

Craig Curry: Serving alongside families through life events

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Craig Curry has been senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Plano nine months. 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 minister 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?

Senior pastor, First Baptist Church of Dripping Springs, 2009-16

Senior pastor, First Baptist Church of Cisco, 2006-09

Event communicator/evangelist, leading revivals, camps and retreats and supply preaching in more than 80 churches while also working full-time for Hardin-Simmons University, 2002-06

Baptist General Convention of Texas youth-led Shine Out Revivals preacher/team leader, 2000

BGCT youth-led Shine Out Revivals preacher/team leader, 1999

Summer staff, Camp Riverbend, 1998

- Where did you grow up?

My dad was a Baptist minister who served in Powell, Dawson, Coahoma, Tahoka and Arlington. The most complicated transition was the move to

Arlington, when I was in seventh grade, from a cotton farming community in West Texas. It was culture shock! For me, “home” is the churches where I was raised. Those churches were gracious to our family, and they displayed the love of Jesus.

- How did you come to faith in Christ?

I accepted Jesus as my Savior and my Lord when I was child during a Sunday evening service at First Baptist Church of Coahoma. I was overwhelmed with great conviction that I needed Jesus.

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

Hardin-Simmons University, bachelor of behavioral science degree in speech communication and church ministry, 2002

Hardin-Simmons University’s Logsdon Seminary, master of divinity degree in spiritual care and preaching, 2005

Baylor University’s George W. Truett Theological Seminary, doctor of ministry degree in church leadership and preaching; project: “The Effects of Community Engagement Through Asset-Based Service at First Baptist Church Dripping Springs, Texas,” 2015

On a personal note, I am grateful for my education at Texas Baptist/BGCT institutions, and I am appreciative of the BGCT ministerial grant I received throughout my entire education. Thank you to the churches in our state for investing in ministerial students.

Ministry/church

- Why do you feel called into ministry?

I did not choose the ministry. I had other plans for my life. They were not great plans, but they were my plans. I wanted to be a movie actor.

I began sensing the Lord leading me toward ministry when I was a teenager. At first, I tried to ignore the call, but it was all I could think about. I thought about running from the call to ministry, but I do not run very fast, and I knew the Lord would catch me. I begrudgingly answered the call with a frustrated “yes.”

My testimony about this is that as soon as I committed to this, my life and my heart changed! Ministry became all I wanted to do. I do not have a backup plan. I really do not know what else I would do. I know that did not come from me. I believe the Lord put that in my heart once I said “yes” to him.

- What is your favorite aspect of ministry? Why?

My favorite aspect of ministry is the opportunity to serve alongside *Fallon Curry*. The Lord richly blessed me with the greatest ministry partner. Fallon is passionate about ministry, very talented and fun. Serving with her brings me great joy.

- What one aspect of congregational life gives you the greatest joy?

The aspect of congregational life that gives me the greatest joy is shepherding. I love that I have the opportunity to serve alongside families through most of their major life events—from baby dedications, to baptisms, graduations, tough times, weddings, funerals and everything in-between. I enjoy trying to be there and minister in all of these different situations.

- What one aspect of congregational life would you like to change?

I would change the tendency that we have to see the church as a place that we go to take, instead of seeing the church as a mobilized body on mission to give.

A wonderful example is from one of my previous churches. There was money left over in the benevolence line item of our budget at the end of the year. We decided as a church the money should be used to bless several families in our community that Christmas. The church felt it was important we not leave a surplus in benevolence. One of the families we sought to bless that Christmas was a blue-collar family with small children. This family was trying to make it financially while the wife worked outside her home to send the husband to college with the hope he would one day go to medical school to become a doctor.

I never will forget the day that young man came to my office and brought back the money we sought to bless his family with that Christmas. He came in and smiled and graciously said: "The church is a place where I am called to go, and serve, and give; not to take. I can't take this money." I understood his position, but I insisted he leave the office with that Christmas money that day. I loved his heart and his concept of the church, though. I never will forget it.

I hope we all can take on his mentality. I received a card from that young man eight years later. The card was a graduation announcement to let us know he completed medical school!

- What qualities do you look for in a congregation?

Gospel centered, loving, gracious, tight-knit, welcoming, fun, community-oriented.

About Baptists

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

Local church partnerships seem to be undervalued. Churches are more likely to partner with a church in Mexico or South America than they are to

partner with the church down the street or across town.

