

At 90, pastor finds reason for living in a call to ministry he once resisted

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LEANDER—Jarvis Philpot has been a pastor more than 65 years, but the 90-year-old minister doesn't remember his calling as a joyous experience.



Jarvis Philpot, age 90, serves as pastor of Round Mountain Baptist Church, outside Leander.

(PHOTO/George Henson)

"I resented God calling me to preach," said Philpot, pastor of Round Mountain Baptist Church, outside Leander. "The Lord first spoke to me when I was 15 years old. I saw the life of my pastor—one of the greatest guys I've ever met. I saw how confining and how restrictive his life seemingly was, and I thought, 'I don't want to live that way.'"

Many people, not least his current congregation, are glad he changed his mind.

At 18, Philpot began preaching, and he noticed each time he did, someone joined the church.

During World War II, Philpot served overseas "two years, six months, and one day," he recalled. When he returned home, he started a paint business with his brother near Fair Park in Dallas.

During a revival meeting about a year later, Philpot "sold out" to God, he recalled with emotion.

"I said, 'Lord it doesn't make any difference where it is—if it is at a fork in the road with a dozen people, I'm there.'"

He moved to Waco to study at Baylor University and became pastor of Elliott Baptist Church, between Hearne and Franklin. He later left there to become pastor of First Baptist Church in Eddy.

After graduation, he moved to back to the Dallas area to attend seminary. Soon, however, he received a call from a church in Odessa asking that he come preach for them.

"When they called, I told them I had too much on my plate and couldn't come out there," Philpot said.

A greater obstacle was a dislike of the dry climate.

"I had said, 'Anywhere, Lord, but West Texas,'" he admitted.

When the call came a second time, he and his family took the train from Dallas to Odessa.

"It really was pathetic," Philpot remembered. "They had a building they had put up, and it had fallen once. But it was a pretty good-sized building, and they had done a pretty good job of putting it back up."



Jarvis Philpot leads a children's sermon at Round Mountain Baptist Church near Leander.

"It had homemade benches up front and about 50 people who had the appearance of defeat. They were dispirited.

"When I walked down the aisle toward the front from the back that first Sunday, it was the strangest thing—I felt, 'I just have to come here.'"

Philpot served Calvary Baptist Church in Odessa 11 years, baptizing 50 people each year.

"I don't reckon that's any kind of record, but it's a pretty good harvest," he said.

During the church's rapid growth, education space ran out, so for more than two years, children's Sunday school classes met in their teachers' cars in the parking lot.

Philpot then became pastor of Oak Knoll Baptist Church in Fort Worth, where he served five years. He put up a map of Tarrant County, and the congregation went block-by-block through neighborhoods surveying spiritual needs. A paid church visitor went to each of the prospects

uncovered through the survey, and then she told Philpot which would benefit most from a visit from the pastor. The Fort Worth congregation grew to an average of about 600 most Sunday mornings.

In 1967, Philpot was called to Crestview Baptist Church in Georgetown, a congregation with about 70 people in Sunday school each week.

"I looked at this town—a county seat of about 6,000 people—and this area, and I said, 'This could be a strategic Baptist church.' I'm not a wizard and I'm not smart, but God reveals things to you," he said.

Philpot was right. In the 22 years he served the Georgetown congregation, it grew to a membership of almost 1,100.

While he retired at age 68, he didn't miss a Sunday in the pulpit, since he was in constant demand as a supply preacher and interim pastor.

Before long, Williamson Association asked him to start a new church in a rural area about seven miles outside Leander. And 22 years later, he still serves the congregation as pastor.

"It's what keeps me living. I'm 90 years old. There's no doubt in my mind that if they hadn't asked me to start that church, I wouldn't be here," he said.