



We know the demand to manage the current church system often feels unfruitful and burdensome. Many pastors wrestle with the idea that what they're doing doesn't look like what they're reading in the Bible. We were pastors in that system, too—frustrated by the feeling of being trapped in an institution and desiring to follow Jesus and be the church in a more simple way.

All of us on the Pastor to Pioneer team have moved from managing institutions to pioneering movements of wholehearted disciples and simple churches in our cities. We are people who seek to know Jesus, listen to what he says, and respond accordingly. We do this with others in very simple ways, often in living rooms.

The transition from being pastors to becoming pioneers was not easy for us, but it has been worth it. We are living into God's call for us outside of manmade religion, and we're doing so without compromising our faith. We also see God transforming our lives, our families' lives, and the lives of those around us.

If you are considering making the journey from pastor to pioneer, we want to help you avoid some common mistakes. These are the top nine repeated mistakes we've seen pastors make when moving from a traditional pastoral role to that of a pioneer. While these mistakes are typical, you can avoid them.



Pitfall #1: Changing Venues But Not Values

One of the biggest mistakes pastors make when entering pioneering work is changing a model without changing the values and principles that the church should embody. If you don't examine the Bible and adjust the principles of what the church is supposed to be and do, you will build a new model on an unstable foundation. Your actions might look different, but your spiritual DNA will remain the same.

New Values

When you pursue new values, you will embody a healthier way of interacting with Jesus and each other. Living according to biblical values will lead to more Christlike fruit. Here are three main values that we see needing emphasis:

1. Everyone listening and responding to Jesus.
2. Everyone pursuing relationships, not programs.
3. Everyone empowered to use their gifts.

If you don't shift your values as a family and community, you will bring consumerism, competition, and celebrity culture from the prevailing model into your living room.

Different Values Will Lead to a Different Venue

Different values will inevitably lead to a different venue, but simply changing a venue doesn't automatically shift values. Meeting from house to house is not the point. However, we have found it to be the most helpful way to walk together in relationship with Jesus and to know how he calls us to interact with each other. Meanwhile, it is challenging to live out many of the values we are pursuing in the prevailing model of the church.

Next Steps

Before jumping into the newest model, return to the New Testament. As you read, what values does the earliest church emphasize? How do the people of God interact with him and with one another?

As you do this, be humble to acknowledge where you have been misguided. God will give you the grace to see and then live differently. You must allow yourself to detox from the old ways of operating *and* thinking. You will bring the institution's baggage into the living room if you don't. You might not realize how entrenched you are in old ways of thinking until you step out of your current church context. This takes time you can't make this shift overnight. You will find that some old ways of thinking will crop up and you will have to work through them.



Pitfall #2: Inviting People to an Event But Not a Friendship

Many pastors think the weekly service is the pinnacle of the church. They believe people will grow and connect with others if they attend a church service. When the people aren't growing enough from a weekly service, pastors fill the church calendar with other events for them to attend.

Events Rarely Lead to Transformation

Rarely do these events translate to deep relationships or personal transformation. Even if they have some fruit, these events model a need for church staff to organize and execute programming for others to attend. Instead, when people are confident to foster friendships with each other, events will naturally flow out of those relationships based on the needs they discover.

Transformation Happens in Relationship

Transformation comes as people are in relationships, spurring each other toward Jesus, not just attending events together. Maturity comes when people feel safe sharing their weaknesses and struggles, and the group gently comes alongside them to help them grow.

Building genuine relationships can be challenging, but it is essential for creating a thriving church community that focuses on loving and serving one another.

Next Steps

Prayerfully consider the people in your life. Who are some people you can invite to a meal instead of asking them to be part of your church or network? Bring them into your life and family rather than into some manmade organization. Many often naturally become part of our church networks as the relationship grows.



Pitfall #3: Planting Churches Rather than Making Disciples

In recent years, the Western church has focused heavily on church planting. The usual pattern involves a church planter gathering a core group and starting in a living room or a small rented space. The goal is to grow as fast as possible. Those involved will consider the church plant successful when it becomes financially self-sufficient.

