

# **Dr. Ray Malone: ‘God said it and put this fire within me’**

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Dr. Ray Malone is the Texas Baptists’ director of human resources. From deep in the heart of one Texan, Malone shares his background and thoughts on the church and ministry. 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](#).

*EDITOR’S NOTE: This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

## **Background**

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

Of my 25 years in ministry, I served 12 years as a senior pastor of three churches—six years at Greater Beulah Baptist Church in Dothan, Ala.; the previous three years at Greater New Hope Baptist Church in Sherman; and before that, three years at Shiloh Baptist Church in Oakwood.

I served one year at Friendship Baptist Church of the Colony; three years as the executive pastor and director of ministerial training at The McKinney First Baptist Church in McKinney; three years as the chief of staff and director of the ministerial alliance at Praise Temple Full Gospel Baptist Church in Dallas; one year at Abundant Life Cathedral in Houston; one year at New Hope Baptist Church in Royse City; and two years at Greater Zion Baptist Church in Huntsville.

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

I grew up between two cities in East Texas—Mount Vernon in my early adolescence and Fairfield in my teen years. I consider Fairfield the place where I grew up, as it's where I learned the most about life and this crazy world we live in.

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

I came to faith on my 25th birthday—July 21, 1996—when I made Christ my personal savior.

I was baptized at an early age, about 8 years old. I remember when the invitation to come to Christ was given at church, I came forward and took the pastor's hand, and that's when the trouble started. For the life of me, I couldn't understand the questions.

He asked if I believed in Jesus, if I believed he died for me, and—here is the doozy—if I believed he was going to come back for me and take me to live with him. I was lost. I couldn't understand the concept of what I was being asked, but since I was told to say, "yes," I obeyed with little to no understanding of what I was agreeing to.

When I was 21, I suffered a career-ending knee injury while playing college football. I tore my ACL, PCL and my peroneal nerve in my knee. The ACL and PCL injuries were bad, but shredding my peroneal nerve was catastrophic. The peroneal nerve controls movement and sensation to the lower leg, foot and toes. By tearing that nerve, I instantly developed a five-degree foot drop that ultimately left me handicapped.

I knew something was tragically wrong on the ride home to my parents' house after leaving Northwest Louisiana stadium that day. I could feel a burning sensation in my leg from mid-thigh to my lower calf. I tried to believe it was just the pain from the torn knee ligaments, but that burning

sensation was so powerful. Little did I know, the burning sensation was my nerve dying.

At the time, being an athlete on scholarship was my life. Now that my football career was over, it left me in a dark place. Because I was so focused on sports, my relationship with my parents and brother suffered greatly. So, for three years, I was hurting emotionally, relationally, physically and spiritually. I needed help, but didn't know how to ask for it. I needed peace, but didn't know where to find it. I needed healing, but didn't know who to talk to about it.

On my 25th birthday, I found myself sitting in the back of Greater Zion Baptist Church in Huntsville. I remember choosing to go to church that day, not for the word of God, but so I wouldn't be lonely. I did not go to hear the word preached or to fellowship with the saints. I went, because I couldn't talk to anyone, and I felt truly worthless. I went because being "alone" in a crowded church was so much better than being "alone" with no one close to you.

But halfway through the service, Pastor Michael C. Davis stood for altar prayer, and he said, "Just let it go!" That's when the Holy Spirit entered my life.

Just as in the book of Acts 2:3 where there was a mighty rushing wind and tongues of cloven fire sat on the apostle, the same thing happened to me. But at that time, I never had read the book of Acts. I didn't know about the Holy Spirit. I only knew that particular moment felt so good, it had to be God. As the tears began to fall, I surrendered my life to Christ and have been running for the Lord since.

**Where were you educated, and what degrees did you**

## **receive?**

I completed three years at Sam Houston State University before getting injured. Then, I left college and worked for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice for five years.

I received a Bachelor of Arts and Sciences in 1999 and a master's degree in professional development in 2004 from Dallas Baptist University.

I received a Doctor of Theology in 2009 from Andersonville Theological Seminary in Camilla, Ga.

## **About ministry life**

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

After my experience with God, I set my heart to seek him through prayer. I was praying late morning 30 days later. I was in my bedroom on my knees, praying fervently. I began asking God what he wanted me to do, because I knew he didn't save me just for me. I knew there was something I was to do, but I had no idea.

