

# **Dr. Fritz Williams: 'Transformation begins with transparency'**

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Dr. Fritz Williams is the pastor of [First Baptist Church in Lockhart](#) and is part of the core faculty at [Stark College and Seminary](#). From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on the church and ministry. To suggest a BGCT-affiliated minister 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 served as youth minister, assistant to the pastor, and minister to young adults and seniors at Antioch Missionary Baptist Church in San Antonio.

I taught private and public school—five years at Antioch Christian Academy and three years in the San Antonio Independent School District as a middle school science teacher.

The also taught at Guadalupe Bible College and Wayland Baptist University.

### **Where did you grow up?**

The “Barbecue Capital of Texas,” Lockhart is my place of birth and where I was raised.

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

When I was 5, my home church had Vacation Bible School, and the teacher gave the invitation in the classroom. I went to the front of the class and declared I wanted to accept Christ and be baptized. She immediately called the pastor in, for they felt since I was so young I was not ready.

Reflecting on the experience now, I understand their concern with a 5-year-old giving a confession of faith. The pastor took me aside and counseled me and asked me questions for two days until he determined this young man is special to God, and we can't hinder his confession of faith and baptism. The following Sunday I was baptized and welcomed into the family of God.

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

- Lockhart Independent School District, K-12.
- Angelo State University, Bachelor of Science in kinesiology.
- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Master of Divinity in biblical languages.
- United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, Doctor of Ministry.

## **About education**

### **Why do you feel called into education?**

Education for me is an extension of my call to preach and pastor. The teaching setting in education provides a greater opportunity for me to give back to humanity and community what Christ has entrusted to me, through human transparency to be his servant to all humanity. It is the gathering of all my human experience to be transparent in an environment that often fosters non-transparency and idol-isolation.

I believe the educator must not omit that transformation begins with

transparency.

## **How does being a Christian influence your work in education?**

What influences my work in education is the same as in pastoring—the opportunity to be a witness to the great things God has done and is doing in the expanse of his creation, as well as a mentor or encouraging voice to those in need.

## **What is your favorite aspect of education? Why?**

My favorite aspect of education is being in a spiritual and social environment where the student and teacher have opportunities to connect in an academic setting and communicate on a higher level of learning, and share praxis to gain an enriching and encouraging experience for the benefit of the (Christian) community.

## **What one aspect of education gives you the greatest joy?**

Looking at the faces and listening to the responses of students when they are at a point of challenge and when revelation or illumination connects with human understanding of the subject matter being taught—when the divine connects with humanity.

## **What is your favorite class to teach? Why?**

I enjoy teaching hermeneutics—biblical interpretation—and preaching. I also enjoy when there is an opportunity to teach Black church history or Black church ministry.

## **What one aspect of education would you like to**

## **change?**

The one-size-fits-all model or perspective on education.

The inclusion of African American and Mexican/Latino church history or experience from a historical-cultural perspective, regardless of the majority of the student population. I believe these histories need to be included to provide a greater contribution of the races and their culture.

The tragedy of the educational system is the omission of the greater contributions of other people groups within history. We possibly would discover other models that would benefit the educational system.

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

Examining my place and perspective in education as an African American has its challenges, but with a balanced mindset, I've overcome some challenges. Many of those challenges have been based upon race and capacity: Is he or she capable of communicating, analyzing and performing like the perceived dominant culture?

The major one is: We were looking at another candidate, but he or she was not interested in the position. So, we hired you.

Competition and comparison are ingrained in the American psyche, but I wish it would change in the educational environment. There are many underappreciated, intelligent and talented people who would do well in higher education if that model wasn't negative to creative people who have the knowledge base and the credentials.

## **How do you expect education to change in the next 10 to 20 years?**

I hope, with the growing shift in the current and upcoming generations, for

education to remain a necessity. I expect to see higher education, especially in theology, retain a Christ-centered focus and a standard of excellence for Christian theology and ministry in America.

Technology will play a pivotal role, but we must be interdisciplinary in creating a learning environment via the classroom experience.

