

# Darin Wood: Loving people, loving church, loving Sunday

August 24, 2016

**Darin Wood** has been pastor of First Baptist Church in Midland since February of this year. He is the fourth pastor featured in the *Baptist Standard's* new "Deep in the Hearts of Texans" column. To suggest a minister to be featured in this column or to apply to be featured, [click here](#).

## Background

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

For six and a half years, I was privileged to pastor Central Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Texas, as fine a congregation as I've ever had the honor to be a part of. I've also served as pastor at First Baptist Church in Frankston and Memorial Baptist Church in Corsicana. I was youth pastor at Immanuel Baptist Church in Shawnee, Okla., and a youth evangelism intern at the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

- *Where did you grow up?*

I grew up in Joshua, Texas.

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

Through the influence of my mother, Judy, and grandmother Aline Terrell, I came to Christ when I was 8 years old. My grandmother patiently took me to a Vacation Bible School at First Baptist Church of Blue Ridge, where the message of the gospel began to take hold. Upon returning home, my patient and loving mother continued pointing me toward Christ. Thus, in April 1977, I gave my life to Christ.

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

After graduating from Joshua High School, I earned a Bachelor of Arts degree at Dallas Baptist University in 1990, a Master of Divinity of degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1993 and a Ph.D. in New Testament from Southwestern in 2006.

## **Ministry/church**

- *Why do you feel called into ministry?*

When I was 15 years old, I knew the Spirit of God was stirring me to action. While I had no idea what that meant, there were two men, Dave Steward and Keith Habermas, who did. Patiently, lovingly and faithfully, they helped me sort through what I felt God saying to me. I didn't feel particularly qualified—for that matter, I still don't—but I felt confident in saying ministry was what God had called me to. 33 years later, I still do.

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

I love being with people! I enjoy preaching—the preparation and the presentation I find exhilarating! But at the end of the day, I enjoy serving people. For me, the most beloved title I possess at church is “Shepherd.” A shepherd isn't a cowboy. Cowboys push from behind, using fear and intimidation to accomplish their purposes. They have no clear feelings for their charges. A shepherd, however, leads from the front. He has the trust of his charges, a trust that has been earned through patient and faithful service. Shepherding definitely takes more time and energy, but that's the nature of Jesus' calling to follow his path as the “Great Shepherd.”

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

Seeing lives changed by the power of the gospel! That's what fires up my soul! Seeing people understand the power of the gospel to change their

lives, their families and their direction causes joy to well up within me in ways I cannot explain.

A close second is Sundays. I really love Sunday mornings. Being blessed with the privilege of communicating the powerful word of God is something I don't take lightly! I usually arrive about an hour before our first service to pray for those coming and to prayerwalk the auditorium. The excitement of people arriving, the joy music brings and getting the chance to preach makes Sunday morning my favorite part of congregational life.

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

I'd like to alter our perspective on change. Many see change as a threat, and thus they fear it and fight against it. They drag their feet and seek to derail it. Some even perceive the worst in others and their motives. I'd wish for us to come together on desiring the same thing. Instead of building our own little empires and protecting them valiantly, let's build and expand the kingdom of Christ!

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

How has my perspective stayed the same would be easier to answer! When I first started in ministry, I believed a strong Bible background and having the title "pastor" would automatically make me the leader. What I've learned is that you may enjoy the title "pastor," but truthfully, it is an earned role, won bit by bit, visit by visit, phone call by phone call, funeral by funeral, wedding by wedding, Sunday by Sunday. My perspective has changed that leadership is founded not on titles or background, but on earned experience together and passionate faithfulness. There's no substitute for faithfulness.

Another major shift since I launched in pastoral ministry in 1999 is the digital transition. When I started as a pastor, I took almost all pastoral calls on the church landline. Websites for churches were unheard of. The church

wanted me to be in touch, so they got me a pager. Social media was still several years away. Now, I rarely take pastoral calls anywhere but my cell phone. I spend a good bit of time texting with congregants and—in certain cases—have even done spiritual encouragement via text. Social media is a key ally, and I wouldn't know how to communicate if I couldn't do it through email! Our church, like many others, incorporates online Bible studies, allowing people to connect with discipleship regardless of where they are or what time it is! Thus, the days of "appointment" Bible studies have changed.

- *How do you expect congregational life to change in the next 10 to 20 years?*

The questions regarding LGBTQ and same-sex marriage will be seen in the same disdainful context as we look back at the Jim Crow laws. Among many younger church members, they have been thoroughly trained in the idea it's an equally acceptable lifestyle choice and therefore must be accepted by the church. I hope I'm wrong, but I don't believe I am.

There will be more of church life done digitally. Online giving will be almost ubiquitous, with little else available. People will download their worship guide instead of receive one in print.

- *What qualities do you look for in a congregation?*

A passion for Christ and his word. A zeal for missions. Love for one another. A willingness to laugh at one's own self. A prayer meeting that actually prays. An enthusiasm for Sunday instead of seeing it as a hurdle to overcome.

- *Name the three most significant challenges and/or influences facing your congregation.*

1. Leadership. We have several key roles vacant at this time. It's not that I

ran people off when I got here, but rather, through the leadership of the Spirit of God and through life circumstances, we have several key gaps.

2. Demographics. Our community and our church must come in closer context to one another. Midland is changing, and we must change with it if we're to win our "Jerusalem."

3. Refining our strategies. Like most long-term established churches, we have some long-term established strategies. But anything can be improved.

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

Forgive the "scatter-shot" nature of this answer. What I wish more people knew about pastoring is this:

Pastoring is not as easy as it looks. I can't "clock out" and leave it at the office. There are times I wish I really did only work one day a week.

Even when I'm at home, I spend time praying through the meetings and conversations of the day, asking the Lord if I led people the right way or if my influence should've been pushed in another direction.

