

BEFORE YOU RESIGN



DISCERNING
THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN
DISCOURAGEMENT
AND RELEASE

BY
GENE RONCONE
PHIL STEIGER
GEORGE STAHNKE
NICK SEDERS

ANOTHER HELPFUL RESOURCE FOR THE MINISTERS AND CHURCHES OF THE
ROCKY MOUNTAIN MINISTRY NETWORK

Table of Contents

- 1. Why Pastors Leave2
- 2. When Should I Leave a Church?6
- 3. When to Stay9
- 4. Resources to Process Emotions & Causes for Departure11
- 5. How to Leave Well15

Chapter 1

Why Pastors Leave

By Gene Roncone

My role as a District Superintendent/Network Pastor often gives me a unique perspective from the top of the mast. Most times this view is encouraging, but sometimes it is concerning; and when it comes to how pastors resign, that is often the case. As we turned the corner on the COVID crisis, churches began to experience a significant amount of ministerial turnover. There may be several reasons and I would like to share a few that I see from my view at the top of the mast.

- 1. Some lack the spiritual disciplines that produce resiliency.** Make no mistake about it—a minister’s personal devotional life is the well from which they draw resiliency, perseverance, and perspective. The Psalmist waxed eloquent on this point saying, *If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction* (Psalm 119:92 NIV). As strange as it may sound, many of our preachers have allowed the business of ministry to hinder their getting alone with God and His Word on a daily basis. They have spent so much time trying to stay out in front of culture that they have left no margin to feed their own souls. Like White Rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*, they rise each day to wrestle the dragon and say to God, “I’m late! I’m late! For a very important date! No time to say ‘Hello,’ goodbye! I’m late, I’m late, I’m late!” As a result, ministry has caused them to write checks their souls cannot cash. They now find themselves weary, discouraged, depressed, frustrated, angry, confused, and easily taxed. Their spirit is lacking the will to lead and leaving just seems easier than staying.
- 2. Some lead churches that are unwilling to follow.** In some cases, a leader will attempt to lead their church into a needed change or a new future only to find the congregation unwilling to embrace it. True leaders may be able to turn down the dial or even temporarily postpone vision, but they can rarely let it die. That is why, in some cases, God releases a leader to another congregation that has a greater capacity to follow and gives the other congregation a leader less motivated by growth.
- 3. Some cannot give what the ministry requires.** We all have varying gifts, capabilities, and potential for growth. When a church has plateaued or declined for a prolonged period, some ministers come to a painful realization—their church has developed needs that exceed their ability. Whether this deficiency is due to age; intensity; or lack of ability to raise funds, lead a building program, or connect with a changing community, sometimes a leader must leave so they can find a more compatible situation. God uses these transitions both to accommodate a pastor’s need for growth and the church’s need for someone capable of leading them into the future. Too often, this scenario is perceived as negative when, in reality, it is God repotting both the leader and the church for future growth.

4. **Some think a change of location will bring a change of reality.** Some pastors are worn-out from work without boundaries, the wave upon wave of challenge, and being deprived of what energizes their spirit. They are also discouraged by the division within the church, the politicalization of everything, and the strong opinions of God's people. Proverbs 13:12 tells us, *Hope deferred makes the heart sick* (NIV); and the sickness of emotional, spiritual, and physical fatigue has them longing for greener pastures. My heart aches for these soldiers, and I hope they realize that our recent culture shift has changed the look of every church in America, including the one they are dating. No view of a church or ministry is an accurate view. I pray they do not wake up one morning like Jacob—thinking they married Rachael only to find Leah by their side.
5. **Some have lost the church's confidence.** We live in a time when leading has high stakes and never-ending risks. Pandemics, economic uncertainty, long workweeks, political unrest, international turmoil, and diverse congregations can create impossible expectations. Mistakes, neglect, and failure can strip a pastor of leadership credibility faster than time can replenish it. When these blows are the direct result of poor leadership or negligent management, leaving may be the only option.
6. **Some face challenges that require a change of lifestyle.** Like most people, ministers will experience health challenges that may demand a change of location, portfolio, or lifestyle. As they age, they will experience a normal decline in ability and stamina. In this case, prolonged ministry will require a reevaluation of their capacity before continuing in ministry.
7. **Some must reprioritize their families.** Ministry is demanding; and in some cases, ministers may have either neglected their families or lead a church unwilling or unable to provide much-needed boundaries. Nothing—and I mean nothing—is worth losing a marriage over. Furthermore, if the minister's children are suffering emotionally, spiritually, or psychologically and the only cure involves a move, then move they must. In addition, when a minister's parents' health demands their attention, they have a biblical responsibility to obey. In other cases, when their financial needs have repeatedly been neglected by those charged by God's Word to attend to them, a responsible leader must own the solution and serve God elsewhere (Deuteronomy 25:4; 1 Corinthians 9:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; and 1 Timothy 5:18).
8. **Some are unable to adjust to new kingdom needs.** Nothing in my lifetime has required leaders to be as ambidextrous as our current cultural shift. Cultural unrest, political Armageddon, and social distancing has kicked the crutches out from underneath us and forced us to think about things we never thought about before. We have been forced to realize we are not Republicans, Democrats, or Independents but children of the living God and citizens of an eternal kingdom (Philippians 3:20)—things like how we will need to thrive as a persecuted minority; things like imagining evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, and worship while being deprived of a physical meeting space. This season is demanding flexibility, a higher intensity of work, and situational leadership skills. Some are just unable

or unwilling to follow God's call when it leads off the map and into the blank space of inconvenience and uncertainty.

