

DEFYING GRAVITY

HOW TO THRIVE IN A PASTORAL TRANSITION

SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY

A four-week study of God's purpose
for pastoral transitions

BY GENE RONCONE





Small Group Bible Study

All the people assembled with a unified purpose (Nehemiah 8:1 NLT).

If you are reading this, then you have been selected to lead one of your church's DEFYING GRAVITY small group meetings. We want you to succeed and have provided answers to a few questions you may have. You can also listen to the audio version of this coaching at www.agspe.org/rusm.mp3.

1. **What is the purpose of this small group study?** The purpose of this study is to educate your people about God's purpose in leadership transitions and then successfully face the challenges of change and experience spiritual growth while overcoming them.

Participants should be given a copy of the short paperback book entitled *Defying Gravity, How to Thrive in a Pastoral Transition* by Gene Roncone. They read assigned pages before the class and then are given a copy of participant notes at small group. This combination of pre-class reading, group interaction, and applying biblical principles is what makes the Defying Gravity study so powerful.

2. **What resources are available to succeed?**

- **Paperback book** entitled *Defying Gravity, How to Thrive in a Pastoral Transition*. It can be ordered on Amazon or through bulk purchases at
- <https://generoncone.org/riseup>.
- **Curriculum**. Free participant notes can be downloaded at
- <https://generoncone.org/riseup>.
- **Podcast**. A leader coaching podcast that provides answers to questions you may have can be found at www.agspe.org/rusm.mp3.

3. **What format and venue can this bible study be used in?** Although this bible study was designed to be used in a small group setting, it can be adapted to a Sunday School or table talk format. The best method is to use it in a venue that facilitates chairs in a circle or around a table or a series of tables with a table leader. The leader is more of a discussion facilitator than a teacher. It should be used in a relational, conversational, and casual way.

4. **What are the benefits of this four-week study?** There are several benefits to using the *Defying Gravity* small group bible study. This powerful resource will help increase your people's capacity for faith and resiliency throughout the transition process. It will also minister to the fear, confusion, and disappointment commonly associated with pastoral transitions. In addition, it has proven to prevent the decline in giving, participation, and attendance levels so common in transitions. It will also create momentum and excitement for the future arrival of your new pastor and unify your church behind biblical teaching, healthy expectations, and shared commitment.

5. **How should I use the teaching notes?** After a short time of fellowship, open the meeting in prayer. The notes contain the following sections to lead the group through:
 - **Icebreaker**. Make this a fun group activity to get everyone primed for the topic. Pull everyone in on this activity.

- **Background context.** This will give the scriptural background of the lesson and should be read by you as the group leader.
- **Teaching and interaction.** The teaching and interaction section of the notes consist of two parts:
 - **White background portion** (teaching content). Assign the reading of the numbered points and statement section to different members of the group.
 - **Blue shaded portion** (discussion questions). This shaded area contains the discussion questions and should be read only by you as you work your way through the lesson. Review this before the meeting, select the questions you want to focus on, and lead the group in an interactive discussion experience. Be sure to engage the entire group instead of allowing a few people to do all the talking.
- **Making it real** (application). You should lead this section in order to bring the truths of the study to bear on a practical level.

6. What will each of the three lessons address?

- **Part 1: How to Grow in Pastoral Transitions.** This lesson gives practical teaching from biblical examples of leadership transitions and explains why God moves leaders in and out of our lives. It gives the people practical ways they can thrive and grow in a pastoral transition. Participants should read pages 1-26 of the book, *Defying Gravity, How to Thrive in a Pastoral Transition* before the meeting.
- **Part 2: What the New Pastor Needs.** This lesson highlights the biblical essential every new pastor needs to be successful. Participants should read pages 27-41 of the book, *Defying Gravity, How to Thrive in a Pastoral Transition* before the meeting.
- **Part 3: Embracing God's New Thing.** The third lesson focuses on the good things that come from God's "new thing" and the commitment required to experience them. The series ends by inviting the people to make a commitment to remain faithful in attendance, giving, and volunteerism throughout the transition. Participants should read pages 42-55 of the book, *Defying Gravity, How to Thrive in a Pastoral Transition* before the meeting.
- **Part 4: Defying Gravity.** The last session focuses on three characteristics of churches that do not experience decline in pastoral transitions. It calls your members to use a 40-day prayer guide, generously support your church's transition fund, and remain committed throughout the entire transition. Participants should read pages 56-68 of the book, *Defying Gravity, How to Thrive in a Pastoral Transition* before the meeting.

7. How should each lesson be structured? Each lesson should consist of the following components, and the lesson plan will walk you through these transitions.

