

An open white door with a brass handle is set in a white wall. The door is open, revealing a bright, empty room with light-colored wood flooring. The text "HOW TO ENTER A CHURCH WELL" is superimposed in large, bold, black capital letters over the doorway.

# HOW TO ENTER A CHURCH WELL

By Jeff Helton

# Listen and learn before you lead.



At its core, I believe the local Church is about relationships. Yes, vision matters. Yes, a strategy is needed. Operationalize is important. But the Church, in its nucleus, is relational.

When ministers take a position of leadership and enter a new environment, one of the most significant action steps is to do nothing. In other words, don't go in with a new philosophy of ministry and immediately change everything.

This recommendation may sound counterintuitive, but researchers agree that the best thing you can do at the beginning of any new venture is to observe.

For the first thirty to sixty days, meet people. Connect with key leaders. Ask questions and then ask follow-up questions. Look for other high-level leaders that you have met or heard of and listen to their observations of the Church.

I frequently coach people to develop six to eight questions related to their new place of service or philosophy of ministry. For example:

- Tell me about some of the best days in the ministry.
- Tell me about some of the hardest days in the ministry.
- What is happening within the ministry you wish would stop?
- What do you wish would happen in the ministry?

Ask those questions to numerous people- volunteers, parents, staff- before making any decisions or changes.

Regardless of your position in the organizational chart, spend time with other key staff members above you, beside you, and below you--from the senior pastor to the student minister to the custodial staff. Identify key volunteers, and get to know them and what they love. Ask them what they would change.

Ultimately, when you enter a new Church position, your greatest friend is curiosity. *"Wow, I don't know that story. Tell me more about that."* Every Church body has its history, lore, skeletons in the



closet, successes, and failures.

To hear the heartbeat of people early on is critical. In those first two months, spend time in meetings and over coffee and in conversations. It will lay a solid foundation that can last years and, possibly even decades.

After you have listened, gathered information, hosted focus groups, and sat in circles of dessert nights, you can finally begin to lead.

Take the information you learned and develop your new philosophy of ministry and its practical plan. Then offer the people one of the greatest gifts you can give them: communication.

Let people know, *"Hey, in a couple of weeks, I am inviting a group of you together to share my observations about what I've seen around the church these first 30 to 60 days."* In the meeting, relate to them your observations.

Second, share with them. *"This direction is what I feel God is stirring in my heart. I have listened to you and learned. I have listened to Him, and now I am ready to lead us into the next season of ministry here at the Church."* Provide an overview of your philosophy of ministry, as well as the practical plan for implementation.

Third, open the floor for comments and conversation. *"What are your thoughts? What would it be like for us to go after the big, very*

*audacious goal I just revealed in front of you?"*

If you want to transition into a Church well, there must be an order. I believe it begins with listening. You need to communicate that their life is more important than your unique vision. Listen and learn before you lead, and you will transition into your Church well.

*Jeff Helton has been married to Lora for over thirty-two years and is a dad to four adult children, two daughters-in-law, and Papa to three grandchildren. He served as a pastor for over 25 years. Currently, he is a life coach and consultant who works with individuals, couples, and teams in churches and the business world. You can reach Jeff at [www.wellspringtn.com](http://www.wellspringtn.com).*



?

Curiosity is your  
greatest friend when  
you start a new  
position.

**Photos by:**  
**Phillipp Berndt**  
**Barret Ward**  
**Kelly Sikkema**

**Written By: Jeff Helton**  
**Graphic Design: Elisabeth Lee**