

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

# Fulfilling Your Calling and Finishing Strong with David Ashcraft - Episode 250

## *Pastoring Pastors (Part 3)*

In a recent survey, The Barna Group found that, despite all of the challenges, 77% of pastors could not see themselves doing anything other than pastoring—even though many of those pastors have considered quitting. With that many pastors committed to see their role through, **it's more important than ever that we're prepared to finish strong.**

In this week's episode, we're joined by David Ashcraft, Senior Pastor of [LCBC Church](#) in Pennsylvania. David became the pastor at LCBC in 1991 and, over the last 31 years, has grown the church from one location with a weekly attendance of about 150 people to multiple locations across the state with almost 20,000 in weekly attendance.

Here's what David had to say on how pastors can stay the course, renew their call to ministry, and commit to finishing strong through all the ups and downs of life and leadership.

### *Interview with Pastor David Ashcraft*

**Tony:** Have there ever been any moments along the way where you've questioned your original calling to ministry? More specifically, have you ever thought, I didn't sign up for this?

**David:** Yes, there were many times. But I had made a commitment: unless God moved me, I wasn't going to look anywhere else. I wasn't going to be peeking around the corner and saying, "God, do you want me any place differently?" I was committed to being here.

I'm not saying to everybody: you need to stay and not ever make moves—moves are necessary sometimes. But I also know that we do tend to bail out too soon. And if I look at the largest churches across the country, almost every one has been pastored by a long-term pastor. You have to be there long enough where you've fought through the early battles and the church begins to take on your personality.

**Tony:** How do you commit to finishing strong, especially given all of the turmoil that we've experienced in our society and churches?

**David:** When I came to LCBC, I said: "We're going to pick a direction. We know people aren't going to like it, but we're going to pick it and go with it." We instituted a 90/10 rule: we wanted 90% of

our people to be just wildly enthusiastic, and said it's okay for 10% to be very upset with us. And so that gave us the freedom to have people mad at us. In the early years, we definitely had that 10%, if not more, that were really upset with us. It doesn't necessarily get easier as you get bigger—but usually it's just a few loud, vocal people. So, we just know we can't please everybody, and that's helped me navigate it and move forward.

I think as pastors too, we get conflicting messages: We'll hear, "It's all about vision. It's all about direction." So we want to charge ahead, but then we'll read something else that says: "But it's all about the person." Then, as soon as people start getting hurt or expressing unhappiness, we feel like we have to back down because we don't want to hurt anyone. But the problem is, at some point, you have to say: "It's okay if you don't like what we're doing. There's lots of other churches. You're still going to be in heaven someday, and we're okay with that." But all of the conflicting messages can make it difficult.

**Tony: It seems like every week there's another story of a pastor who has made poor decisions leading him or her to stepping down or being removed from ministry. What advice do you give leaders to help them avoid becoming one of those stories?**

1. We need to acknowledge our fallibility and realize we are not that far away from that—we're just a few decisions away.
2. We need to invite God into our thought processes and our decision making. So many of the decisions where people have fallen, had they invited God into the process, they wouldn't have done the behaviors. And it never starts that big—it's small decisions.
3. We need to have the right people around us to challenge us and watch what we're doing. When we don't have anybody around us, when we're living our life in secret or just alone, and there's no other people that see what we're doing, it can lead to poor decisions.

Those are some safeguards we can put in place, but all of us are fallible and susceptible. It just continues to show how much we need God to be in the midst of all of our decisions.

**Tony: Any final encouragement you want to give pastors and church leaders to encourage them to stick to their calling and finish strong in their ministry?**

**David:** Stay with it. Keep at it. Don't give up. The grass always looks greener someplace else—but it's not. You're doing a good job, and you're doing something significant, so don't bail out—stick with it and bring the right people around you that can encourage you. There will always be negative voices, so don't try to please everybody. Adopt the 90/10 rule, and know that there will always be people that are mad.

Maybe God is calling you elsewhere, but I think God wants you to make sure that the church

you're in is really stable before you move, too. So just be careful to not move too quickly, and make sure God truly is a part of that decision.

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