- Fellowship with treats and coffee (15 minutes)
- Introduction of new guests (2 minutes)
- Ice breaker (5-10 minutes)
- Teaching and discussion questions (45 minutes)
- Closing prayer (5 minutes)

8. What is my job as the leader? Each of the participants' notes already have the truths and biblical concepts build into them. Your participants will have also read the pre-class reading that presents the content in a more extensive way. That means your job is more of a facilitator than a teacher. Following are a few pointers to help you along the way:

- **Be clear.** Use the purpose statement mentioned above in #1 to help the group maintain focus and avoid distractions.
- **Be prepared.** Prepare for the lesson by going through the material and thinking through each discussion question beforehand. It may even help for you to answer the questions in your own mind or on paper. That will also help you know what questions you will want to spend more time on. It is important to be a good steward of time and allow the group maximum exposure to all the truths of this lesson.
- **Be relational.** Transformational discipleship cannot take place outside the context of meaningful relationships. Make sure the participants know you care about them as individuals and want them to experience all God has for them in this transition.
- **Be transparent.** Transparency and vulnerability encourage others to be the same and help them learn on a deeper level. However, be careful that transparency among your participants does not deteriorate into negative or nonproductive discussion.
- **Be engaging.** Pull people into the discussion with good questions, invitations to share their perspective, and an inclusive leadership style. Be prepared to clarify discussion questions or give examples of where you think the discussion should go when needed.
- **Be strong.** Every small group has a person who either dominates the discussion or tries to redirect the group to their preferred topic or pet peeve. Being assertive up front will help protect the group from being hijacked by a domineering temperament. If this becomes a problem, simply say, “Jim has done a good job sharing his opinion. Let’s hear what others have to say as well.”
- **Be positive.** Negative experiences in the past, church conflict, fear, and a dislike for change may bring some to turn the discussion in a less-than-productive direction. Some may want to dwell on what they will miss or even what they did not like about the previous pastor. Be careful to keep the discussion positive and uplifting and even redirect discussion in a more positive path if needed. Do not let the group get caught up in gossip, nonproductive fear, or church politics associated with the pastoral search process. If you sense this starting to happen, say something like, “Change can bring out the best and the worst in all of us. Let’s try to keep our discussion productive.”

- 9. How do I get copies of the lesson plan/participants’ notes?** The lesson plan/participants’ notes are included in this packet as a PDF document. You can copy them and distribute as needed. They are also available at <https://generoncone.org/riseup>.
- 10. Whom do I contact if I need help?** If you find yourself in need of help or coaching, please contact the acting chair of your church board who will be able to address any questions you may have.

Thank you for your willingness to be such an important part of your church’s sustainability initiative. The prime directive of the Rocky Mountain Ministry Network is to sustain healthy ministers, vibrant churches, and Spirit-driven relevance. If we can be of any other assistance to you, please let us know.

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



Part 1: How to Grow in a Pastoral Transition

1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 3:1-9

Small Group Bible Study

Pre-class reading: Pages 1-26 of the book *Defying Gravity*

ICE BREAKER

15 minutes

Have some fun by polling your participants to determine the various preferences that exist in your own small group. Have members vote by raising their hand after each question is asked.

- **Coffee:** Raise your hand if you like coffee. Raise your hand if you don't.
- **Football:** Raise your hand if you like the Broncos. Raise your hand if you don't.
- **Music:** Raise your hand if you like country music. Raise your hand if you don't.
- **Winter:** Raise your hand if you love winter. Raise your hand if you don't.
- **Movies:** Raise your hand if you like action movies. Raise your hand if you don't.

Why is your group able to function despite your different preferences? The answer is that you are willing to put aside your differences because of more important priorities.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

10 minutes

We tend to think the awkward disruption of pastoral transitions is a modern challenge. It is not. As a matter of fact, the Apostle Paul had to publicly correct a New Testament church for failing to see pastoral transitions through a spiritual perspective. The church in Corinth was blessed with some of the finest leadership the New Testament church had to offer. Their pastoral roster could have been considered the “dream team” of New Testament leadership.

- Paul: The driven, strategic, and theological apostle of soaring faith.
- Peter: The dynamic, inspiring, and emotional disciple of Jesus.
- Apollos: The silver-tongued orator who spoke with the eloquence of a trial attorney.

You would think this would have resulted in a spiritually healthy church, but it did not. In fact, Paul had to give them firm correction regarding their own struggles in the transition of leadership.

¹⁰I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. ¹¹My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. ¹²What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." ¹³Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶(Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power (1 Corinthians 1:10-17 NIV).

¹Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. ²I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet

ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? ⁴For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings? ⁵What, 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. ⁶I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. ⁷So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. ⁹For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building (1 Corinthians 3:1-9 NIV).

