

Alan Grisham: Uniquely shaped for pastoral ministry

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Alan Grisham has been the pastor of [First Baptist in Buffalo](#), Texas, since 2010. From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on ministry and the church. To suggest a Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated leader to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

Background

Where else have you served in ministry, and what were your positions there?

While I grew up in church, accepted the Lord at the age of nine and was called at the age of thirteen, I ran from my call for more than twenty years. After trying to fill my calling in many ways of service, I finally began my role as pastor at the First Baptist Church in Buffalo. I have served in various capacities as Sunday school teacher, deacon, Royal Ambassadors leader and member of many committees, including the pastor search committee and personnel.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in various parts of Texas. My dad's job required him to move; so, we moved every few years. I was born in Abilene, but lived in San Antonio, Wichita Falls, Houston (Clear Lake) and Nacogdoches and lived in Allen, Fort Worth and Buffalo most of my married life.

How did you come to faith in Christ?

I was raised by a loving mother and dad who believed we should be in church. We went to church, and at the age of nine, I made a decision at Eisenhower Road Baptist Church in San Antonio. A few years later at Faith Baptist Church in Wichita Falls, I felt a call to the ministry. But as the years went by, I chose not to follow that call.

Where were you educated, and what degrees did you receive?

I received a Bachelor of Business Studies from Dallas Baptist University in 2007, and a Master of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 2011.

Ministry life

Why do you feel called into ministry?

I believe God set me apart and has given me talents that only I have been given. I am not saying my talents are the best, but God made me; so, the talents he has blessed me with allows only me to use them as God chooses.

I was called to the ministry when I was only thirteen. I knew it, and I told people ministry was my calling. However, my own interests and desires got in the way of that, and by the time I graduated from high school, following the call to ministry was the least of my worries.

While I ran from that call, God still put me in places to learn trades and have experiences that change the way I serve today as a minister. I understand that people in the secular world have a very different life than those in the ministry. We both have pressures, but the pressures are often different. My experience allows me to understand some of those pressures differently than if I had only been in "church work."

God set me apart many years before I fully surrendered, but only I can serve the way I do because of God's grace and patience with me.

What is your favorite aspect of ministry? Why?

Ministry is about people. People need the Lord. Ministry has allowed me to be present in people's lives otherwise I would not have unless God allowed it. My favorite aspect of ministry is being blessed in knowing and learning with others about God's plan for our lives.

How do you expect ministry to change in the next 10 to 20 years?

Time is something we seem to all agree there is a shortage. Families today seem to be so overwhelmed with jobs, other obligations, kids' activities, sports and hobbies. I believe we must learn how to reach those families where they are rather than just expecting them to fit church into their schedules.

In many areas, people work on Sunday, and many more now have kids in activities that take place on Sunday. Our traditional worship time is often hard for us to reach these families. If we do not learn how to reach busy families, many of them will remain lost, and a generation will be difficult to be reached.

Name the three most significant challenges and/or influences facing your ministry.

The three most significant challenges we face are the church's influence on culture, our finding ways to help people to serve without guilt, and the constraints and complications of time. In many ways, all three of these challenges are the same but wrapped in a different box.

We live in a time when we have more devices and "time saving" gadgets

than ever in history, but we all seem to have “no time.” The days of a five-day work week are gone. People can’t imagine not having the internet at the tip of their hands at all times. Even in the rural area where I live, we are all glued to our phones, televisions and computers and seem to be running at overdrive.

We want to see all our families’ events, and we only seem to add more to our already busy schedules. This complicates the young family, as well as older families wanting to participate in their grandkids’ lives. Everything is demanding, and church and serving the Lord is hard to “fit into our lives.”

It is no different for pastors. We want to be at all the events of our church member’s lives but know we have limited time, as well.

We as pastors and as families must learn how to prioritize our time, which is becoming more and more difficult. Creating more activities at church often makes time management even harder for our families.