The Goal is Christlikeness

The goal in the New Testament never seems to be church planting. The church in the New Testament aims for the people of God to grow in maturity in Christlikeness. Some call this

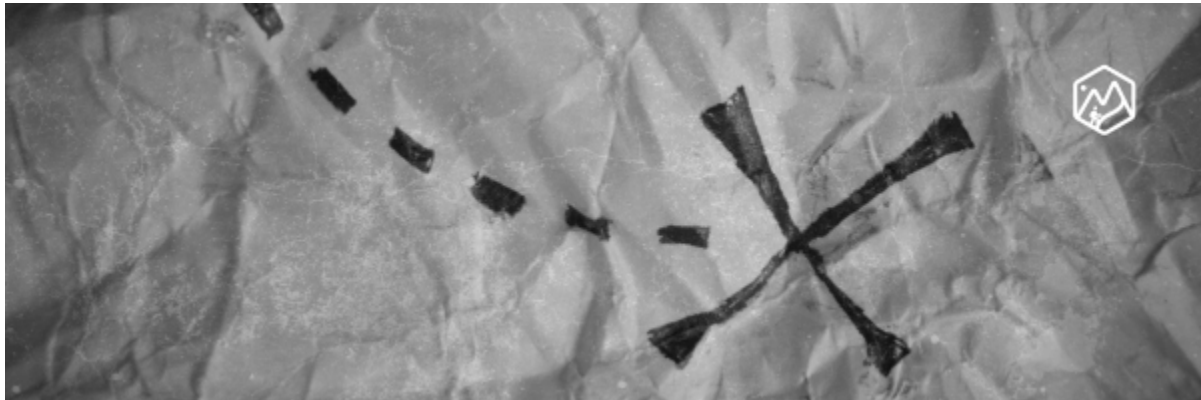
discipleship. We aren't talking about trading small groups, Bible studies, or Sunday school for new events or tools. We are talking about living our lives in deep connection to Jesus, worshiping, beholding, and responding to him together as a Jesus-centered community. He will then bear the fruit of Christlikeness in our lives (John 15).

House Churches Aren't the Point

Many pioneers are tempted to start as many house churches as fast as possible. But when we operate in such a hurry, many groups fizzle out over time. The pioneer should instead begin by pouring deeply into the few and modeling for them a life of transformation that comes from listening and responding to Jesus. You can then teach them how to gather with others in a Jesus-centered community. These small communities tend to be healthier and have greater endurance because they are built on the foundation of a relationship with Jesus and maturity in him, not just gathering in a house.

Next Steps

Start by focusing on your maturity and the transformation of your household. What does your time with Jesus look like? Are you spending time beholding him and responding to him? What changes do you need to make?



Pitfall #4: Wanting the Treasure Without the Cost

The status quo of church ministry often focuses on attendance and other metrics, as well as expectations around the quality of production for events and programs. But God is inviting you to follow him without the burden of manmade religion.

He desires you to have a life-giving relationship with him through Jesus full of joy and peace. As you grow in your relationship with him, you get to respond to his leadership and direction. You no longer have to maintain a checklist of religious duties and obligations to keep God happy. He is glad to be with you because you are clothed with the righteousness of Jesus and cleansed by his blood. Jesus has done what is required for you to have a restored relationship with the Father. He doesn't expect us to try harder to change on our own. He has given us the Holy Spirit, who produces the fruit of Jesus in our lives.

No More Manmade Religion

This kind of life will likely demand a different church structure than you are currently experiencing. We don't need a manmade intermediary. We have direct access to the Father through Jesus. The people of God don't need manmade structures and programs to facilitate our relationship with God, and you don't need to be the hired help to run them. You don't have to be the lynchpin that keeps the whole church machine running and bear the burden of keeping it going each week. You can be part of a community where everyone hears and responds to the voice of Jesus. You don't have to be under the pressure every Sunday of people coming to you to be fed because they don't know how to go to Jesus and have him feed them.

This New Life Comes at a Cost

Stepping into something new requires leaving behind the old. Before there is new life, there is the death of the old. Before the Israelites could enter the Promised Land, they needed to leave Egypt.

The cost will be high for you to begin pioneering. It may mean giving up your title, financial security, and even friendships. It may mean leaving behind the familiar, the comfortable, and the stable. However, the high cost is, of course, worth it because God is the treasure.

Next Steps

Take time to reflect and allow the Lord to reveal the areas in your life that need to change or die. Title, reputation, security, and control (among other things) likely need to die before you step into pioneering. What are those things for you?



