

Alan Lefever: Christian history is ‘exciting, poignant and humorous’

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Alan Lefever has served as director of the [Texas Baptist Historical Collection](#) for 26 years, and he’s been on staff at TBHC for 32. He is also an adjunct professor at [Truett Seminary](#), where he’s taught for 17 years. From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on church and ministry. 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?

I have served as a summer youth minister at Northridge Park Baptist Church and Harlandale Baptist Church, both in San Antonio, as an associate college minister at First Baptist Church Waco and I have been a supply and revival preacher.

Where did you grow up?

San Antonio, Texas.

How did you come to faith in Christ?

I was led to the Lord by my father in the living room of our house at the age of 10.

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

I have a Bachelor of Arts from Baylor, a Master of Divinity and Doctorate from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a Certificate of Archival Administration from The University of Texas at Arlington.

Ministry life

Why do you feel called into ministry?

I had a stroke at birth and, as a result, cerebral palsy that affected the right side of my body. Initially, the doctors told my parents that I would probably not walk or talk. Ironically, those who know me well know that I talk all the time. By the age of 14, I felt God calling me into ministry to use this gift of communication to tell his story. Until I was in seminary, I felt that call was as a pastor. However, during grad school it became clear that God was calling me to minister as a historian and professor.

What is your favorite aspect of ministry? Why?

Communicating with others how God has actively worked in history through broken individuals to deliver his perfect message. Why is that my favorite part? Because it shows all of us can and should have an active role in being changing agents for God.

What one aspect of ministry gives you the greatest joy?

Showing people that the stories of Christian history and heritage are as exciting, poignant and humorous as the family stories we share with each other around the dinner table. After all, we are part of the family of God.

What one aspect of ministry would you like to change?

The belief by many, including some ministers, that only professionally

trained ministers can do ministry. One of the hallmark beliefs of Baptists through the centuries is “Priesthood of the Believer.” In a real sense, every Christian should be a minister.

In a world driven by service industries, many congregations have turned over virtually all aspects of ministry to the “trained professionals” on the church staff. I think, for us to effectively reach a hurting world, congregations need to be reengaged in the ministry of the church so that, as we used to say when I was on staff at FBC Waco, “Every member is a minister.”

How has your ministry or your perspective on ministry changed?

I try to concentrate my energy and efforts in areas where I can bring about change and make a difference and not worry about things over which I have no control ... Thank you, Serenity Prayer.

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

I’m a historian. I don’t see the future, only the past!

If you could launch any new ministry—individually, through your congregation or through another organization—what would it be? Why?

It would be a well-funded organization that would communicate the history and heritage of Baptists through contemporary means. Why? Because I hear people talk about “historic Baptist principles” many times who appear to have little knowledge of historic Baptist principles. People are actually more interested in history than they think. We just have to find a better way to communicate it.

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

Funding, awareness (the TBHC has been around since 1933, but few people have heard about it) and collecting material.

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

That we are constantly on the lookout for material dealing with the history of Texas Baptists. If they have material from family members who served Texas Baptist churches or old church minutes, especially from churches that no longer exist, we would love for them to donate these materials to the TBHC so that we can continue our ministry of chronicling the history and heritage of Texas Baptists. [Ed. note: [Contact Alan here.](#)]

About Baptists

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

How do we communicate the unchanging message of the gospel with an ever-changing world?

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

In a perfect world, I wish that Baptists from different groups, regardless of their disagreements, could figure out a way to minister together on the two areas many Baptists have historically agreed upon: missions and evangelism.

About Alan

Who were/are your mentors, and how did/do they influence you?

Dwayne Wise, my youth minister growing up: His confidence in me helped me hear God's call and gave me the opportunity to begin serving in the ministry as a teenager.

Sherry McKinney, the granddaughter of BB McKinney's granddaughter and one of my high school history teachers: Her passion for history helped ignite my interest in the subject that continues today.

Leon McBeth, my mentor professor at seminary: He was a master storyteller. There is not a day that I speak to a church or teach my class that his spirit is not with me.

What did you learn on the job you wish you learned in seminary?

How to agree to disagree.

What is the impact of ministry on your family?

It has been mostly positive. My wife is a big fan of church history ... Or at least that's what she tells me.

Other than the Bible, name some of your favorite books or authors, and explain why.

Of course, I enjoy numerous books on history and biographies. My favorite author outside that realm is Frederick Buechner. I have loved everything he's written, but his autobiographical book "Now and Then," which I read for the first time while I was in seminary, is especially meaningful to me. His work, "Wishful Thinking," is the best "dictionary" of Christian terms that I have ever found.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

II Corinthians 12:7-10. The passage deals with Paul's thorn in the flesh. Growing up with a disability, I found it comforting that one of the pillars of

the early church had something that he considered a disability that God made a strength.

Who is your favorite Bible character, other than Jesus? Why?

Peter, because he's passionate and committed to the gospel but sometimes opens his mouth before he thinks.

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

I once pitched a no-hitter in slow-pitch softball ... Yes, the opposing team was really, really bad.

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

Listened to others earlier in my ministry, contrary to what I believed. I now know I did not know everything as an 18-year-old youth minister.

Bonus

Write and answer a question you wish we had asked.

Is this the year the Houston Astros win the World Series? YES!

[Ed. note: We received Alan's answers on July 14, 2017.]