Occasionally, I fret over a missed evangelistic opportunity or responding to critic the wrong way. More than one night, I've laid awake praying for a church member in crisis.

Pastors are human. We make mistakes and feel the pain of choices we wish we would've made. We have families who love us, miss us when we have meetings that take us away from home at inopportune times and weep when they hear us criticized. Most every pastor cringes when someone says, "I love you pastor, but ..." or the equally popular, "Well, you know, people are saying ...."

We hurt when members of our church pass away—and we frequently have

to postpone our own grief to help others with theirs.

Sunday comes really quickly some weeks. No matter what the week has held, we'll be expected to have a word from the Lord for our church.

What I'd say to our congregants is recognize you've called a man who will do his best to serve the Lord with all the passion and energy he can muster, but at the end of the day, he is still a man.

### **About Baptists**

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

How do we accomplish our mission as a church and engage culture without surrendering our convictions?

How do we connect with those different from ourselves?

How do we speak publically about difficult issues without surrendering control of the conversation?

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

Surrender the idea that Baptists can operate independently. We need parachurch organizations and partners to serve with.

Drop some of the bureaucracy within the mission boards. I understand the need for administrative decision making, but to navigate some of these channels is an undue—and expensive!—burden.

Stop with the resolutions at the conventions attempting to engage culture. I understand the principle behind it—we want to speak as a group to the issues of the day. From my perspective, however, all the resolutions serve

to do is to confirm the worst of what people believe—we're out of touch and holier-than-thou. It's as if some resolutions are saying, "Sit down, and let me tell you all the ways you're doing it wrong." I believe we'd be stronger without them.

For our Baptist General Convention of Texas, move the annual meeting permanently to the summer. If we wish to connect with a younger demographic, holding our meetings in November doesn't accomplish that.

### **About Darin**

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

My grandmother and mother. Those two ladies were the first and definitely the most formational.

Dave Steward, an RA director at First Baptist Church in Joshua—my home church—and passionate lover of Jesus!

Chuck Flowers (former BGCT youth ministry leader), who hired me for reasons I'll never understand and showed a reckless confidence in me.

James Lankford, a friend and cohort in every measure who constant encouragement and friendship have endured more than few path changes for both of us.

The late Dr. David Edwards from First Baptist Church in Corsicana, who taught me PhDs make effective pastors.

Dr. David Dykes of Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler, who showed me how to lead. His interest in me and belief in me is something I'll never get over.

Sears at Seminary South Mall, where I worked throughout my seminary stay. They taught me something about leadership and thinking on my feet

that has benefitted me far more than many of seminary classes did.

Clement of Alexandria. Obviously, we never met, but he was the topic of my dissertation. His passion for God's word and communicating it to his contemporaries still lights up my heart!

My father-in-law, Rev. David Brown of East Louisiana Baptist Association. His encouragement and sage wisdom have proven to be timely over and over again.

Finally, my wife, Julie, who has shown extraordinary patience and counsel in our journey together. Much of who I am as a person, as a man and as a pastor, I owe to her.

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

Leadership principles. The belief that the one with the most Bible knowledge is automatically the leader doesn't apply anymore. Some of the least meaningful classes I had in seminary were the so-called "practical" classes. Forget praxis; teach leadership principles. The praxis will always be in flux, and cultural shifts will force us to alter it as well. But well-positioned leadership principles can grant wisdom to guide through challenging seasons.

- *What is the impact of ministry on your family?*

Too many nights, I have meetings that stretch well past bedtime for my son, Joshua, so I miss out on that. Other times, Sunday is anything but a day of rest. My day off sometimes gets interrupted. I can't count how many times I've taken my wife and son to the hospital with me, left them in the truck and made calls. Funerals don't wait for business hours, and weddings are usually an all-weekend deal for me. Generally speaking, my family loves what I do. But there are times ....



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

*Courageous Leadership* by Bill Hybels. When it came out in 2002, I was a young pastor. It was formational for me.

*The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert Coleman. Many of the concepts regarding evangelism and discipleship found therein, I've sought to incorporate into my work.

Nearly anything by Henry Cloud, but most especially *Boundaries* and *Boundaries for Leaders*. Dr. Cloud's analysis of leadership seems to resonate with me.

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

When I was in college, I read and understood [Acts 17:6](#) for the first time. The idea of a rag-tag group of evangelists terrifying the local leaders intrigued me and caused me to pray "Lord, let that be my journey!"

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

The Biblical character Joshua. His courage, passion and leadership have always inspired my imagination! It doesn't hurt that I grew up in Joshua, Texas. It also shouldn't be surprising that we named our son Joshua!

- *Name something about you that would surprise your church.*

I waste a lot of brain space on lyrics of 1980's music, both pop and country western. I know almost every line from the Three Stooges films.

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

Responding to critics. Earlier in ministry, I took criticism in the worst way possible. I tended to avoid my critics and ostracize them from leadership

opportunities. I can't really say when the Lord began to change my heart on this, but I can say I've seen some of that change. I wish it had changed sooner. Now, older and wiser, I do my best to listen well to their critique and draw what I can from it. I do my best to engage them and move toward them if they will allow it.

## **Bonus**

Write and answer a question you wish we had asked.

- *What's the best part of being a pastor?*

Getting to be there for the most important parts of life with people you love. Whether it's the high points, like the birth of a child, or the low points of losing someone we love, having the privilege of loving people through those moments is huge when it's people you love. You cannot pastor people you don't love. You cannot love people you don't trust. My commitment to my calling as a pastor invites me to love Jesus and to love people—even those who are hard to love.

**Read other “Deep in the Hearts of Texans” columns on ...**

- [Bob Roberts](#)
- [Dante Wright](#)
- [Brent McDougal](#)