

David Garland: Pastor, teacher, scholar

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David Garland has served Baylor University's [Truett Theological Seminary](#) since 1997 and is a member of [First Baptist Church in Waco](#). 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

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

I taught 21 years at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and was the inaugural holder of the Ernest and Mildred Hogan Professor of New Testament Interpretation.

Where did you grow up?

My parents were Canadian Baptist missionaries to India. After returning to the United States in 1946, my father was pastor of First Baptist Church in Crisfield, Md. My parents lost a child in India, and I was born in Crisfield 12 years later in 1947.

I grew up in Baltimore, Md., where my father was pastor of the First Baptist Church, founded in 1773.

How did you come to faith in Christ?

Through the witness and prayers of my grandparents who were missionaries to India, parents, assistant pastors, and faithful Sunday School teachers and Royal Ambassadors leaders.

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

I spent two years at the United States Naval Academy before belatedly heeding a call to ministry and graduating from Oklahoma Baptist University.

I earned a Master of Divinity and Ph.D. from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and did post-graduate work at Eberhard-Karls Universität in Tübingen, Germany, and Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia.

About education

Why do you feel called into education?

I felt called to be a pastor but was asked to stay to teach at Southern Seminary after graduating with my Ph.D. It allowed my wife Diana to finish her Ph.D. at the University of Louisville. Then, I received tenure, published some books and realized perhaps this was what God intended for me to do. I also was able to teach and serve as an interim pastor to 17 churches.

What is your favorite aspect of education? Why?

I love teaching students *in person*—not online—and I love the opportunity and encouragement to write.

What is your favorite class to teach? Why?

I love teaching the Gospels, and I also love teaching the Pauline Epistles

and Revelation.

What one aspect of education would you like to change?

I would like more emphasis to be placed on developing competency in ministry, which is not necessarily reflected by grade point average.

How has your place in education or your perspective on education changed?

I have been a professor, an associate dean and dean in a seminary; an interim provost and president of a university. Therefore, I have seen education from multiple perspectives. I absolutely am convinced, while education at schools that are not faith-based might seem luminous, it is all sound and fury.

The struggle to provide excellence in education and to remain faithful to a Christian/biblical worldview is difficult for colleges and universities, but it is imperative.

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

1. Cost.
2. Maintaining Christian distinctiveness for Christian schools. See what has happened in history to so many schools originally founded by Christians.
3. Perceiving education as only training for a job—a high-paying, high-status job. Education should accomplish far more than that.

What do you wish more people knew about education?

It is worth every penny spent.

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

I started in engineering and went to an all-male engineering-specialty high school—Baltimore Polytechnic Institute. I wish I had the wisdom and opportunity to major in classics. It would have helped me be a better New Testament student.

What are you most pleased about from your life in education?

I am pleased my books have been translated into Korean, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian and soon in Arabic. I wonder if and how God might use them among people who live in a quite different culture.

About Baptists

Why are you Baptist?

I was born Baptist and educated by Baptists. I have become convinced from a lifetime of in-depth study of the Scriptures, what Baptists identify as Baptist distinctives are profoundly biblical.

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

1. The incursion of secular values and civil religion in churches, and the loss of evangelical fervor.
2. The danger of pride and arrogance.
3. The glorification of super-pastors.
4. The loss of a mission vision that unites Baptists of all stripes.

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

I think humans mistakenly believe if only things would change according to what they think is best, all would be well. It is a delusion, because none of us have God's wisdom or fully grasp God's purposes. God is in control and will use—or not use—the people called Baptist as God deems best.

About David

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

My mentors were my professors at Southern Seminary. They taught me to love the Scriptures and made me want to learn to read them in the original languages, to understand their historical contexts and how to apply them to life.

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

P.G. Wodehouse. He makes me both laugh and appreciate the glories of the English language.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

I have no favorite verse, but I love the Gospel of Mark. I have written three books on Mark, and I enjoy its narrative subtleties that whiz by many readers and go unappreciated.

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

Paul. To pick only one item from his list of hardships in 2 Corinthians

11:24-31: Who would submit to being whipped five times with 39 lashes simply to maintain his standing in the synagogue so he could continue to preach the gospel to them, except someone unswervingly committed to his calling to proclaim the gospel and to win the lost among his people? It is a saint who confesses his perseverance and all he does comes only through God's grace that makes him sufficient.

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

I used to box at U.S. Naval Academy.