TEACHING AND INTERACTION

45 minutes

Paul gave the Corinthians four things they had to do to grow through pastoral transitions. Let’s talk about each of them.

1. **Stay united as a community of faith.** Paul told the Corinthians they must not allow themselves to become divided during leadership transitions: *I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought* (1 Corinthians 1:10 NIV, Emphasis added).

GROUP DISCUSSION: As a group, discuss some or all of the following questions.

A. Preferences are based on your own tastes, unique desires, or favorite styles. The style of music or preaching we enjoy are examples of preferences. Principles, however, are the foundational beliefs and doctrines of our faith. Among other things, they embody nonnegotiable truths like salvation through Christ, the Second Coming of Christ, and the doctrine of sin. Sometimes we become divided because we promote our personal preferences over biblical principles.

- What are some modern examples of how we might elevate a preference to the level of a principle?
- Why is it not worth being divided over preferences?
- What might an unyielding commitment to our preferences reveal about our spiritual maturity and surrender to Christ?

B. The Corinthians also became divided by an unhealthy dependence upon their leader. Paul rebuked them saying, ¹¹*My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. ¹²What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ”* (1 Corinthians 1:11-12 NIV, Emphasis added).

Each of these leaders had different personality traits, spiritual giftings, and ministry styles. Paul was an “Type A” personality and a grand strategist whose soaring faith and daunting courage planted churches all over the New Testament world. **Apollos** was a silver-tongued orator whose preaching resembled the closing arguments of a skilled trial attorney (Acts 18:24-27). **Cephas/Peter** was the emotional, impetuous guy who was the working man’s hero. **Jesus** was God’s Son and our model of perfection.

- In what ways might we become divided by an unhealthy reliance upon the personality or giftings of a pastor?

- Have you ever seen this kind of division and unhealthy dependence upon a minister's style in the church today?
- How might our unhealthy attachments to the past cause us to miss God-sized opportunities in the future?

2. Decide whom you are following. Paul had to confront the Corinthians because they were following man instead of Christ.

¹¹My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. ¹²What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." ¹³Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:11-13 NIV, Emphasis added).

GROUP DISCUSSION: As a group, discuss some or all of the following questions.

- A. What might be some indications that we are following a person rather than Christ?**
- B. Statistics show that many churches experience a decline in attendance, giving, volunteerism, and church engagement during a pastoral transition.** What does Paul's teaching to the Corinthians tell us about the real reason for these trends?
- C. What are a few practical ways we can keep our eyes on Christ in our own pastoral transition?**

3. Embrace spiritual maturity. The Corinthians prided themselves on being "deep," "spiritual," and "mature" Christians; but Paul confronted them with the fact that their response to leadership transitions exposed them to be immature and acting like babies.

¹Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. ²I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? ⁴For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings? (1 Corinthians 3:1-4 NIV, Emphasis added).

GROUP DISCUSSION: As a group, discuss some or all of the following questions.

- A. Paul is trying to remind the Corinthians that pastoral leadership transitions are a deeply "spiritual" thing.** His reference to the Corinthians' behavior as being worldly and infantile shows how important it is to view our own pastoral transition through a spiritual lens.
 - Why is a pastoral transition a deeply spiritual thing for a church?
 - Think about the different stages involved in a pastoral search process. How might we think or act immaturely in these various stages?
- B. As a group, brainstorm and come up with examples of how a person might act in a spiritually mature way in the following areas:**
 - How we respond to the challenges associated with the confidential nature by which a pastoral search must be carried out.
 - How we support our board as they seek God's will.
 - How we respond to opportunities to gossip, register criticism, or act upon our fears.
 - How we process our own preferences regarding who or what the next pastor should be.

- How we respond to the everyday needs of our church ministries, finances, and Sunday services.

C. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to remember that it is God and not the spiritual leaders He brings into our lives that are our true source.

- What might an unhealthy dependence upon a pastor reveal about your spiritual maturity and surrender to Christ?
- What are a few practical ways you can keep your eyes on Christ in your pastoral transition?

4. Accept the new thing God is doing in your church and life. Paul concludes by reminding the Corinthians that the spiritual leaders in our lives are only tools the Lord uses to make us grow.

⁵What, 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. ⁶I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. ⁷So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. ⁹For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building (1 Corinthians 3:5-9 NIV, Emphasis added).

Paul reminds them that every leadership transition in our lives is evidence that God is doing three things:

- God is inviting us to cooperate with Him.
- God is growing us.
- God is achieving His master plan for our lives.

GROUP DISCUSSION: As a group, discuss some or all of the following questions.

