Dr. Barry Raper, coordinator of ministry programs at Welch College and Welch Divinity School (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-cT478hkWE>; the onsite lighting is not the best, but the content is powerful.) Further, read Daniel Webster’s *PULPIT* magazine article on the call to the ministry (<https://nafwb.org/called-to-ministry/>). To our own detriment, we sometimes focus more on what we think would make a good minister rather than on the biblical description of a good minister.

Pray for Deacons

As we pray, **let us ask God to give us deacons**. Study the deacon job description (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Timothy 3:8-15), and search for candidates. Deacons are a key component to a strong church (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:13). I suppose the most famous deacon is Stephen (Acts 6-7) who impacted his church and community in a major way. Most of the time, deacons will be heavily involved in procuring a new pastor and keeping the church strong if it is without a pastor. Read two articles on pastoral transition from Brandon Roysden for insight into the impact of deacons as well as for practical advice on navigating a pastoral transition (Lessons in Leaving: <https://nafwb.org/lessons-in-leaving> and Pastor Wanted: https://www.onemag.org/pastor_wanted.htm).

NAFWB

Pray for Everyone to Perform Their Own Role

As we pray, let us **pray for men and women who will use their spiritual gifts, aptitudes, and personality in the ministry of the church**. Everyone was made to minister (1 Peter 4:10). Sometimes, the problems we face today are the consequences of sins committed yesterday. One such sin is a sin of omission—the congregation’s failure to minister. In some churches, the mindset has become that the pastor does the ministering and even non-ministry related tasks. The result is weak churches and worn-out pastors. On the other hand, when a congregation uses their spiritual gifts properly, a pastor is free to pastor the flock without being sidetracked by other tasks (Acts 6:2).

Ask God to give us churches full of people who are willing to put their spiritual gifts to work. Study passages such as Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; and Ephesians 4:1-16. Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:7). Let us pray and **search for those with specific gifts and help them use those gifts in ministry**. Churches with a high percentage of members effectively using their spiritual gifts will be healthy (and more appealing to a potential pastor). As a result, the church becomes what it should truly be.

The need for 124 pastors is everyone’s problem, and we are all part of the solution. Let us each ask ourselves, “What has God called me to do?” and get busy doing that. If we do, churches will become stronger and more effective and congregants will enjoy lives that are more fulfilled.

1 Survey of Free Will Baptists Pastors, 2019. NAFWB Committee On Denominational Research:
<https://nafwb.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Pastor-Survey-Summary.pdf>

2 Fides A del Castillo, Health, spirituality and Covid-19: Themes and insights, *Journal of Public Health*, 2020, 185,
<https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdaa185>

3 T. Andrasfay, & N. Goldman (2021). Reductions in 2020 US life expectancy due to COVID-19 and the disproportionate impact on the Black and Latino populations, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 118.
<https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/118/5/e2014746118.full.pdf>

4 For example, see M. Hess. (July/August, 2020). The Growing Crisis of Pastoral Shortages. *Baptist Bulletin*.
<https://baptistbulletin.org/the-baptist-bulletin-magazine/the-growing-crisis-of-pastoral-shortages>

5 E. García, & E. Weiss (2019). The Teacher Shortage Is Real, Large and Growing, and Worse Than We Thought. Economic Policy Institute
<https://www.epi.org/publication/the-teacher-shortage-is-real-large-and-growing-and-worse-than-we-thought-the-first-report-in-the-perfect-storm-in-the-teacher-labor-market-series>

6 https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/239416_IACP_RecruitmentBR_HR_0.pdf

7 E. Moore, & M. Martinez (May 21, 2020). It’s Only Going to Get Harder to Recruit and Retain Troops in a Post-Pandemic World. *Defense One*.
<https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2020/05/its-only-going-get-harder-recruit-and-retain-troops-post-pandemic-world/165555>

8 W. Finlay, & J. E. Coverdill (2007). *Headhunters: Matchmaking in the Labor Market*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Download additional resources: nafwb.org

NAFWB