9. **Some have surrendered the "want to."** Effectiveness in ministry is dependent upon something only we can bring to the table—willingness. Peter warns pastors to *be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be* (1 Peter 5:2 NIV). The New Living Translation pulls no punches translating the same verse, *Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly*. That means somewhere between obligation and indifference is willingness, and it is God's will for a pastor to lead from the "want to," not the "ought to." The fact that Scripture requires our willingness means it is something God expects us to bring to the table. Once willingness is surrendered, it is not only hard to regain but also leaves us aggravated and resentful of the very people God called us to serve.
10. **Some are genuinely being called to new assignments.** Let's face it—God's sovereignty is not put on hold during a cultural crisis. God is still writing new chapters and orchestrating sovereign intersections between churches and ministers. Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 that God uses different ministers to meet the unique needs of churches. Consequently, it would make sense that as a church's needs change or if a minister is incapable or unwilling to provide what that church needs, God would usher in a leadership transition. The fact of the matter is that not all transitions will be bad. Some will be God-ordained, inspired, and empowered! The Holy Spirit may have already started some of this deep work months and years before a transition appeared as a dot on the horizon. The key is to discern who and what is driving the train of change.

Following are some thoughts as to how to do that:

- **Feed your soul.** Each day will require enormous amounts of energy, wisdom, and discernment. Make sure you are in God's Word daily if for no other reason than to fill your tank. If this is hard for you, start by reading three chapters a day. Underline verses that speak to you and then select one to be your verse for the day.
- **Lean into God.** Give the Holy Spirit the time, margin, and right-of-way to show you if it is God who is calling you away or just the stress of accumulating circumstances.
- **Be real with yourself.** If you have a track record of short tenures, running from problems, or chronic discontent, ask God to show you why. Change for change's sake will only create a mountain of accumulating consequences.
- **Evaluate family impact.** Make a list of who in your family might be negatively impacted by a misguided move. Is it fair for your spouse and loved ones to suffer the effects of a needless transition?
- **Surrender your weaknesses.** Your weaknesses, mistakes, and insecurities are not a liability to God. In fact, they are an opportunity for Him to be glorified through you (2 Corinthians 12:9).

- **Think about your thinking.** Pray over the list of reasons mentioned above and on a scale of 1-10 rate how much each one is influencing you.

To help you do that, Phil and I want to provide some help in these uncertain times. Phil will give some help in discerning the difference between burnout and release. Then, if you still feel like God is moving you on, I will address how to leave your current ministry in a way that honors God, gives you the needed closure, and sets your ministry and church up for success.

Chapter 2

When Should I Leave a Church?

By Phil Steiger

We decided to walk home that night after service. It was a warm evening and a long walk, but it gave us a chance to talk through whether it was time to leave. We had spent several good years at the church and loved a lot of people there. It had recently undergone a change of senior pastors and I was offered a new position, but we felt the timing was right for us to leave. We did not have another job lined up, but we were certain God was asking us to take a step of faith. While we were able to maintain a lot of friendships and leave well, we learned it was hard to do even under “the best of circumstances.”

Are there ways to tell if it is time to leave a pastorate? Are there differences between a need for a long vacation or a sabbatical and the decision to leave? This can be one of the more significant decisions in a pastor’s life and in the lives of the pastor’s family and the church; consequently, it deserves prayer and good planning.

While I believe that long-term pastorates should be the goal in most cases and something we prepare ourselves for, there are numerous things to consider when deciding whether it is the right time to leave. Without taking into account times in which a pastor is asked to leave or forced to leave, following are some ways to process the question of whether it is time to leave a church.

- 1. All else being equal, strive to stay.** Disagreements with a board member or a few influential people in the church are normal over time for a pastor. When God puts someone behind the pulpit, it comes with the burden of leadership and decision making. Anyone who has led a church for any length of time can tell you there will inevitably be moments that pit your decisions against the desires of someone else in the church. I once read that you have not really preached until you have preached with an angry board member in the pews. These moments are normal and should be seen as the result of sinners leading sinners and a reason for prayer, grace, and wisdom and not necessarily as a power struggle that leads to leaving a church.

One of the greatest assets in determining which kind of situation you are facing is to have the wisdom of many counselors—specifically, pastors who are a few years farther down the path than you. Isolated pastors not only put themselves on an island but may also disconnect themselves from the help and prayer they need when the time comes. More than once, these kinds of friendships and resources have been a tremendous help to me.

This is an important place to begin this conversation because if the statistics are true, too many pastors leave churches too often to accomplish significant long-term goals. We should

not let leaving be our first reaction to the bumps and bruises of pastoral ministry. Endurance and stability might be exactly what the church needs.