A. By calling them “fellow workers,” Paul was reminding the Corinthians that God needs their cooperation and participation if they are to grow in these seasons of change.

- If we are God’s fellow workers, we must cooperate with Him. What are ways we might not cooperate or even compete with God in this season?
- Brainstorm as a group and come up with a list of areas in which each one of us must cooperate with God in order to grow spiritually in this season of development.

B. By calling them “God’s field,” Paul was reminding them that God is the divine gardener. He is always tilling, fertilizing, tending, pruning, and growing us through leadership transitions.

- What might each of the items listed above look like in this process?
- What do both the fun and painful things of this growing process have in common?

C. By calling them “God’s building,” Paul was reminding them that leadership transitions are part of God’s blueprint or building plan for our lives.

- How does it make you feel hearing that leadership transitions are part of God’s master plan for your life?
- What visual associations and emotions is Paul wanting to associate with leadership transition by using the metaphor of building?

MAKING IT REAL (APPLICATION)

5 minutes

Pick one question from the list below and take turns sharing your answer with the group.

- What was one aha moment you had as a result of today's study?
- What is one area of your life the Holy Spirit is challenging you with as a result of today's study?
- What are a few ways you can pray for your church as a result of today's study?

PREPARATION FOR NEXT MEETING

Please remember to read pages 27-41 of the book, *Defying Gravity, How to Thrive in a Pastoral Transition*, before our next meeting. If you would like to order the book in paperback or Kindle format, you can do so by clicking here <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0B3YSS1YF/>.



Part 2: What Your New Pastor Needs

Hebrews 13:17

Small Group Bible Study

Pre-class reading: Pages 27-41 of the book *Defying Gravity*

ICE BREAKER

15 minutes

NASA knows what the church needs. NASA gives special attention to all the tiles on the Space Shuttle; however, they are wise enough to know the difference between equality and mission critical priorities. Unlike the white tiles on the top, the black tiles on the bottom of the shuttle must be able to be exposed to 2,300 degrees Fahrenheit during reentry. As a result, they are more costly, prioritized, and protected than the other tiles—not because they are more important but because they are more critical to the mission’s success and the survival of the crew. The same principle holds true concerning the role your pastor plays in leading your church and facing spiritual warfare. Brainstorm as a group and come up with a list of different physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental ways your pastor may be exposed to extreme spiritual assault as a result of their role. Then write them below.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

10 minutes

Several scriptures are used in this teaching to identify the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of your future pastor. Read the ones listed below as a group.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12 NIV).

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you (Hebrews 13:17 NIV).

TEACHING AND INTERACTION

45 minutes

In this study we will explore the following three questions:

- Why should you support your new pastor?
- How do you support your new pastor?
- What are the benefits of supporting your new pastor?

1. **Why should you support your new pastor?** Scripture gives many answers to this question, but today we will focus on three.

GROUP DISCUSSION: As a group, discuss some or all of the following questions.

A. Scripture teaches us that pastors are God’s gift to the church: ¹¹*So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-12 NIV, Emphasis added).*

- What is the purpose of a gift?
- What does the fact that pastors are God's gift to us say about how we should understand their purpose?
- Have you ever given a gift to someone who did not appreciate it or respect it? How did it make you feel?

B. Scripture teaches us that the reason we should respect and cooperate with our pastors is because they keep watch over us as spiritual shepherds: *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you* (Hebrews 13:17 ESV).

- Brainstorm as a group and come up with as many items as possible to describe the ways a pastor may keep watch over and care for you spiritually.
- Why is it important for us to know that our pastors will one day "give an account" to God for the way they cared for God's people?
- Why do you think it was important for Scripture to include this fact?

C. Scripture reminds us that having a competitive relationship with your pastor hurts you more than it hurts them: *Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you* (Hebrews 13:17 ESV).

- In what ways can a competitive relationship with your pastor be a disadvantage to you?
- What might tempt us to have a competitive relationship with our pastor?

2. How can you best support your pastor?

- **Pray for your pastor daily.** The enemy of your soul wants to destroy you by destroying the spiritual water carriers in your life (John 10:10). To destroy you and your church, the devil will seek to distract and defeat your pastor by attacking everything that is important to them.
- **Honor your pastor.** A minority in the church may tell you that honoring pastors is an outdated and unhealthy thing in this day of equality; however, the Bible clearly contradicts this convenient omission and recognizes the difference between strategic importance and intrinsic value.

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17 NIV).

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you (Hebrews 13:17 NIV).

¹²*Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work* (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 NIV).

