

Chuck Gartman: Decades of dedication to youth ministry

April 21, 2020

Chuck Gartman is the director of ministry guidance and an assistant professor of Christian education for [Howard Payne University](#). He is a member of First Baptist Church in Brownwood. From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on Christian higher education. 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

How long have you been at Howard Payne University?

I was an adjunct professor from 1989 to 1991 when we started the youth ministry emphasis for our university. I came back to HPU in 2002 to serve full-time until 2005. Then I served part-time while I was on staff at First Baptist Church in Lubbock from 2005 to 2012 and Field Street Baptist Church in Cleburne from 2012 to 2016. I returned to HPU to be the full-time director of ministry guidance and assistant professor of Christian education in 2016.

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

While at Howard Payne as a student, I served at Oak Park Baptist Church in Kerrville as the youth and music minister, Bethel Baptist Church in Eastland as the youth and music minister, and First United Methodist Church in Brownwood as the youth minister.

While at Southwestern Seminary, I served at First Baptist Church in Jacksboro as the youth and music minister.

After graduating from seminary, I served at Field Street Baptist in Cleburne as the youth and music minister. I came back to Field Street after 40 years to serve as the minister of education and leadership development. I also served at First Baptist Church in Conroe for more than 14 years. I was fortunate enough to serve in almost every capacity in my tenure at that church, with the exception of pastor.

I moved from there to Nashville, Tenn., where I worked for LifeWay Christian Resources for 10 years. While in Nashville, I served three churches as the interim youth minister—Judson Baptist Church in Nashville, First Baptist Church in Franklin and Bluegrass Baptist Church in Hendersonville.

We returned to Brownwood in 2002 to join the faculty of HPU. From there, I went to First Baptist Church in Lubbock as a 55-year-old youth minister, if you can believe that. I transitioned to associate pastor for leadership development for three years and then returned to Field Street Baptist Church in Cleburne.

While at HPU, I served as the interim pastor at First Baptist Church in San Angelo.

Where did you grow up?

We lived in several states because of my dad's work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture before settling in McAllen, Texas, where I attended junior high and high school. I came to Howard Payne as a student in 1967.

How did you come to faith in Christ?

I started my spiritual journey in Rome, Ga., at West Rome Baptist Church when I accepted Christ as Savior and Lord at age 6. My parents were faithful Christians and very active in the church, so it was a natural step to take.

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

- Howard Payne University, Bachelor of Science in religious education
- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Master of Divinity with emphasis in pastoral care and Christian ethics
- New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, post-graduate studies in youth ministry

About education

Why do you feel called into education?

I always have thought explaining theology and ministry was an important part of equipping people for ministry in the local church, whether as laypeople or in professional ministry. In my view, education is a chief component of discipleship. I feel called of God to ministry as a vocation, and the Lord has opened doors faithfully for me to participate in educating and equipping people for ministry.

How does being a Christian influence your work in education?

I am involved in ministry and biblical education at my university. However, I feel no matter where I may teach—and I have taught at a state junior college—my faith influences how I treat students, fellow faculty and administrators. Also, I feel a sense of urgency as an ambassador for Christ

to share what the Lord has done for me in my salvation, as well as in my vocational life.

What is your favorite aspect of education? Why?

I love students, so I enjoy the relationships I have with them. I also enjoy discussions with my colleagues about ministry, theology, culture and ideas. Both of these aspects have caused me to grow in my faith, and hopefully, to have helped others to do the same.

What one aspect of education gives you the greatest joy?

Seeing people “get it” when it comes to in-depth theology or to a ministry aspect about which they never have thought before or have come to conclusions that were different than they originally may have thought.

What is your favorite class to teach? Why?

I enjoy teaching about youth culture. It is ever-changing and extremely challenging. I even wrote a book on it for a class in the Certificate of Ministry Program at Wayland University. The title is *The World of the 21st Century Teenager*. It was out of date the day I turned it in.

I also love to teach the Communicative Preaching course. That is one of my all-time favorite experiences.

What one aspect of education would you like to change?

The cost of it. I don't have an easy answer on this one, but we have to get a handle on student debt somehow.

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

It is quite possible, I believe, we will move toward a completely online experience for more students. I would be sad to see that happen, because the face-to-face nature of education is so valuable.

If you could get one “do over” in education, what would it be, and why?

Even though I have not lacked for any experience I have desired, if given the opportunity, I believe I would have gotten a terminal degree. I have been a life-long learner and continue to be, but a terminal degree might have opened some doors that have remained closed for me. I don't necessarily regret the path I chose, but a terminal degree may have increased some influence I have had on students.

About Chuck

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

Music and movies have influenced my life to a great degree. I have gleaned insight, wisdom and knowledge from these by looking for messages God reveals in them.

Why are you Baptist?

One realistic answer is my parents and my family heritage have been Baptist. However, my parents taught me to think for myself, and I have come to the conclusion the Baptist way is the best for me. Most of the major doctrines and practices align with my deepest thoughts.

Additionally, Baptists have educated me, and I have worked for Baptists

most all my life.

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

My parents, Jay (deceased) and JoAnne Gartman, were the best mentors I have had. They modeled their faith in front of our family and friends. There was very little doubt where they stood on most issues we faced as we grew up.

My wife Connie has mentored me in the art of parenting and family. She teaches and demonstrates the right principles of both every day. She is a wonderful person.

Randy Johnson from First Baptist Church in Richardson, Texas, is one of my models of faithfulness to the church.

Myrte Veach, retired manager of the youth ministry services section at LifeWay Christian Resources, was best the supervisor and manager I ever encountered.

Nat Tracy (deceased), professor of religion and philosophy at Howard Payne University, was my favorite and most influential college professor. His insistence, like that of my parents, that I learn to think for myself and evaluate my belief system were some of the greatest gifts I received in my life.

Gary Gramling and Allen Jackson both not only have challenged me educationally and theologically, but also have supported me in my efforts to teach people in a way both practical and helpful.

Other than the Bible, name some of your favorite

books or authors, and explain why.

A Long Obedience in the Same Direction by Eugene Peterson helps establish the importance of discipleship in my own life as well as in the lives of those with whom I have some influence.

TEACH by Allen Jackson is the clearest, most concise presentation of the principles of teaching I have ever read.

Personal Disciple-Making by Chris Adsit, is the best written and organized book concerning the practical logistics of our main task of making disciples I have read.

I Don't Go to Church: I am the Church by David Bish describes what I believe ought to be the overarching task and emphasis of church membership.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

My life verses are found in Paul's letter to the church at Philippi—Philippians 3:7-14. My end goal is to know Christ intimately. He has made himself clearly known to me, but I'm still learning from him and pursuing him.

Romans 8:28-29 is a close second to the passage in Philippians. I believe God is at work in everything to bring about the development of his character in his people.

Who is your favorite person in the Bible, other than Jesus? Why?

Thomas is my favorite. His life and responses, I believe, have been grossly misinterpreted. Rather than a doubter, I believe Thomas was a thinker, a realist and a risk-taker. I want to have all three of those characteristics in my own life.

What is the most important aspect of your life that has moved you forward in your faith development?

I believe it is my commitment to spending time with God in personal worship that has caused me to move forward in my faith development. J.R. Vassar once said the altars of corporate worship have crumbled because the altars of personal worship have crumbled. I can think of no more insightful quote that describes what has happened to Christianity in America. I don't believe there is anything magic in either kinds of worship, but without both, I do not believe we will move forward in our pursuit of God's character.