- 2. You are a tool and may never be a shepherd.** In some situations, a church board or the individuals who control the personality of the church simply see pastors as means to their ends. In these cases, a young and energetic pastor and family may enter a church with excitement and hope but quickly learn they are on a short leash. Pastors are called by God to be undershepherds to His flock which requires the ability to lead from behind the pulpit, in the board room, and in the foyer.

Shepherds build meaningful relationships with congregants and become friends and disciplers; tools are only window dressing for the unhealthy desires of others to shape and control a church. Shepherds are those who seek the vision and power of God for the course of a congregation; tools are subject to the whims and frustrations of a handful of powerful people. Shepherds have the right to correct; tools are only allowed to bring correction in preapproved ways. Shepherds are compensated out of wise stewardship and love; tools are kept on a financial knife-edge.

Where do you find yourself? If God called you to the pastorate, he called you to shepherd His flock as someone who is ultimately responsible to Him. If you feel you can shepherd, you have a blessing that a lot of pastors long for. If you are being kept in an uncertain and tenuous position and are unable to change that atmosphere, you may need to find a place where God can use you as a genuine undershepherd of the King.

- 3. You have brought about all the change you can.** This can be the result of your personality and leadership style. You came to accomplish a handful of things; you have, and now it is time for the next leader to take the reins. I know of situations where a pastor was called by a church but knew going in that they were there to fill a specific role and accomplish a few tasks. Maybe the congregation was coming out of an abusive pastorate and needed a kind and stable pastor. Maybe they were on the brink of needed change or growth, and a pastor was there for a few years to lead through a complicated stage. In any event, pastors in these situations know when their job is done. They were called for a specific purpose, it has been accomplished, and now it is time for the next pastor to step in.

This can also happen when the church resists needed change, and your leadership is not respected enough to be followed. More churches than we care to acknowledge need a fundamental change of heart. They are stuck or have run a few pastors out of town, and you now find yourself in a place where you are convinced there is potential but are resisted at every turn. You might have been able to paint the nursery, but you have been unable to get the congregation to buy into an outreach-oriented approach to their community.

Simple, small steps may not fulfill the call you feel to disciple a church or reach a community. Sometimes there is just too wide a gap between the calling and giftings of a pastor and the personality of a church unwilling to grow or change.

- 4. When your exhaustion exceeds your ability to rest.** Sometimes what you need is an extra day off. From time to time, this is exactly what we do; and it gets us through to the next Sunday. Sometimes a two-week vacation is the right thing. Unplug for a bit. Read something different. Breathe some new air.

There are seasons where a sabbatical is the right thing to do. An extended period of time to reconnect with people, clear the air, and hear from God can be a rejuvenating practice.

However, a pastor often knows when even a sabbatical will not overcome the burnout or exhaustion they feel. If that is the case, not only should a pastor lean heavily on trusted friends and mature counselors, but they may also need to consider stepping away from their position in ministry. God is more concerned with your soul than your stats. You were a child of God and loved deeply by Him long before you were a pastor who was expected to preach on Sunday and lead a staff the rest of the week.

- 5. Your family pays too steep a price if you stay.** It is one thing for a pastor to endure some frustration and conflict from time to time. It is another thing for church ministry to do damage to the family. It is incumbent upon us as pastors to see and understand the spiritual and emotional health of our family and see them as more important than the next sermon series. There may be some cases where expectations and schedules can be adjusted to assure that our families are healthy and strong; but when a church makes demands on a pastor that causes deterioration of family health, it may be time for a pastor to prioritize their family.
- 6. When your vision for the church has lifted.** It has been my experience over the 17 years I have pastored the same church that my vision for the near future changes. When that happens, it takes time to discern what is next. That often leaves me in a season of some spiritual frustration and causes me to press into God more and more. None of these changes have been a signal to leave. They were God's way of getting me to recenter myself in prayer and Scripture.

However, there comes a time when God lifts a pastor's vision for the future. While you may still be able to go from week to week, it begins to wear on you over time. You know, probably better than anyone, when God simply has something different in store for you.

When to leave is not the only decision to make; how we leave matters. The way we leave is a matter of integrity before God and others. We need to be able to set up the congregation for success in the next step, and we need to be able to pave a smooth path for the next pastor and their family. I once was able to thank the pastor who preceded me for how he handled things—how he left gave me an immediate measure of trust with the church leadership, and it gave them a healthy sense of change. May we all be able to do something similar.

Chapter 3 When to Stay By Gene Roncone and Phil Steiger

Now that we have addressed when to leave, we must also acknowledge there are times we must stay despite an invitation or desire to depart.