- **Encourage and affirm your pastor.** Most pastoral discouragement occurs because the majority tolerates an abusive minority. Instead of allowing a few "fault finders" to establish a culture of criticism, make it a point to recognize your pastor's positive contribution to the kingdom. Make no mistake about it—pastors are imperfect people; however, if their mistakes are discussed more than their wins are celebrated, it contributes to a culture of fear and dishonor.
- **Give your pastor rest.** Even after the space shuttle lands, it takes several hours for the black tiles on the bottom to cool down. The same is true spiritually for your pastor. Be generous in

giving them vacation time that is uninterrupted and refreshing. Unless it is an absolute necessity, do not interrupt them on their day off and give them rest without guilt.

- **Help your pastor heal.** NASA knows that some missions are so taxing that tiles must be repaired while in orbit. In the same way, there will be times when your pastor faces discouragement, loss, humiliation, a death in the family, and even extremely hurtful attacks from immature Christians. When that happens, be proactive and patient in determining how much time and resources will be required to help them heal.
- **Be reasonable.** Your pastor has a personal life that requires attention and maintenance. Remember that they are people too! They need margin to deal with their own personal responsibilities like paying bills; caring for their home; spending time with their family; yard work; and personal research on things like retirement planning, bidding insurance rates, and personal planning. If your high expectations cause them to burn the candle at both ends, no one wins.

GROUP DISCUSSION: As a group, discuss some or all of the following questions.

- A. **How might your church provide a year-round prayer covering for your new pastor and family?** Who among you might be willing to coordinate and participate in this effort?
- B. **How might church members and the church as a whole fulfill the biblical mandate to honor leaders?**
- C. **What are practical things your small group can do on your own to encourage your pastor?**
- D. **Most everyone wants their pastor to rest; but at the same time, the same people can unknowingly see their own needs as an exception to that rule.** What are ways a church can create margin for the pastor to get rest?
- E. **A recent study entitled *Isolation in Ministry* which can be accessed at www.agspe.org/isolation.pdf found that pastors are facing discouragement and even depression at increasingly alarming rates as God's people are becoming almost impossible to please.** What do you think is contributing to this crisis of impossible expectations?
- F. **Do you think most church people have reasonable expectations of what a pastor should be, do, and say? If so, why? If not, explain.**
- G. **As you look over the list of ways to encourage your pastor, which ones seem to be most lacking in your church?**

3. **What are the benefits of supporting your pastor?** The Bible teaches us that having a competitive relationship with your pastor will only hurt you.

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you (Hebrews 13:17 NIV, Emphasis added).

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you (Hebrews 13:17 ESV, Emphasis added).

Listen to your leaders and submit to their authority over the community, for they are on constant watch to protect your souls and someday they must give account. Give them reason to be joyful and not to regret their duty, for that will be of no good to you (Hebrews 13:17 The Voice, Emphasis added).

Be responsive to your pastoral leaders. Listen to their counsel. They are alert to the condition of your lives and work under the strict supervision of God. Contribute to the joy of their leadership, not its drudgery. Why would you want to make things harder for them? (Hebrews 13:17 MSG, Emphasis added).

The implication is that when we encourage our pastors, we benefit from their being encouraged.

GROUP DISCUSSION: As a group, discuss some or all of the following questions.

- A. **Read each of the four different translations above while underlining the positive words and circling the negative words.** What observations do these comparisons reveal to you?
- B. **Each of the four different translations above attempts to communicate the meaning of the Bible's original language.** Look at each of the four different translations and identify which elements of biblical truth each translation is attempting to reinforce.
- C. **What is your own aha moment after looking at this verse in several different English translations?**

MAKING IT REAL (APPLICATION)

5 minutes

Each year the month of October is set aside nationally to recognize and show appreciation for pastors.

Why not have your small group offer to assist your deacon board by honoring your pastor and pastoral staff on an annual Pastor Appreciation Day. More information is available at www.agspe.org/20220815_Pastor_Appreciation.pdf.

Pastors need people who help give them the “want to.” Abraham had his 318 highly trained men (Genesis 14:14). Saul had men “whose hearts God had touched” (1 Samuel 10:26) and “valiant men” (1 Chronicles 10:11-12). Found in 2 Samuel 23:8-39 is a roll call of men, referred to as “David’s mighty men,” who boldly and courageously served David’s vision. Each one of you can be that for your new pastor as well.

PREPARATION FOR NEXT MEETING

Please remember to read pages 42-55 of the book, *Defying Gravity, How to Thrive in a Pastoral Transition*, before our next meeting. If you would like to order the book in paperback or Kindle format, you can do so by clicking here <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0B3YSS1YF/>.



Part 3: Embracing God's New Thing

Isaiah 43:19

Small Group Bible Study

Pre-class reading: Pages 42-55 of the book *Defying Gravity*

ICE BREAKER

15 minutes

Have each member of your group share one difficult thing that comes easy to them because they love doing it. Then have them briefly share that one thing and why they love doing it so much.

