



50 Best Interview Questions and Why You Should Ask Them

How to use this checklist.

1. Select the questions you would like to ask in a second interview and which ones you would like to use in a third or future interviews and mark them accordingly.
2. Modify questions as they seem necessary for your church or for the candidate(s).
3. Add questions when directed or as seems necessary.

| Question # | Question | Why | When to ask | Comments |
|---------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|----------|
| Introductory | | | | |
| 1 | Tell us about yourself and your family. | Simply allow the candidate to get comfortable and begin to interact with the team. Talking about themselves and their history can be an easy icebreaker. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 2 | We have read your salvation experience and call to ministry in your profile, but we'd like to hear you personally tell us. | Look for authenticity in their faith. Does their story resonate with you? Do you see a spark of enthusiasm? Is there anything in their story that is fresh or is it all from years past? | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 3 | Why are you interested in this position? | This is an open-ended question that leaves room for you to interpret motivation. A follow up question is to ask what excites them most about this opportunity. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

| Job Description | | | | |
|-----------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| 4 | If your church has significant or unique expectations, ask questions to understand their capability. | This allows for everyone to have clarity on expectations and discuss strengths and gaps, | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

| Profile | | | | |
|---------|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| 5 | Review the candidate profile. Draft questions about content that isn't clear or needs further explanation. Try using an open-ended phrase like phrase, "Tell us more about..." | This allows for everyone to have clarity on a given topic and invites deeper, more personal conversation. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 6 | Consider if any questions in the profile address areas that are of particular importance to your church. Draft questions around those areas. | If it is important to your church, be sure to explore the candidate's beliefs and approaches. Be aware that the candidate may not believe exactly what you believe, and the search team will need to explore the | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

| Assessments | | | | |
|-------------|---|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| 7 | Draft 5-10 specific questions around the assessments. | Some assessment results may be of particular interest to your specific church and how the candidate will lead. This allows you to more deeply explore how their approach will fit. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 8 | Would you say your assessments describe you well? | Observe if the candidate is self-aware of who they are and how they are perceived by others. If a candidate confirms the assessments, you have a pretty good read on who you are getting as a future pastor. If the candidate disagrees with the assessments, pursue specifics and consider involving an expert to help evaluate discrepancies. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 9 | How do your assessment results support your role as a caring pastor? How do your assessment results support your role as a strong leader? | A candidate's assessments might indicate one of these roles may come more naturally for them, yet both are important for a lead pastor. Understand how they will lean into both expectations. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

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|----|---|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| 10 | <p>As a caring pastor, what is your flat side (weakness)? How do you compensate?</p> <p>As a strong leader, what is your flat side (weakness)? How do you compensate?</p> | <p>Every candidate will have a flat side. Explore their weaknesses with them. Evaluate how self-aware they are of their flat side, if they “own” it or minimize it. Consider how receptive they are to round it out with other people’s strengths.</p> | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don’t ask | |
| 11 | <p>How would you describe your God-given hard wiring and how it contributes to your strengths and weaknesses?</p> | <p>This question helps determine their understanding of underlying gifts, strengths, and personality traits.</p> | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don’t ask | |
| 12 | <p>How would your friends and spouse describe you? How have they affirmed you? What blind spots have they identified?</p> | <p>Look for alignment with how the candidate perceives themselves and how others perceive them.</p> | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don’t ask | |

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| 13 | What are your two greatest weaknesses? | Instead of asking about one, for which they've likely already rehearsed an answer, this will allow you to see how self-aware the candidate is, and if they are able to demonstrate an opportunity for growth in their weaknesses. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 14 | They say you live out of your top two StrengthsFinder themes. Do you agree? How does that look in your life? (You can review the candidate's themes in their profile and in the book by Tom Rath <i>STRENGTHSFINDER 2.0</i> .) | This answer can give insight into how the candidate will behave and respond. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

| Church Ministry | | | | |
|-----------------|--|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| 15 | What do you appreciate most about your current church? What are your concerns and how have you addressed them? | This is the opportunity for the candidate to fully describe their current situation, reveal any conflict or issues in their current employment and reasons for desiring a change. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 16 | Give an example of a social issue you are passionate about. Has it affected your preaching and your leading? | In this way you can begin to understand the pastor's worldview and how their view may match your church. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

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|----|---|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| 17 | What is your philosophy of generosity? | Consider if the response fits with your beliefs. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 18 | How much time would you spend per week in sermon preparation and what is your philosophy of how you allocate the rest of your week. | People naturally spend more time where their passions and desires are. Will their schedule line up with the most pressing needs or desired involvement of the church? | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 19 | When has your ministry been most impactful and successful? | This gives a candidate the freedom to brag a little without feeling it inappropriate. You can measure what the person considers "impactful and successful" and determine if it fits well in your context. Follow up questions can ask about accomplishments and failures in ministry and ministries that have specifically targeted and reached the lost and unchurched. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

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|----|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| 20 | What area of ministry are you most passionate about? | This question will reveal the ministry area they will talk about, preach about, pray about and participate in the most. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 21 | How do you personally use technology and social media and in your current church? | This is too vital an area for now and in the future to not understand a candidate's philosophy and methodologies. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 22 | Besides the Bible and Jesus Christ, what books and people have most influenced your ministry and life? What blogs do you follow? | These questions will provide insights into how well read the candidate is as well as their theology, philosophy and methodological leanings. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

| Preaching | | | | |
|-----------|--|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| 23 | Describe your preaching style. | Consider how important preaching style is to your church and if there is room for variance. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 24 | How would you evaluate your preaching? | Determine their self-awareness of their skillset in preaching. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

