

Dennis Wiles: Front-row seat to watch God's transforming power

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Dennis Wiles is pastor of First Baptist Church in Arlington, where he has served 15 years. He shares his background and thoughts on ministry in the *Baptist Standard's* "Deep in the Hearts of Texans." To suggest a Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated 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?*

I have served as pastor to several churches:

Jimtown Baptist Church, Jimtown, Okla.

First Baptist Church, Mertens

Southside Baptist Church, Tyler

Calvary Baptist Church, Garland

First Baptist Church, Huntsville, Ala.

- *Where did you grow up?*

I was reared in Birmingham, Ala.

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

My parents were very strong Christians. We attended Wylam Baptist Church in Birmingham. I became a follower of Jesus during my senior year in high school.

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

Bachelor of arts in psychology, University of Alabama-Birmingham

Master of divinity, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Doctor of philosophy in church history, Southwestern Seminary

Ministry/church

- *Why do you feel called into ministry?*

As a junior in college, I just began to sense God was calling me to serve him in ministry. I sought wise counsel, prayed and studied the Bible to seek his direction. He just spoke powerfully to me in every way. Since that time, God has continued to affirm that call in my life.

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

I love everything about ministry. I love people! Ministry is about people. I love to preach, teach, shepherd, witness and lead. My life is just lived out in and through the local church. It is fun!

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

There is so much about congregational life that I love. I have a front-row seat in watching God transform people through his power and presence. I love to see God at work in the lives of people. Then, I love to watch those who have been redeemed by his grace and healed by his love become ambassadors of this incredible gospel. What a privilege to be a minister!

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

That one is easy—business meetings! Praise God, no one will care about Robert's Rules of Order in eternity!

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

I think I have learned to trust God more deeply. When I was younger, I had the tendency to rely on my hard work and ministry efforts—sometimes to the exclusion of truly trusting God. I have learned through the years that God loves the church more than I do. He is at work through the church. I am still learning—but I trust him so much more now.

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

Actually, we have done it! I have felt led to lead my church to become a mission-sending congregation. We are training and sending cross-cultural workers to live long-term in cross-cultural settings.

We also have launched a mission entity that enables other churches to do the same. This is a dream come true for me. It has personalized the Great Commission for my church and for other churches.

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

I have been blessed by the people of God through the years. I am so appreciative of how God has used them in my life. I think sometimes I wish they knew just how burdened pastors feel for their congregations. It is hard to explain the heart of a shepherd. We carry a burden that never goes away.

About Baptists

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

We don't actually live in a post-denominational world. Obviously, denominations remain real and still serve a purpose. However, Baptists are facing some crucial decisions in the very near future.

Both the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Southern Baptist Convention have been deeply affected by the fringes of their respective perspectives. Many Baptists like me are searching for a more reasonable option for community and missional investment.

I believe a movement in the Baptist family that is conservative in theology and generous in spirit eventually will emerge as a realistic option for thousands of Baptists. I hope I live long enough to be a part of it.

About Dennis

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

I have had so many!

My *dad* taught me about the value of family and how important being a good father impacts a family.

My *father-in-law* taught me the importance of being a provider and the value of a strong work ethic.

Dr. *Jack Gray* led me to take my personal spiritual formation seriously.

Dr. *William Estep* taught me to invest myself in scholarly pursuits.

My childhood pastor, Brother *Clyde Meredith*, exemplified what it means to be a pastor, and I am inspired by him to this very day.

Paul Powell took me under his wing and mentored me in every area of pastoral leadership. I can't imagine where I would be today without Paul.

And *Mike Fritscher*, pastor of Cottonwood Baptist Church in Dublin,

mentored me in the mission-sending journey. I have been blessed by these mentors and many others along the way.

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

My church would be shocked to know that I am a huge Auburn fan. OK, actually, they wouldn't be surprised.

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