TEACHING AND INTERACTION

45 minutes

In the Old Testament, Israel's spiritual rebellion carried them far outside the umbrella of God's favor and protection. Times had changed and Israel was no longer a big fish in a small pond. The northern part of the kingdom had long been defeated by the Assyrians and the southern kingdom was carried off into Babylonian captivity. Individually, they began to think nostalgically about the past and how God had miraculously split the Red Sea and delivered them from the Egyptians, but God gave the prophet Isaiah a word of hope and anticipation. He told them that their longing for the past was blinding them from the future. Let's begin by looking at Isaiah 43:19.

"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:19)

God told them that the changes He was bringing to their lives was a new, current, different, and powerful thing. However, in order to benefit from it, they would need to "perceive" it. That can also be said about the new things God is doing through your pastoral transition. Today, we are going to look at five things you must do to embrace God's "new thing" in your own life and church.

- 1. Do not be hurt by the parameters of ministerial ethics.** Every profession has standards that govern how colleagues relate to each other. Doctors, lawyers, teachers, and police officers all have standards they are expected to keep with colleagues. Ministry is no different.

The Apostle Paul wrote about his desire not to interfere with his own ministry colleagues:

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).

Ministers who have credentials with the Assemblies of God also have to make a commitment to ministerial ethics as outlined in the General Council Bylaws:

All discourteous conduct is disapproved, and all ministers are advised against interfering with pastors in charge of assemblies, whether it be by going in upon their work without consent or by such correspondence with members of the assembly as will hurt the influence of the leader. All correspondence which concerns the whole assembly shall be addressed to the one in charge and not to individual members. Where there is no pastor, letters concerning the work shall be addressed to the officers of the assembly. Any minister who so offends shall be

subject to discipline (General Council of the Assemblies of God, Constitution and Bylaws, Bylaws, Article IX. Doctrines and Practices Disapproved, Section 8. Violations of Ministerial Courtesy, Revised August 7–11, 2017, Anaheim, California, p. 171).

Every Assemblies of God minister has to sign a statement annually agreeing to abide by these standards. In most cases, these rules are meant to prevent an outgoing pastor from using their influence in a negative way. This would include:

- Interfering in another pastor's church without first consulting them.
- Communicating with people in the church that may undermine the credibility or influence of another pastor.
- Making requests or suggestions or fundraising through someone other than the lead pastor.
- Criticizing a pastor to people in the church.

The reasons for these standards are not only moral but also logical. Leadership is not a position, title, or address; leadership is influence. The purpose of ministerial courtesy is to give the new pastor plenty of time to bond with the new church. Consequently, if your previous pastor seemed to withdraw relationally, do not take it personally. They were only following through with what they agreed to do, and they want to help the church connect with the new leader.

GROUP DISCUSSION: As a group, discuss some or all of the following questions.

- **What kind of professional courtesies does your profession require when an individual leaves?**
- **Why do you think leaders in the Bible set a precedent of respecting boundaries and ministerial etiquette?**
- **How can a lack of ministerial boundaries be confusing and even harmful for a church and its congregants?**

- 2. Take responsibility for your choice.** Your church bylaws outline a process of how your new pastor will be selected. After an extensive search process, your pastoral search committee will present whomever they believe to be the most qualified, willing, and available candidate to be voted on by the church members. When that vote is finalized, you become one; and that person becomes your new pastor. Whether you voted “yes” or “no” is not important. What is important is that you support the decision of your church. Your attitude, commitment to unity, and God's will are more important than your vote.

GROUP DISCUSSION: As a group, discuss some or all of the following questions.

- A. Most churches have what is called a presbyterian/congregational form of governance.** That means the members of the church delegate day-to-day decisions to others and reserve big decisions for official members to vote on at church business meetings. At the end of the day, the entire church is expected to accept and support the result of the vote.
- What are negative and unhealthy ways a member may not accept or be willing to support the will of the members?
 - What are positive and healthy ways a member may accept the will of the members?
- B. After your members vote, the vote does not matter as much as the attitude.** What are some practical ways you can be proactive in having a good attitude about the result of the vote?
- C. Just like believers in the Bible who cast lots to select leaders (Leviticus 16:8; Acts 1:21-26), we must trust the process and believe that God's will is achieved through the vote of your**

members (Proverbs 16:33). When speaking to the Corinthian church about leadership transitions, Paul 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). Why is accepting the results of the selection process as God’s will important for us as a people of faith?