We must learn to make God first and not make serving him more a requirement, but instead, make people see God as a refreshment. This is complicated because while schools, employers and other demands used to make it easier for church, Sundays are no longer looked at as a day of worship but as an extra day to catch up.

We must learn how to see the challenge our families face with their time management. The church must learn how to adapt to help families see the importance of serving without making them feel guilty into serving.

What do you wish more laypeople knew about ministry or, specifically, your ministry?

I wish more laypeople understood ministry is a blessing. I never really knew what a pastor did during the week. The job of ministry is demanding, but it is more than a job. It allows me to be a part of people’s lives.

Being part of people's lives can be during the best of times—weddings or the birth of a baby or seeing someone come to the Lord. It can also be in the worst of times—the death of a loved one or the sin of a family member that destroys those around them.

God has allowed me to see the grace, love and working of God. I wish laypeople understood ministry—whether it is in the occupational role or in the layperson ministry—is a blessing.

About Baptists

What are the key issues facing Baptists—denominationally and/or congregationally?

The key issue facing Baptists today is we are getting older. Many of our congregations are full of God-fearing, loving people but are not getting younger. The age in many of our churches is older, and we are missing younger families.

Older people often have seen their children, who are many times parents themselves, not make church a priority. Sports, academics and work tend to be the primary focus of younger families, and our churches have often become insignificant in their lives.

What would you change about the Baptist denomination—state, nation or local?

I would like to see us become as recognizable a force as other groups in the United States. At first, this may seem silly, but hear me out.

There are groups that are always asked and approached regarding what they think about struggles our culture faces. I agree with some of those groups, and others I don't, but they are always engaged in the culture

debate. These groups include the NRA, Planned Parenthood, Anti-Defamation League and LGBT, just to name a few.

I wish our culture could see that Baptists are a group of believers who not only have experienced God's power but whose voice is important.

I remember when television would be concerned about how our organizations would react to couples living together, adultery, incest and homosexual lifestyles. Now, we are virtually silent, and culture does not even seem to worry or care about our stance. This is probably because many of us are unaware of God's word. I would like our denomination to be more active in this.

About Alan

What is the impact of ministry on your family?

As a pastor, I am often the receiver of many kind words. I am applauded for being a "Man of God." However, the pressures of being a pastor are often harder on my family than on me. I am blessed to be in a church that has encouraged me and my family and supported us in all we do and participate.

My family is just as much of the ministry, but they did not "sign up" for it like I did. I have seen my kids not be able to participate in some things because they needed to be in church on Sunday. It was the right choice; it is a sacrifice I did not have to make, but they did. My wife is encouraging, supportive and my best ally, but she also is forced to carry burdens that may not always be easy to share with others.

Pastors' families often make sacrifices often overlooked or discounted, but I know it must be difficult to be a PK (preacher's kid) or especially a PW (preacher's wife).

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

My favorite passage is one very familiar to us all found in Genesis 1:1. It says "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This passage is simple and clear. It is the foundation of all I believe. First, it states God is and always has been. Nothing was before God, and all was created by God. This shows us our God is always here, all-powerful and all-knowing. This is all his creation.

As our world changes and searches for purpose, beginnings and answers, it can all be found in this verse. I believe this one verse is the most important, because if you don't believe it, then you can't believe any of the Bible. However, if you do believe it, then most all other questions can be answered by knowing God has always been, God is a wonderful creator, and God is all-powerful.

Name something about you that would surprise people who know you.

That I am naturally shy. I am not comfortable speaking in front of groups, but God has allowed me to be able to preach by his strength.

If you could get one "do over" in ministry, what would it be, and why?

It would be to have started early enough that my parents could see where I am serving the Lord. My parents were both there when I was thirteen and surrendered to the Lord to preach. However, since I ran from my call, they did not see me graduate from Southwestern Seminary or see the blessing to be the pastor of First Baptist Church in Buffalo. If I could change one thing, it would be to have started early enough that they could see me here.