Pitfall #5: Sharing Before Doing

Pastors are notorious for passing things on to others without first living them out themselves. You have probably felt the pressure to teach something new every Sunday without having enough time to apply what you are learning first.

Live It Before You Share It

When you grow in conviction about living into different principles and values as a church, giving a sermon series on these things is tempting. But people grow by seeing and experiencing something different. Remember, you are modeling entirely different principles from those we typically practice in manmade models.

Don't Announce a New Vision

Don't make the same mistake many of us have by announcing a new vision of disciple-making and gathering in simple churches before you have lived it and allowed the new DNA to infuse the church relationally. Embody the culture and values you want to see replicated. Don't start by teaching them just yet.

Next Steps

Start small. Start by listening, obeying, and sharing Jesus yourself. Start by being the church in your own home. The family is the hub of discipleship, community, and mission. You will reproduce in others what you are living and modeling. As you pour your life into the few, you will see deeper, healthier things grow and multiply. Don't advertise it. Don't try to start a network. Just live it out in your own life. Until you do this, you won't have anything to pass on other than theory.



Pitfall #6: Calling Yourself Pastor

Though many consider the pastor an indispensable role in a church, the New Testament does not have a position like our modern-day pastor. Even if you intend to operate differently, the title of "pastor" comes with a lot of baggage and expectations.

If people call you pastor (or any similar title), their expectations of your behavior will reflect their understanding of what a person in that role should be. They will be tempted to have you run an organization, lead church services, or be the hired hand that keeps everything running. These things do not help the church function in an empowering, decentralized way.

Jesus Is the Only Person Given the Title "Pastor"

The term "pastor" is better translated as "shepherd" in the New Testament. A shepherd is a gift given to care for those in need within the church, listed among many other gifts (Ephesians 4:11-13). It is not elevated above other gifts. Nor are shepherds appointed as church leaders. No one in the New Testament has the title of pastor other than Jesus (John 10; 1 Peter 2:25, 5:4). Therefore, we should reconsider using this title for ourselves.

Being Called Pastor Comes with Added Burden

If you take on the title of pastor, you will be tempted to think of yourself as more central to the work than you should be. You likely will feel the burden of trying to produce and control what happens in these churches.

To avoid this problem, start by being a disciple of Jesus who makes other disciples as you operate in a spiritual family from your home. Don't call yourself a pastor or church planter. By the grace of God, as you make a disciple, teach them to make other disciples and how to meet together in simple ways.

Elders, Not Pastors, Are Appointed

Once a church in an area grows from house to house, a group of elders will emerge from that new work. Their role is to shepherd, oversee, and serve as an example to the rest of the community. They don't control everything but empower the church to use their gifts and listen to, obey, and share Jesus. The goal of shepherding is to teach and equip the church to be able to feed themselves rather than relying on others to do it for them. Elders functioning in these ways helps the church mature and prevents the elders from being the bottleneck as the church grows.

Next Steps

Is giving up the title of pastor (or any similar title you hold) difficult for you? Consider why this might be.



Pitfall #7: Skipping the Grieving and Focusing on Leaving

The journey towards pioneering goes beyond just acquiring new tools and methods. It's about your own personal transformation, healing, and maturity. As you pioneer, it will come with losses. The process of grieving and letting go of your old life as a pastor is challenging and takes time. Acknowledging your feelings and allowing yourself space to process your emotions is essential.

Many pastors ignore the transformation the Lord wants to bring to their inner lives. It feels easier to focus on "doing things" for the Lord rather than allowing the Lord to address the things in their hearts.

Jesus Will Comfort Us in Our Loss

Let him minister to your heart, affirm your strengths, and encourage you through the challenges. He can provide comfort during grief and heal any wounds you may carry. This process requires vulnerability and openness that may sometimes feel uncomfortable, but it's necessary to embrace the journey ahead fully. Remember that the Lord is with you every step of the way and wants to see you thrive in this new chapter of your life.

Don't Grieve Alone

If you step into pioneering, you must have a support system on which you can rely. When grieving potential or actual losses, sharing your feelings with someone you trust can be helpful. The coaches on the Pastor to Pioneer team serve in this role to help pastors navigate their journey. You can also turn to your spouse for support and talk to them about the sadness and grief you're experiencing. Pay attention to your emotions throughout the journey and try to understand why you feel these ways.