3. Give your new pastor time. A new pastor is like a heart transplant. At first, the body sees the heart as a foreign object. It takes time for the body to adjust to the heart and for the heart to adjust to the body. One of the biggest mistakes churches make is expecting too much too early. That is why it is important to:

- Give your new pastor time to learn the church, the board, the community, and the culture of your church.
- Understand that it is common for pastoral changes to result in declines in attendance and giving.

Expecting your new pastor to conquer the world and please everyone the first couple of years is as unreasonable as making someone run a marathon two weeks after a heart transplant.

GROUP DISCUSSION: As a group, discuss some or all of the following questions.

A. It is important to give your new pastor time to get to know you. Remember, you only have one name to learn while your new pastor has hundreds. One way to do this is to introduce yourself the first time and then to continue to mention your first and last name every time you see your new pastor for the first year. What are other creative ways you can help your pastor get to know you?

B. You will also need to be flexible and give your new pastor time to make changes since this pastor is a totally different person than your previous pastor and will do things differently. Instead of criticizing, pray for them. As a group, brainstorm together to come up with a list of expectations your church will need to be flexible with during this transition. Write them below.

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4. Encourage your pastor. We live in an activist culture, and God’s people are becoming impossible to please. The fact that 70 percent of those who enter the ministry will not retire from the ministry is evidence that many churches do not have a culture of honor. The Bible commands us to be encouragers to our pastors:

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you (Hebrews 13:17 NIV).

GROUP DISCUSSION: As a group, discuss some or all of the following questions.

A. What are practical ways you can encourage your new pastor with your words?

B. What are practical ways you can encourage your new pastor with your actions?

C. What are practical ways you can encourage your new pastor with your prayers?

MAKING IT REAL (APPLICATION)

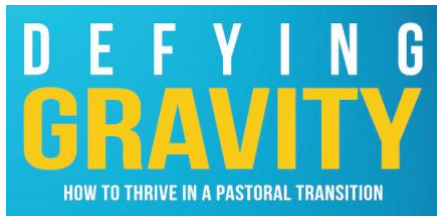
5 minutes

Although you may not know who your new pastor is, God has already appointed them so why not close your meeting by praying for that person as they try to discern God's will. Your group leader will select one of the following ways to pray:

- Your group leader will lead in prayer.
- Your prayer time will consist of individuals leading out in prayer for your new pastor as the Spirit of God leads them.
- Your group will come up with a short list of prayer topics, and your leader will ask for a small group of volunteers to lead in prayer for each topic.

PREPARATION FOR NEXT MEETING

Please remember to read pages 56-68 of the book, *Defying Gravity, How to Thrive in a Pastoral Transition*, before our next meeting. If you would like to order the book in paperback or Kindle format, you can do so by clicking here <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0B3YSS1YF/>.



Part 4: Defying Gravity

Joshua 10:12-14

Small Group Bible Study

Pre-class reading: Pages 56-68 of the book *Defying Gravity*

ICE BREAKER

15 minutes

Have each member of your group share one difficult thing that comes easy to them because they love doing it. Then have them briefly share that one thing and why they love doing it so much.

TEACHING AND INTERACTION

45 minutes

Statistics repeatedly reveal that churches in pastoral transition can experience a substantial decline in morale, attendance, and giving. I have found that in most cases, the giving will decline about 5 percent more than attendance will. This is even true of healthy churches. However, instead of just accepting the gravitational pull of transition, why not believe God to sustain or even increase morale, resources, and engagement during this time. Why not step out like Joshua and believe God to defy gravity and enable an anomaly of faith.

¹²On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel: "Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and you, moon, over the Valley of Aijalon." ¹³So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. ¹⁴There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a human being. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel! (Joshua 10:12-14 NIV).

Why not be a gravity defying force in your church during this pastoral transition? Why not stand tall with your church board, point your finger to the sky and say in faith, "Sun, stand still!" The last three chapters of the book *Defying Gravity, How to Thrive in a Pastoral Transition*, give the following three ways each of us can do that.

- 1. Pray your church through.** Next to the Spirit's divine leading, prayer is the most important resource for a successful pastoral transition. The prophet Samuel not only understood the importance of prayer during leadership transitions but also perceived a lack of prayer to be sin. That is why in his farewell speech to the nation, he said: *As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you* (1 Samuel 12:23 NIV). Prayer is the one thing God expects you to bring to the table—not just you but the entire church as well!

GROUP DISCUSSION: As a group, discuss some or all of the following questions.

- A. The 40-day prayer guide on pages 57-61 gives you a daily prayer focus that covers every person and stage of the pastoral search process.** Brainstorm as a group and come up with a list of benefits you think this list could bring to the church if everyone used it.