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|----|--|---|---------------------------|--|
| 25 | Are you satisfied with your preaching skills and how do you improve? | Does the candidate continue to self-evaluate and improve? | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 26 | How much time do you spend in message development? | Ensure the candidate's time expectations match that of the church. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 27 | What resources or people do you incorporate into your messages? | How does the candidate integrate other voices into their messages? | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 28 | What is your philosophy of the use of digital media for the worship service? | Is the response compatible with the church's current or future expectations? | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 29 | How do you decide/plan for sermon topics, series? | Does the candidate demonstrate enough planning to be responsible and yet enough spontaneity to be relevant to current events? | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 30 | Do you collaborate with others on message topics or preparation? | Does the church have capacity to collaborate if the candidate so desires? | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

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| 31 | What is your philosophy on giving an invitation? | Ask for specifics from the candidate of recent application of their philosophy to see how well it aligns with your church's philosophy. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 32 | What are the last five books you read? Why did you read them or what did you like about them? What books or types of books influence your life the most? How many books do you read in a month/year? Which types of books influence your preaching? | What a candidate reads will tell you a great deal about what topics matter to them and how they will incorporate those topics into their preaching. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 33 | Describe your thoughts on the purpose of worship and how it is reflected in your preferred worship style, planning and order of service. | Do their responses fit with the current or preferred future culture? Is there a tolerance for change? | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

| Leadership | | | | |
|------------|---|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| 34 | What are your aspirations for future education? | Does your church's value of formal education match that of the candidate? | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 35 | How do you develop and lead staff and lay leadership? | This open-ended question will demonstrate the candidate's ideas on delegation and building team members and volunteers. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

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| 36 | What would you hope to accomplish in your first year on the job? | This answer may provide a sense of their ambition and of how fast they might move in implementing change. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 37 | Share with us your current church's mission and vision and your role in shaping it? | Listen and discern if they exhibit a passion about the church's mission and how they lead vision casting. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 38 | How would you approach evaluating our current staff? | This question broaches the subject of church staff and follow up questions can identify the candidate's position on keeping or terminating current staff, as well as potential additional hires they would consider. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 39 | What changes are you seeing in church ministry and polity and how have you adapted yourself and your church to meet those changes? | The church world is changing rapidly. Here you want to listen to whether they understand those changes, can adapt and bring new ideas to your church. A follow up question is to ask about the governance structures of the various churches the candidate has served. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

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| 40 | What problems have you experienced in previous churches and how did you address those? | Problems will arise in the church. This question helps you understand the nature of the problems the candidate has dealt with, how they were addressed, and if there is a pattern you should be aware of. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

| Personal | | | | |
|----------|------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| 41 | How do you cope with stress? | How a candidate handles stress is vital to their success. Denial is the worst. Press candidates who say stress is not an issue. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 42 | What goals do you have? | This will help you determine if the candidate plans ahead. If they don't have a direct answer (at least one) chances are making plans is a difficult task. Also ask about previous plans they have made and accomplished (or not) and why that happened. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

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|----|--|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| 43 | Is your work environment important to you? | Pastors typically have a preference for what kind of work environment helps them be productive. If there are office expectations, be sure to communicate them. Probe further about office and clerical needs. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 44 | How do you handle conflict? | Conflict is an issue that is certain to be part of any pastor's leadership. Ask for an example of how a candidate has handled conflict in the past or present a hypothetical and relevant scenario for them to address. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 45 | How do you stay organized? | Use this question to explore their organizational style and how it may support or negatively impact those they need to work with whom they coordinate. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

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|----|---|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| 46 | What has been a major change in your thinking or perspective, or a significant lesson you learned in the past couple years? | Interpret the candidate's pursuit of continuous growth and a desire to mature. Observe how transparent and self-reflective they are. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 47 | How do you manage the demands on your time between work, family, personal, spiritual and physical? | This will identify where they struggle the most in balancing these critical areas. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 48 | What parts of the ministry are most energizing and most depleting for you? | Candidates will likely prioritize ministry that is energizing and may need support in areas that are draining to them. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

| Candidate | | | | |
|-----------|--|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| 49 | Have you heard any of our responses that have concerned you? We would be glad to discuss them further. | This is an exceptional opportunity for your team to practice self-awareness and understand how you are perceived. Encouraging a candidate to be honest will help you determine adjustments you may need to make in areas as simple as your delivery or as complex as expectations of candidates that may seem unreasonable. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |
| 50 | Is there a question you would like to ask, but have not felt comfortable asking? | Challenge your team to make the candidate so comfortable that they are willing to broach topics that aren't easily discussed but might be troubling to either of you. | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| | | | Don't ask | |

Search Team Added Questions

Use this section to add specific questions not included above that your team would like answered. We strongly encourage you to follow the above format and include “the why” you are asking the question. That will help your team determine ahead of time if the question will really answer what you are trying to ascertain and will help provide clarity on what the question resolves for you.

| | | | | |
|----|--|--|---|--|
| 51 | | | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| 52 | | | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |
| 53 | | | 2 nd interview | |
| | | | 3 rd or future interview | |

*Thanks and credit are given to **Jim Baker** of **Sacred Structures** for permission to use and adapt some of his resource *25 Questions Every Pastor Search Committee Should Ask*.