Next Step

Make a list of losses you have experienced or will experience if you transition to pioneering. How do you feel about losing these things? Who can you share these losses with?



Pitfall #8: Not Sharing with Your Spouse

As a pastor, when you start questioning the values, structures, and outcomes of the existing church model, you are essentially challenging the source of your community and financial support. If you are married, you might mistakenly try to keep these questions and thoughts to yourself so that you do not burden your spouse with concerns about losing financial stability and friendships.

The Danger of Moving Too Far Ahead of Your Spouse

Starting without your spouse may seem more straightforward at first. However, if you don't involve your spouse in wrestling through these big questions, you may develop beliefs they do not share. Such a difference in beliefs can become a significant barrier if you desire to move away from the traditional model of the church and pioneer something new, but your spouse is not on board.

Start the Conversations Early

If you are married, we recommend you have conversations with your spouse early on in the journey to wrestle with these issues together. You don't have to lay everything out immediately. Start small and have regular conversations about your feelings and thoughts. Open up and share the deep parts of your heart, including your fears, excitements, and questions, and then invite your spouse to do the same.

Starting Together Helps You Journey Together

The key to successful pioneering as a couple is to embark on the journey together. Although it may take longer to reach the destination, starting the journey together helps you pioneer together.

Next Steps

Allow your convictions to grow together with your spouse as the Holy Spirit reveals truth from the Word. Read through Acts together and talk about how you see the church functioning. How does it compare to your experience?



Pitfall #9: Thinking Organizationally Rather than Relationally

When you start dreaming of a simpler, more relational way of following Jesus and being the church, it's tempting to begin branding the work. As a pastor in the prevailing model, you have been trained to establish a name, non-profit, website, etc. We encourage you to hold off before placing an order for t-shirts and mugs with the logo of your new house church network.

No Church Names

There aren't fancy church names in the New Testament. Gatherings of believers in homes don't seem to brand the ministry or have a church sign out front. There are very generic ways of describing different gatherings. When it is a gathering in a home, the believers refer to it as "the church in so-and-so's house." When someone writes a letter to a group of believers in a city, they are called "the church in _____(city)." You see examples of this throughout the New Testament, such as the church in Rome, the church in Ephesus, and the church in Corinth. They considered the believers in a city as part of the same church, and they didn't come up with different names, brands, or structures. They understood themselves to be connected relationally rather than organizationally.

The Church Is Like a Family

In the New Testament, we see the church growing organically and relationally. The church operates like a family unit. While there is undoubtedly structure and routine that goes into keeping a household running smoothly, what truly makes a family thrive is the emphasis placed on building and nurturing strong relationships.

A Necessary Shift

Moving from an organizational to a relational mindset is a huge but necessary step when shifting toward pioneering. Keeping things relational can make growing and adapting to specific situations easier. It also empowers the people to respond to the Spirit rather than expecting the organization to do it for them. The church might add organizational structures later to help the body function well. Creating rigid structures too soon often adds complications and can hinder the work.

Next Steps

Are you tempted to brand a new work in any way? If so, why? Are you willing to let go of the need for a brand and simply adopt generic references like those in the New Testament?

Conclusion

These mistakes are common because chasing a new model is tempting. But this is a journey of transformation. It starts with personal transformation and transformation in your home, and ministry flows from there.

We invite you to embody new values and principles, not simply try a new model. We are inviting you into a life-giving relationship with Jesus and others. You can experience a life and ministry marked by joy, peace, and freedom rather than duty, exhaustion, and burden. You can be on a mission together with your family in an integrated way where they don't get your leftovers.

It is challenging to learn a new mindset and way of operating on your own. We have found it helpful to have someone who has navigated these common pitfalls to help guide you on your journey from pastor to pioneer. If you need someone to be that guide for you, reach out to us at www.pastortopioneer.com.

Pastor to Pioneer

Many pastors are feeling burdened and trapped managing institutions that aren't producing the fruit they desire. At Pastor to Pioneer, we help pastors live into God's call for them without compromise by empowering them to pioneer movements of wholehearted disciples and healthy simple churches in their communities.

For more resources and to get connected, visit:

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