- 1. Stay when the church is facing difficult times.** Generally, a pastor should not leave for reasons of personal safety, gain, or promotion when the church is facing great trials, division, or danger. This would include financial trials, a difficult building or relocation program, natural disasters, epidemics, or tragedy. The only acceptable excuse to leave during these times is when your leadership caused or contributed to the problem. Examples of this would include moral failure, unethical behavior, financial mismanagement, negligence, the church's becoming incapable of paying your salary, or a leadership style that is making the problem worse rather than better. A shepherd does not leave the flock when the flock is in distress, and neither should a pastor.
- 2. Stay in the absence of divine confirmation.** A minister should stay when there is a lack of divinely orchestrated confirmations to leave. Being tired, discouraged, or missing family is not a good enough reason to depart. God's Word is filled with examples of leaders God required to push through difficult, inconvenient, and even oppressive seasons. If your desire to leave is not accompanied by unsolicited invitations, divine appointments, and miraculous confirmation, you should remain faithful to your current post and calling. The biggest warning sign in this area is when you are trying harder to leave than you are to lead.
- 3. Stay if you lack tracks for a healthy transition.** At the end of the day, every pastor is an interim pastor and godly leaders prepare for their exit. Succession planning at its most may take years to put a written and collaborative plan in place. However, at its least it involves creating a transition document with all the most current and needed information to ensure a smooth transition. This would include one document that contains up-to-date financial statements for the past year; banking account information (account numbers, log-in information, passwords, and up-to-date signature cards); master password log for all services associated with the church; leadership information (names, contact info, and position titles); congregational contact list, membership roster, attendance history, and a list of keys and who has them; list of all verbal, implied, or standing commitments; location of organizational assets (credit cards, mailbox, PO box, safety deposit box, checkbook, and files); and digital photographs of all the interior rooms and exterior property along with a one-page summery profile of the church, city, and surrounding community. These items should be placed in a document that can be shared in a moment's notice. We are not saying every pastor should stay indefinitely if they have not at least prepared minimally, but every pastor should stay at least until they have.

4. **Stay if your spouse does not support leaving.** Forcing change upon your spouse, children, or dependent relatives is not a good foundation to build a new ministry upon. If you have not prayed together, researched together, and decided together, it is better to stay until you have.
5. **Stay in the doldrums.** The doldrums are areas in the ocean where a ship cannot find wind or a current. Things stand still. You want to move on, but things are stagnant. When the Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to *preach the word*, he added, *be prepared in season and out of season* (2 Timothy 4:2 NIV). Without a clear call by God to move on, stay when things seem stagnant, when the vision and motion of the church seem to be “out of season.” Good leaders often show up when others leave looking for the “next exciting thing.” Solid churches are built over time when things are exciting and when they are not.
6. **Stay when doctrinal purity is at stake.** There are times when members of the congregation leave to find teaching that tickles their ears. We know that we will never appeal to everyone, but there are times when people leave for reasons that are not doctrinally sound. It may be that a new church entices them away or there is a new fad in town that attracts a lot of people. Even when we know people leave for the wrong reasons, it still hurts and can damage our sense of calling and usefulness. In 2 Timothy 4:3-5, Paul warns us that this will happen and that our job is to endure.
7. **Stay when influencers covet the helm.** God’s voice is stronger than the voices of some of the members of the congregation. For many pastors, moments like these are bound to come. A group of people, sometimes influential people, become dissatisfied and begin to pressure the pastor to change or leave. While these can be complicated decisions requiring a lot of time, prayer, and conversation, God can use these situations to remove unhealthy influences from a congregation. If it means some financial support leaves but you are following God, He will provide.
8. **Stay if leaving reinforces a habit of running.** If your résumé looks like a string of short-term assignments and you tend to look for “greener pastures,” staying may help you develop your capacity for longevity. Community pastoring, lifelong relationship, effective ministries, family stability, rooted vision, deep discipleship, generational leadership, resiliency, regional impact, and advanced sermon development skills are all rewards that only come from longevity. You will never experience or appreciate their fullness if you suffer from serial quitting.

Chapter 4

Resources to Process Emotions & Causes for Departure

By Gene Roncone, George Stahnke and Nick Seders

There can be several factors that contribute to a minister's resignation, transition, retirement, or termination. Navigating the emotional midfields of transition can be difficult. To help minister and resource you during these difficult seasons, we have provided the following resource list. It is categorized by common reasons why ministers resign, are released or disqualify themselves along with helpful links. This list is the collaborative effort of George Stahnke, Gene Roncone and Nick Seders.

1. I am exhausted spiritually.

- INVENTORY: [The Maslach Burnout Inventory](#)
- INVENTORY: [The Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory](#)
- BOOK: [Worn Out by Obedience: Recovering from Spiritual Fatigue](#), by Ron Moore
- BOOK: [The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath](#), by Mark Buckanan
- BOOK: [Emotionally Healthy Spirituality](#), by Peter Scazzero
- ARTICLE: [8 Tips for Pastors Struggling with Burnout](#), by Tim Stevens
- VIDEO: [How to Get Back on Track Spiritually](#), by Allen Parr
- PDF: [Before You Resign, Discerning the Difference Between Discouragement and Release](#), by Gene Roncone, Phil Steiger, George Stahnke and Nick Sedars

