

Dante Wright: Leading people to ‘aha moments’

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Dante Wright has been the senior pastor of Sweet Home Baptist Church—affectionately known as the Pinnacle of Praise—in Round Rock more than 11 years.

Under Wright’s leadership, the 100-year-old congregation has grown from 60 to more than 2,400 members. The multiplying church has moved several times and now is involved in the first of three construction phases on a 28.75-acre campus. The Pinnacle of Praise’s purpose and mission is “to Build Soldiers, to Reach Sinners and to Resemble the Savior.”

Wright is the second pastor to participate in the *Baptist Standard’s* new “Deep in the Hearts of Texans” column:

Personal

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

True Light Baptist Church in Blytheville, Ark., senior pastor

Mount Canaan Baptist Church in Shreveport, La., associate minister

Greater Emmanuel Baptist Church in Dallas, assistant to the pastor

- *Where did you grow up?*

Dallas

- *How did you come to faith in Christ?*

I attended a Fellowship of Christian Athletes breakfast at the age of 16. Upon hearing the testimony of Heisman Trophy winner Tim Brown, I accepted Christ as my personal Savior.

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

Associate's degree in applied arts, Cisco College

Bachelor of Science, Southeast Missouri State University

Master of Arts, Criswell College

Master of Divinity, Liberty University

Doctor of Ministry, Liberty University

Doctor of Philosophy (in progress), Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

- *Why do you feel called into ministry?*

I believe I have been called to be a voice for the voiceless, to fight injustice with God's justice and to teach others how to discover Jesus and to discover their influence.

- *What is your favorite aspect of ministry? Why?*

My favorite aspects of ministry are preaching, teaching and casting visions.

Preaching and teaching are about having an intimate relationship between God, the congregation and myself. The intimacy of discovering the truth of God's word over and over again brings joy to my heart. The moments of clarity for the congregation bring them closer to God, and I love being a part of that process. Preaching and teaching are awesome responsibilities, but when done with dedication, perseverance, diligence and love, these two aspects of ministry bring maturity and growth to the congregation.

Casting visions is what helps keep the church moving forward. There must be a visionary leader who looks to God for guidance and is forward thinking in his approach to ministry. That person ideally is an innovative, out-of-the-box thinker and even a risk taker. These are the qualities I possess, and they have proven successful in our ministry.

Ministry/church

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

What brings the greatest joy to me in congregational life is when, through the process of teaching, people have an “aha moment” of really understanding God’s message and make a decision to accept Christ as their personal Savior. Secondly is when members commit themselves to the study of God’s word—individually and corporately—for their spiritual growth.

- *How has your ministry or your perspective on ministry changed?*

One of the realizations of the ministry context in which I serve is the understanding of Millennials. They are not traditionalists in the sense of the church I grew up in. One of the things I have learned is how to present the same gospel message but use a different method.

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

If I could launch a new ministry, it would be a nationwide ministry of reconciliation, forgiveness and restoration.

There are many people in homes, churches and society in general who are hurting and broken as a result of dealing with the adversities of life, whatever they may be. Many are in need of being brought to a realization and sense of wholeness. There is a real call to meet these various needs on

a personal, spiritual and social level to bring about lasting healing and restoration.

About Baptists

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

There is a lack of unity in the overall body of Christ and continuing racial tension.

About Dante

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

Pastor Chester Williams, my childhood pastor, influenced by modeling godly male leadership before me.

Dr. Harry Blake modeled what a true shepherd looks like, and he was an activist for humanity.

Dr. Calvin Miller influenced me to fall in love with expository preaching.

Dr. J. Alfred Smith influenced me to preach a two-sided gospel that involves both spiritual and social transformation.

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

The real nuances of church administration. It is sad that many young preachers leave seminary with somewhat of an idea how to prepare and deliver a sermon, but few learn how to pastor a church which is vastly different.

- *What has been the impact of ministry on your family?*

Positive: My children are being raised and nurtured in the word.

Negative: My family has to share me far too often with the church, school and other activities in which I am involved.

- *Name some of your favorite books (other than the Bible) or authors, and explain why.*

On the Road to Jericho, by J. Alfred Smith, Sr.—an autobiography of a black activist and a successful black pastor who also was a community advocate.

Expository Preaching with Word Pictures, by Jack Hughes—gives a rich vividness to learning to preach with word pictures.

Jesus and the Disinherited, by Howard Thurman—a great picture of the love that Jesus has for the socially outcast, particularly the poor and disenfranchised.

- *What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?*

Psalm 23, because it displays the power and sufficiency of God.

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

David, because he was able to maintain a life devoted to God alone, despite grave missteps, sins and struggles. He made mistakes but continually sought renewal from God. Leadership is hard, and there are times when we become caught up in the power that comes with leading, but I believe David teaches us both the good and the ugly aspects of being a leader, of having God on our side, and of making mistakes that don't turn God away. David is complex yet is known as a man after God's own heart.

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

I would have surrendered to the call of God at age 16.

- *What advice would you give to young ministers as they mature in their*

vocation?

Make sure you try to receive your education young, before ministry becomes all-consuming.

Take administrative classes, or obtain a degree outside of ministry. It will broaden your leadership capabilities.

Read, read, read.