B. What are a few practical ways your church people can transform this prayer list into a daily habit?

- 3. Financing the future.** A common misconception about pastoral transitions is that the church will save money because they will not have to pay a pastor's salary. Searching for a pastor is a significant expense worthy of the benefits it brings. Cutting corners only results in depriving your church of the experiences and resources needed to make wise decisions and identify God's will. The Bible encourages us to be as strategic with our budgeting as we are with our process:

²⁸For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish" (Luke 14:28-30, ESV).

Most churches experiencing a pastoral transition will end up spending more, not less, even though they will have a short break from paying a lead pastor's salary. When anticipating expenses, it is important to distinguish between hidden and hard costs.

- **Hard costs** include expenses directly related to the search process.
- **Hidden costs** include expenses indirectly related to the transition.

Because transitions are inevitable, expenses related to them are also unavoidable. Any transition is going to involve "best case," "likely case," and "worst case" scenarios. A transition fund will help your church transform obligation into opportunity.

GROUP DISCUSSION: As a group, discuss some or all of the following questions.

- **Brainstorm as a group to come up with a list of things you can do without over the next 2-3 months that would enable you to reallocate those funds in the form of a donation to the church's transition fund.**
- **If you were part of the board, what kind of emotions might you feel if people started giving money to the transition fund?**
- **The book, *Defying Gravity*, recommends a church establish a transition fund equal to one month's income for the church.** This will help the church cover expenses and provide residual funds to finance your new pastor's first initiatives. What are ways each person can help make that happen?

- 3. Stay committed through the transition.** Although most churches experience declines in attendance, giving, and participation during pastoral transitions, some churches actually grow through them. The reason these churches "defy gravity" is that they nurture a strongly committed membership. These members are willing to make the following commitments:
- **Prayer.** I will pray daily for our board, staff, volunteers, church, and future pastoral family.
 - **Trust.** I will trust God to use the search process to identify our future pastor.
 - **Faith.** I will have faith and stay optimistic and spiritually expectant.
 - **Commitment.** I will sustain my commitment, faithfulness, attendance, giving, and service during the transition and for twelve months afterward.
 - **Patience.** I will have fair expectations, be patient, and give our future pastor and family the time needed to adjust to a new community, church, and work environment.
 - **Unity.** I will seek to build unity and resist selfishness, division, and the desire to force my preferences on others.
 - **Sensitivity.** I will be sensitive to our staff, volunteers, and workers by supporting and encouraging them during this interim time.

- **Hope.** I will trust our deacons to be led by the Holy Spirit, sensitive to the needs of our church and community, and unified as they seek God's will.
- **Cooperation.** I will take responsibility for the final decision the members make in selecting our new pastor.
- **Support.** I will support our new pastor and seek to understand the vision and burdens the Lord will place upon their heart.

GROUP DISCUSSION: As a group, discuss some or all of the following questions.

- Look at the list of commitments listed above.** Which ones come easier to you and why?
- Look at the list of commitments listed above.** Which ones are harder for you and why?
- If you were the devil, what would you be tempting members to do during this time?**
- Brainstorm as a group to create a list of reasons why deciding now to have a predetermined mindset will benefit you and your church in a year.**

MAKING IT REAL (APPLICATION)

5 minutes

Close your meeting by making a personal covenant between you and the Lord to support the church through the first year of the transition. Perhaps your group can sign the member covenant and turn them into the church board as a way to encourage them and build their faith.

If you would like to order the book in paperback or Kindle format, you can do so by clicking here <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0B3YSS1YF/>.

MEMBER COVENANT

As a member of this community of faith, I pledge my commitment in the following areas to help my church and to personally experience spiritual growth through this pastoral transition.

- **Prayer.** I will pray daily for our board, staff, volunteers, church, and future pastoral family.
- **Trust.** I will trust God to use the search process to identify our future pastor.
- **Faith.** I will have faith and stay optimistic and spiritually expectant.
- **Commitment.** I will sustain my commitment, faithfulness, attendance, giving, and service during the transition and for twelve months afterward.
- **Patience.** I will have fair expectations, be patient, and give our future pastor and family the time needed to adjust to a new community, church, and work environment.
- **Unity.** I will seek to build unity and resist selfishness, division, and the desire to force my preferences on others.
- **Sensitivity.** I will be sensitive to our staff, volunteers, and workers by supporting and encouraging them during this interim time.
- **Hope.** I will trust our deacons to be led by the Holy Spirit, sensitive to the needs of our church and community, and unified as they seek God's will.
- **Cooperation.** I will take responsibility for the final decision the members make in selecting our new pastor.
- **Support.** I will support our new pastor and seek to understand the vision and burdens the Lord will place upon their heart.

Name

Date