2. I have disqualified myself morally, sexually, or financially.

- ARTICLE: [Whatever it Takes](#), by Paul and Jenny Speed.
- ARTICLE: [How to Confess an Affair to Your Spouse](#), by Focus on the Family
- ARTICLE: [Accountability is Not Condemnation, It's a Pathway to Freedom](#), by Kris Vallotton
- ARTICLE: [Confessing the Affair: Do's & Don'ts](#), by Josh Spurlock
- ARTICLE: [How to Confess an Affair without Losing Your Marriage](#), by Dr. Joe Snow
- ARTICLE: [Thoughts on the Restoration of Fallen Pastors](#), by Jared C. Wilson
- BOOK: [Starting Over](#), by Dave & Jon Ferguson
- BOOK: [Gentle and Lowly](#), by Dane C. Ortlund
- PDF: [Before You Resign, Discerning the Difference Between Discouragement and Release](#), by Gene Roncone, Phil Steiger, George Stahnke and Nick Sedars
- VIDEO: [How to Confess An Affair to Your Spouse](#), by Marriage Helper
- VIDEO: [How to Confess An Affair to Your Wife or Husband](#), by Beth Ray
- BOOK: [Unfaithful: Hope and Healing After Infidelity](#), by Gary Shriver

3. My spouse has had an extramarital affair and I feel I have lost credibility.

- BOOK: [Truefaced: Trust God and Others With Who You Really Are](#), by Bill Thrall
- BOOK: [Beneath the Surface: Preventing and Recovering from Sexual Temptation and Moral Failure](#), by Bob Reccord
- BOOK: [Surviving an Affair](#), by Jennifer Harley and Willard F. Chalmers
- BOOK: [Unfaithful: Hope and Healing After Infidelity](#), by Gary Shriver
- BOOK: [Torn Asunder Workbook: Recovering From an Extramarital Affair](#), by Dave Carder

- PDF: [Before You Resign, Discerning the Difference Between Discouragement and Release](#), by Gene Roncone, Phil Steiger, George Stahnke and Nick Sedars

4. My church is unwilling to follow me.

- ARTICLE: [When They Won't Follow Your Leadership](#), by Jared Moore
- ARTICLE: [The Problem with "Church, Submit to Your Pastor"](#), by Mark Strauss and Justin Irving.
- ARTICLE: [Why do Churches Wound Their Pastors?](#) by Dan Doriani
- WEBSITE: [For pastors who have been fired or forced to resign](#), by Pastor's Hope Network.
- PDF: [Before You Resign, Discerning the Difference Between Discouragement and Release](#), by Gene Roncone, Phil Steiger, George Stahnke and Nick Sedars
- BOOK: [Moving On: Surviving the Grief of Forced Termination](#), by Deanna Harrison
- BOOK: [When to Walk Away](#), by Gary Thomas
- BOOK: [Leadership Pain](#), by Samuel R. Chand

5. I can no longer give what the ministry requires.

- ARTICLE: [On Knowing When to Resign](#), by D. A. Carson
- SERIES: [How Ya Feeling?](#), by Kyle Idleman
- BOOK: [God Does His Best Work with Empty](#), by Nancy Guthrie
- BOOK: [The Best Yes](#), by Lysa TerKeurst
- BOOK: [Pastors at Greater Risk](#), by H.B. London and Neil Wiseman
- PDF: [Before You Resign, Discerning the Difference Between Discouragement and Release](#), by Gene Roncone, Phil Steiger, George Stahnke and Nick Sedars

6. I need a change to stay motivated.

- ARTICLE: [10 Questions To Ask Yourself Before Searching For A New Church Job](#), by Vanderbloemen
- ARTICLE: [7 Signs It's Time to Leave](#), by Carey Nieuwhof
- ARTICLE: [7 Ways to Leave a Church Well](#), by Cameron Triggs
- ARTICLE: [Eight Principles to Consider Before Leaving a Church You Used to Love](#), by Karl Vaters
- ARTICLE: [Short Term Pastorates, Steppingstones or Roadblocks](#), by Ministry Magazine
- ARTICLE: [11 Reasons Some Pastors Leave Too Soon](#), by Church Lawless
- PDF: [Before You Resign, Discerning the Difference Between Discouragement and Release](#), by Gene Roncone, Phil Steiger, George Stahnke and Nick Sedars
- BOOK: [The Dangerous Duty of Delight: Daring to Make God Your Greatest Desire](#), by John Piper
- BOOK: [Do Over](#) by Jon Acuff

7. I have lost my board's confidence.

- ARTICLE: [The Board Lacks Confidence in the CEO? 13 Ways to Recover and Survive](#), by Forbes Magazine
- ARTICLE: [I've Been Asked to Resign. Should I?](#) by Bob Bickford
- ARTICLE: [7 Good Questions that will Help you Handle Criticism](#) by Hal Seed
- ARTICLE: [My Church Fired Me as Pastor. Now What?](#) by Jeremy Todd
- PDF: [Before You Resign, Discerning the Difference Between Discouragement and Release](#), by Gene Roncone, Phil Steiger, George Stahnke and Nick Sedars

- SERIES: [Turning Setbacks into Comebacks](#) by Rick Warren
- BOOK: [Necessary Endings: The Employees, Businesses, and Relationships That All of Us Have to Give Up in Order to Move Forward](#), by Henry Cloud
- BOOK: [The Ideal Team Player: How to Recognize and Cultivate the Three Essential Virtues](#), by Patrick M. Lencioni