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

1. Race.
2. Historical-cultural identity of minorities.
3. Apologetics.

### **What do you wish more people knew about education?**

Education is the key to greater opportunities, and you are never too old to obtain an education. Education may be expensive at some institutions, but there are many accredited, affordable and accessible institutions.

### **What is the impact of education on your family?**

We have been fortunate as a family to have elders who encouraged us to get our education. On my mother's side of the family, we had great-uncles who reminded us of the sacrifice their parents made during a time when it was extremely difficult for Blacks to get a higher education. These uncles told us if they did it, then it is very important for each one of us to get an education to have a better life. Repeating these stories inspired us to go for it.

My parents continued to do the same for my sister and me. While we do have family members with bachelor and master's degrees, my sister and I are the only family members I know of with terminal degrees. Because of these influences and family impact, I now have children with bachelors and master's degrees.

# About Baptists

## Why are you Baptist?

When I was a young, a well-aged pastor stood and said, “I’m a Baptist because Jesus was a Baptist, and John was, too.”

Too funny, right, but I believe in the Baptist model, baptism upon confession, and fulfilling and living out the Great Commission.

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

The Southern Baptist Convention must settle the issues of race, especially with African Americans, and the convention’s negative views toward critical race theory.

Our churches, congregationally, need to plan for succession, and develop the young adults and youth to know the foundational practices and the importance of the practices for the sustaining of the church and Baptist heritage.

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

Where do I start, and how could I end? Church polity and autonomy as the Baptist way of life, while it has been a strength for us, also could be our greatest weakness. While some do maintain loyalty to the convention when it comes to structure and issues, we could benefit or learn from other denominational models to create a more viable experience in Baptist life.

# About Dr. Williams

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

The Apostle Paul shared with Timothy one of his greatest mentors was his grandmother. The late Esther Thompson was my grandmother. She provided a foundational experience for her grandchildren when we spent the summer “in the country.” She and my grandfather made sure we had a solid Christian foundation. She made sure, like our parents, we went to Sunday school with her at the little country church for which her father—our great-grandfather—provided the land. She sang hymns and prayed over us to put us to sleep at night, and taught us Bible verses.

My parents both pressed upon me the necessity of being a good person and Christian example. I remember my father, who was and is still a deacon, took me as a boy to help out the elderly and those needing assistance with daily living.

Another influence was the late Pastor Earl Jackson Sr. He and his late wife were my godparents. He was my childhood pastor and always shared his wisdom in a practical and applicable way. He was an outstanding preacher and gave me great sermonic advice when I began preaching.

The late Rev. Dr. E. Thurman Walker pastored the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church and hired me three weeks after I joined the church. He told me he loved my spirit, and I had a way of connecting with people, especially the youth. He felt God telling him to hire me as the youth minister. This began the development of a 20-year relationship, as he entrusted me with being creative in ministry and exposing the youth to new experiences in Christ, as well as providing an opportunity to grow my ministerial capacity. He always said to me and other ministers, “Your gift will make room for you.”

Pastor T. L. Garner Jr. influenced me to use the gift God gave me and not worry about the cultural norms in preaching and serving. He constantly said: "Be respectful of the elders, but don't allow no one to underestimate you and the gift God has given you. And when you get the opportunity, you must always be ready and bring it!"

Dr. Harry Hunt, my Old Testament professor, and Dr. William Tillman were my greatest academic influence at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. They displayed the grace of God to me as a human being, as well as an African American in the seminary environment.

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

- *The History and Heritage of African American Churches* by L.H. Welch Jr.
- *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* and *God of the Oppressed* by James Cone.
- *Jesus and the Disinherited* by Howard Thurman.
- *My Moral Odyssey* and *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet* by Samuel DeWitt Proctor.
- *Doctrine that Dances* by Robert Smith.

There are a few more, but these books have served as a foundation for personal and professional development and focus.

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

Psalm 62:1-2. God alone is my salvation, my protector and my stability.

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

I have two favorite people in the Bible: Jeremiah, for he prophesied the



message of God under extreme circumstances, but still held true to his call; and Peter, who although viewed unnecessarily with great scrutiny, stands bold—despite failure—to lead and preach the gospel of Christ.

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

I love hunting, but I can't stand snakes.