I think this is a mistake. We have an opportunity as neighbor churches to come together in fellowship and unity with a close camaraderie for the sake of the gospel. Together, we can do more in the local community in the same way that together, we can do more globally. The difference is the impact can happen much faster in the local context, and the community is watching.

About Craig

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

My greatest ministry influences have been my Dad, *Dan Curry*, and my Pawpaw, *Bill Curry*, who both served as Baptist pastors in Texas.

Dad has a very wide ministry skill set. He is great with people, and he is a great administrator. His impact on my life and the churches he has served is tremendous. One specific thing to point out is his emphasis on grace throughout his ministry. Dad taught us to extend grace to people through his words and through his actions. It is my sincere hope that my ministry carries that torch. Dad's greatest skill is his natural ability to mentor. He has mentored a great number of people that now serve in full-time ministry.

My Pawpaw was a loving shepherd, and he influenced Dad, and then me, to love people and love community. He was a very sincere man. He was known for his wisdom, his warmth and his ability to reach people through relationships. His influence was wide-reaching in the whole community. I have preached in some of the churches he served as pastor, and the people still talk about his influence 40 years after he served. It is my desire to be a shepherd like Pawpaw.

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

We did not discuss the ins and outs of going to visit the jail in seminary! My first pastoral-care visit as a pastor was to the county jail. I was 26 years old, and I probably looked like a teenager. I did not have any identification available to show the jail clerk I really was a minister there to visit my church member. I did not look like a pastor. I looked suspicious! They kicked me out of the jail that day, assuming I was up to no good.

I learned funeral/grief ministry on the job. This is true, not because we did not discuss this ministry in seminary, but because preaching a funeral just cannot really be simulated. When I was three weeks into my first pastorate, I was asked to preach my first funeral. I was very nervous. I wasn't ready. I knew I wasn't ready. The first thing I thought to do was to go get advice from the funeral director who was also a deacon in my church. I worried he might lose respect for me when he recognized I did not know what to do, but he was very gracious and helpful. He knew exactly how to encourage me. Thank you for your support and encouragement, *Brad Kimbrough*. That week I also found it helpful to read everything *Paul Powell* wrote on how to minister to a grieving family.

- What is the impact of ministry on your wife and family?

I will start with the impact of the ministry on my wife, *Fallon*. When we were newly married, I was going to seminary, but I did not see myself becoming a pastor. I thought we would be involved in ministry in other ways. The first thing we did in full-time ministry was enter into pastoral ministry. This caught both of us off guard! Fallon became a "first lady" at the age of 23. She initially had anxiety about this, but she thrived in church ministry immediately. We quickly learned we enjoy working on projects and events together and shepherding together. Fallon is good at everything I am not good at, and that always has been a godsend!

My children have only known love and acceptance from the church. Our church people are like family to our kids. We like how our children are in

close fellowship with senior adults. It is as though they have many grandparents. I also love watching how being around people all of the time affects their personalities. I am grateful for the churches we have served and how they have treated our family. Our children are young right now, though, and I know it might get more complicated in the coming years.

- Who is your favorite Bible character (other than Jesus)? Why?

Although a difficult story, my favorite character is the prophet Habakkuk. The prophet is upset about the injustice he sees in his own people. When he voices this frustration and invites the Lord to intervene, God declares Habakkuk's people will be wiped out by the even-more-reprehensible Babylonians. That is not exactly the outcome Habakkuk hoped for when he cried out to God.

Anyone who has ever cried out to God hoping for a specific answer and God's response is very different than what they expected can relate to this story. Habakkuk did not give up on the Lord, though. He climbed to the highest point in the city on the watchtower to focus his attention on the Lord and seek clarity. Habakkuk did not get the answer he wanted at that time, but he still looked to the Lord, anyway!

He has this to say about how he is going to stick with God, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior" (Habakkuk 3:17).

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

I want two ministry "do overs" at least! I really need even more than that.

First Do-over: I once vented to church members about things regarding the church I was frustrated about. I noticed over time that when I did this, I

was souring my people to their church. I was poisoning my own well. I have determined this goes against everything we were and are trying to do to lead people to unity and dynamic ministry. Do over! I desire to be a positive leader and head encourager.

Second Do-over: For years I hand-wrote my sermons and put them in a filing system only I understood using manila folders. I was invited to speak at a youth camp in New Mexico several years ago, and I took with me the sermon file labeled "favorite." I left that file of sermons, all of my favorites, on an airplane on a flight to El Paso. I never saw them again. No backup. The sermons were gone! I still struggle to breathe when I think about it. Do-over! I hope someone got saved on the next flight reading through the "favorite" file.

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