8. I have personal challenges that require a change of lifestyle.

- ARTICLE: [On Knowing When to Resign](#), by D.A. Carson
- PDF: [Before You Resign, Discerning the Difference Between Discouragement and Release](#), by Gene Roncone, Phil Steiger, George Stahnke and Nick Sedars
- VIDEO: [I'm not okay...but Jesus is.](#) by Louie Giglio
- BOOK: [Necessary Endings: The Employees, Businesses, and Relationships That All of Us Have to Give Up in Order to Move Forward](#), by Henry Cloud
- BOOK: [Hope in the Dark](#) by Craig Groeschel
- BOOK: [Jonh](#) by Joni Eareckson Taday

9. I must embrace new family priorities.

- ARTICLE: [Looking for Biblical Reasons to Quit Your Job?](#), by Jennifer Waddle
- ARTICLE: [Should You Move to Be Closer to Your Aging Parents?](#), by Deb Hipp
- ARTICLE: [Don't Sacrifice Your Ministry for Your Family](#), by Lifeway Research
- ARTICLE: [When Crises Come to Ministry Families](#) by Kristi Northup
- PDF: [Before You Resign, Discerning the Difference Between Discouragement and Release](#), by Gene Roncone, Phil Steiger, George Stahnke and Nick Sedars
- BOOK: [Necessary Endings: The Employees, Businesses, and Relationships That All of Us Have to Give Up in Order to Move Forward](#), by Henry Cloud
- BOOK: [The Family Life of a Christian Leader](#) by Ajith Fernando
- BOOK: [Walking Through Twilight](#) by Douglas Groothuis

10. I feel I have become ineffective or outdated.

- ARTICLE: [10 Reasons Why Pastors Lose Their Passion For Ministry](#), by Jason Isaacs
- ARTICLE: [Change These Three Factors or Face Obsolescence](#), by Jim Baker
- ARTICLE: [5 Ways To Avoid Becoming Obsolete As A Leader](#), by Glenn Llopis
- ARTICLE: [7 Ways to Stay Active in Ministry After Retirement](#) by Michael Rowe
- PDF: [Before You Resign, Discerning the Difference Between Discouragement and Release](#), by Gene Roncone, Phil Steiger, George Stahnke and Nick Sedars
- VIDEO: [Necessary Endings](#) by Henry Cloud
- BOOK: [Sometimes You Win - Sometimes You Learn](#) by John Maxwell
- BOOK: [Necessary Endings: The Employees, Businesses, and Relationships That All of Us Have to Give Up in Order to Move Forward](#), by Henry Cloud

11. I no longer have the "want to."

- ARTICLE: [When You've Lost Your Passion For Ministry](#), by Justin Lathrop
- ARTICLE: [10 Reasons Why Pastors Lose Their Passion For Ministry](#), by Jason Isaacs
- ARTICLE: [Is It Time to Quit Ministry?](#) by Carey Nieuwhof
- ARTICLE: [How to Choose Your Next Job](#) by John Piper

- PDF: [Before You Resign, Discerning the Difference Between Discouragement and Release](#), by Gene Roncone, Phil Steiger, George Stahnke and Nick Sedars
- BOOK: [Necessary Endings: The Employees, Businesses, and Relationships That All of Us Have to Give Up in Order to Move Forward](#), by Henry Cloud
- BOOK: [How Did I Get Here?](#) by Christine Caine

12. God is genuinely calling me to a new assignment.

- ARTICLE: [7 Ways to Leave a Church Well](#), by Cameron Triggs
- ARTICLE: [5 Keys to Starting a New Pastorate Well](#), by Josh King
- ARTICLE: [3 Things Guaranteed to Happen When God Calls You](#) by Ben Mandrell
- PDF: [12 Points for Pastors Beginning a New Pastorate](#), by Dr. Lamar E. Smith
- PDF: [Before You Resign, Discerning the Difference Between Discouragement and Release](#), by Gene Roncone, Phil Steiger, George Stahnke and Nick Sedars
- PODCAST: [Navigating Career Change](#) by Darryl Wootton and Doug Clay
- BOOK: [Your First 100 Days: Make Maximum Impact in Your New Role](#), 2nd ed. Edition, by Niamh O’Keeffe
- BOOK: [The New Leader's 100-Day Action Plan: How to Take Charge, Build Your Team, and Get Immediate Results](#), by George B. Bradt
- BOOK: [Immediate Obedience](#) by Rod Loy

13. I will be leaving my current pastorate to retire.

- PDF: [Before You Resign, Discerning the Difference Between Discouragement and Release](#), by Gene Roncone, Phil Steiger, George Stahnke and Nick Sedars
- ARTICLE: [Retirement Best Practices for Pastor and Congregation](#), by David Rich
- ARTICLE: [When Pastors Retire: Intimidating Transitions - Potential Rewards](#), by Louis Tamminga
- ARTICLE: [Seven Thoughts About Retiring Pastors Who Stay at Their Churches](#), by Thom S. Rainer
- ARTICLE: [Questions for Pastors as They Prepare for Retirement](#), by Ministry Magazine

Chapter 5 How to Leave Well By Gene Roncone

Speaking at a convention of the National Association of Evangelicals, Ted Engstrom told pastors and church leaders that “one of the most important legacies a leader can give or leave the institution is a smooth transition in leadership.”¹ Leaving is never easy, especially when you are tired or have transitioned emotionally to the thought of leaving. Your help in setting your church up to succeed in this transition will give you closure and be invaluable to everyone involved. Leaving well blesses you, your people, whoever follows you, and more importantly, God. Following are eight things to do in order to leave well. I ask for your help in all eight of them. If you can, you will set your church up to win.

- 1. Lead through the tape.** Sprinters are coached to run through the tape, but I am talking about “leading through the tape.” Now is not the time to coast. Few things reveal the depth and quality of a leader more than what they do the last 30 to 60 days before they depart. As leaders, we have a duty to create the conditions our church and successors will need to be successful. Good leaders help their churches prepare for the transition while poor leaders coast without giving proactive leadership to the details of the transition.

There are many examples in God’s Word of godly leaders assuming the responsibility for a smooth transition of leadership. Before his passing, Moses prepared Joshua and made sure there was a smooth transition of power and leadership (Deuteronomy 31). Jacob assembled his sons to instruct them about life after his departure (Genesis 49:1). Joseph took the time to encourage his sons and instruct them in what to do after he died (Genesis 50:24). David accepted the challenge of preparing his successor to succeed (1 Chronicles 22:1-16) and surrounded him with a capable team (1 Chronicles 22:17-29). Before retiring, he gave Solomon and the tribal leaders a written plan to move forward in building the temple (1 Chronicles 28:19). Before leaving Ephesus, Paul gave detailed instructions to the elders on how to carry on without him (Acts 20:22-38). Before returning to heaven, Jesus told His disciples He desired even greater kingdom success for those who followed Him (John 14:12).

To help your church experience a healthy transition, I would suggest you read the following short chapters in the Network’s transition manual entitled *Rise Up* before you announce your resignation.

- Chapter entitled “Courageous Intentionality.”
- Chapter entitled “A Pastor’s Departing Pledge.”
- Appendix entitled “Parting Well.”

It will only take a few minutes to read these short chapters, and the transition manual can be accessed online. If you are part of the RMMN, I only ask that you not give a copy or share

the link with your board or leadership community as I would like to do that in person when I meet with them one-on-one as part of the Network's transition services. You can access my pastoral transition resources at www.generationone.org/riseup.

- 2. Communicate in real time.** If you are a district affiliated church, please let me know of your intention to resign before anyone else. It is much harder to find temporary preachers, candidates, and volunteers for district affiliated churches than for sovereign works. The more lead time you give the Network, the smoother the transition will be. If you are interviewing somewhere and not certain of the outcome, please know that any of that information will remain confidential between the two of us. The sooner you let me know, the healthier your church will be.
- 3. Provide an exit interview.** Before you leave, I would like to schedule a 30-minute phone or Zoom appointment with you to learn from your wisdom and perspective from the top of the mast. To help us make the most of our time, I have formulated my questions in the form of an online survey. It will only take a few minutes to work through it, and I will receive your responses instantly. You can find the survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/rmmnexitinterview>.
- 4. Give prior and reasonable notice.** If you are leaving for another ministry, please be prepared to provide at least a 30-day notice to give the church the best possible chance of making a healthy and smooth transition. If a pastor gives a 30-day notice and then uses two weeks of that time on a vacation or missions trip, the transition will be more difficult. If you are retiring, you may be able to notify the church several months before and leave a legacy of advance planning and preparedness. Either way, please structure your notice in a way that sets your church up to win.
- 5. Create a transition briefing.** My office will need to be in regular communication with the leadership of your church. I prefer to work with open churches directly as pastoral transitions are a passion and life study of mine. Please create a Word document with the following items organized in headings within the document. It will help both your leadership community and us to gain a real-time perspective of the spiritual, financial, and numerical pulse of the church.
 - **Finances.** Most of the questions an interim pastor or candidate will have will be related to the current financial standing of the church. If you are a sovereign church, this information will need to be gathered for your board and temporary chair. If you are a district affiliated church, I will need the following items:
 - Name of the church's bank, account numbers, access passwords, and log-in information (web address, username, and passwords).
 - Names, phone numbers, email addresses, and the roles of all the people who are on the bank account's signature card. It is important that your local presbyter and a sectional committee member be placed on the bank signature card BEFORE you resign. This is an existing requirement for all district affiliated churches but is often neglected.

- Bank statements and financials for the past twelve (12) months.
 - **Congregational information.** A list of all regular attendees and their contact information (name, address, email addresses, phone/cell numbers, and other important information).
 - **Attendance.** The church's average Sunday attendance for the last twelve (12) months.
 - **Service times.** The day, time, and description of all public services, bible studies, or meeting times.
 - **Leadership team.** Every church has a group of people who hold the church together whether they have an official title or not. Please include a list of names and contact information for these people as well as a brief description of each of their roles. As an example, this should include board/advisory members, key leaders, or influencers, those who count and deposit money, and those who do the books.
 - **Commitments.** List any verbal, implied, or standing commitments you have made that remain outstanding (financial, calendar, guest speakers, or otherwise). The next leader will need to know.
 - **Access.** List of names, email addresses, and cell phone numbers of those who have access to financial spending, keys, credit cards, mailbox, safety deposit boxes, or the church checkbook.
 - **Advisements.** Please describe any warnings, red flags, or advisements you feel I would need to know regarding financial concerns, unity, existing conflict, or difficult personalities that are currently happening in the church.
6. **Send photographs for a future advertisement.** Please send as many good, high-resolution photos of the exterior and interior rooms of the building from several different angles. If those photos could be taken horizontally rather than vertically, it helps us later on to include them in the ministry opening announcement. If you rent space, photos of your church and meeting space would still be very helpful. Whether you are a sovereign or district affiliated church, the Network will need these to adequately advertise the position opening after your departure.
7. **Broker trust.** Your people will experience some anxiety after hearing of your impending departure. Please assure them that the Network is ready and prepared to help them find a new leader. Some of the resources we recommend for pastoral search committees depend upon the unique situation; however, the four most popular are as follows:
- **Strategy Huddle.** A one-and-a-half hour meeting where I visit your board/advisory committee meeting in person/zoom and encourage them with some recommended first steps, resources, and a Q&A session. The sooner this is scheduled the better.
 - **Rise Up Transition Resource.** A 200-page resource manual full of good advice, practical steps, and answers to the most common questions regarding the pastoral search process.
 - **Rise Up Podcast Channel.** An audio channel with short podcasts that coach search committees through some of the most common subjects they may feel unprepared to

address. These short podcasts can be accessed at no charge at <https://soundcloud.com/rmmnriseup>.

- **Personal Coaching.** Your church's board/advisory committee will be given my personal cell phone number and have real-time access to me for coaching, encouragement, and advice.
- 8. Embrace ministerial ethics.** Every profession has its unique standards of ethics and etiquette, and the ministerial community is no different. We have generally accepted standards, and professional courtesies that are based on ethics, scripture, or common sense. There are three things that should guide your theology of departure.
- **God's Word.** The Bible commands ministers to respect the boundaries, seasons, and calling of other pastors and ministries. The Apostle Paul modeled a deep respect for the ministry boundaries and work of fellow ministers: *It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation* (Romans 15:20 NIV). When speaking of the different ministers that served in Corinth, he also said, *What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task* (1 Corinthians 3:5 NIV). In other words, if God calls a person away from a ministry and appoints another person to steward that work, ministers as servants must recognize that their old ministry is not theirs to interfere with, build upon, or complicate. They must give themselves fully to their new ministry and leave their old assignment in the hands of a new shepherd. This is the principle that is modeled in the Bible.
 - **Ministerial ethics.** Most ministers are credentialed with a reputable denomination or credentialing authority and are accountable to them for doctrine, lifestyle, and ministerial ethics. As RMMN ministers, we are credentialed with the Assemblies of God. To maintain good standing, we must renew that credential each year and sign a document agreeing to their doctrinal statement, organizational policies, and ministerial ethics. This includes agreeing not to interfere in another pastor's ministry or communicate in a way that might undermine the credibility or influence of their new pastor. We agree not to fundraise or make requests or suggestions through anyone other than the new pastor. To do otherwise is called "discourteous conduct," and such infractions can result in our credential being placed under investigation or revoked. Why? Because our history and influence in a prior ministry does not give us the right to interfere after we have departed. God has called a new person to lead that church, and we are obligated to respect their calling and ministerial boundaries as it is the ethical thing to do.
 - **Common sense.** Ministerial ethics, etiquette, and courtesy are also based on common sense. Leadership is not a position, a title, or even an address. Leadership is influence. That is why, whether it is being a doctor, a lawyer, or even an insurance agent, every profession has its own standards of professional courtesy. It is also why ministers usually make a clean break and give the new pastor plenty of margin to bond with their new congregation and develop the needed influence to lead the church into the future. It is also why many departing pastors pull back and give the new leader space to lead

and build their own influence. John the Baptist modeled this kind of ministerial courtesy when he told his own disciples about Jesus: *He must increase, but I must decrease* (John 3:30 ESV).

Being proactive, cautious, thinking about our thinking, and submitting our emotions to the Spirit can help us take the high road and love our previous congregants enough to allow them to bond with God's new pastor.

If you can do these eight things, I believe your departure will be so much easier on those serving and partnering with you in ministry. Please email these items to my personal email address at gene@rmdc.org in order to help sustain confidentiality.

In closing, I would like to thank you for your contribution to the strength and health of the Rocky Mountain Ministry Network. If you have decided to stay after reading this, know that we are in this together and are here for you. However, if you have determined that God is calling you to another ministry outside our Network, I want to thank you for serving this Network church and helping me navigate a smooth transition.

Contending for community,

Gene Roncone
Rocky Mountain Ministry Network
District Superintendent/Network Pastor (aka "helper")

¹ George Barna, *Leaders on Leadership*, Ventura, CA, Regal Publishers, 1997, p. 298.