At that precise moment, internally it was like I was in a hot, open field with no shade, but I could see a looming storm cloud on the distant horizon. I was a bag of nerves. I wanted and needed the refreshing of the storm, but I secretly was afraid of its force. At that moment, the storm landed, and God spoke to me.

He said one word, and the word seemed to come from everything around me—the floor, the TV, the closet, even from the bed itself. It was as if everything within a 20-foot circumference spoke his voice in unison, and it said, "Preach."

I was shocked, dumbfounded. I asked for clarity. I just had read about

Gideon's fleece (Judges 6:36-40) and how Gideon asked God to make the ground wet and the fleece dry to secure Gideon's faith.

I asked God a second time to secure mine, repeat secretly what I had heard audibly. I just needed confirmation, to make sure I had heard correctly, and he said it a second time. That's why I feel the call to preach—because God said it and put this fire within me that still burns to this day.

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

When I'm preaching and see the light bulb turn on in the listener's mind. That is the moment I remember the words of Professor Cleophus Larue: "Every sermon should instruct, delight and persuade the listener to follow the directions of God." I know if they got it, they will follow it.

### **What one aspect of ministry would you like to change?**

Although it absolutely is correct and necessary to have sound doctrinal preaching, if I could change one aspect of ministry, it would be the inner turmoil I go through on a weekly basis to make sure I've crafted a sermon that pleases God and touches souls.

The biblical word "study"—crafting the sermon—I absolutely enjoy. But the emotional turmoil with its many questions—Is this point clear? How will they receive this? What happens if I start stuttering again? I'm not qualified to teach this word. What if I trip over my feet and fall flat on my face? Why would they listen to me?—are weekly visitors to my spirit.

It's the enemy trying to dissuade me by making me feel inadequate to preach God's word. In truth, we all are inadequate, but I know my calling to preach the gospel ultimately is secure.

### **What did you learn on the job you wish you learned in**

## **seminary?**

Sadly, I wish I would have learned more about the venom in people's hearts. Seminary taught me about God. Pastoring taught me about people.

While in seminary, I ruthlessly judged Moses for getting so frustrated with the people of God that he smote the rock instead of speaking to it. Now, I know why Moses struck the rock. I thank Moses for only hitting it one time, because there have been instances when I still would be beating the rock years later.

The people of God might be sheep, but sheep have very sharp teeth.

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

I would have to say ministry itself has had a very positive impact on my family. It is a blessing to know my family is saved.

However, I failed in the early years of ministry. I did not set proper boundaries for my family. Being a pastor and following God is easy for me as a person. I am committed. However, it was difficult for my family, because I wore the pastoral hat 24/7 and did not take the necessary time to be a husband, father, son or brother.

I placed the church before my family, but not God. My personal relationship with God is first and foremost in my life. Second, comes my responsibility to the household I lead. Third, comes my responsibility to the church as its pastor. Paul highlighted this principle in discussing the qualifications for church leadership: "For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God" (1 Timothy 3:5)?

I learned I couldn't be pastor all the time. My wife needed a husband, my children needed a father, my parents needed a son, and my brother needed a brother. God's main responsibility is covering the church. My main responsibility is covering my family.

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

Our greatest giving generation is being received to Glory, and while millennials give a portion to the church, they try to dictate where those funds are given. The church must account for it. Our practices, giving measures, even our leadership has to change.

The Hispanic population will be the majority in Texas by 2040. This means the Caucasian population—the majority since the founding of this country—will be the minority, and the body of Christ must make that adjustment as well.

In my book *The Joshua Dilemma*, I describe how the body of Christ desperately needs properly trained mentors who must shape the next generation of leaders spiritually, so we do not repeat the mistakes of Judges 2:10—“When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord, nor the work which he had done for Israel.”

## **Who supports you the most in ministry?**

My wife Brenda. She always has been by my side. Through the trials, troubles and tests God has placed in my path, she has been there. When I am troubled, she has an open ear. When I am frustrated, she is a soothing voice. When I am angry, she is my peace. I would not be where I am without her, and I honor her for being my wife and my best friend.

## **About Baptists**

### **Why are you Baptist?**

I am Baptist because of its foundation. I can be traditional Baptist, contemporary Baptist, primitive Baptist, National Baptist, Full Gospel

Baptist or any other type of Baptist, and it still fits. It doesn't really matter, because the foundation is so wide. There is room for every type of worship within the Baptist covering, and I love that.

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

We must learn to practice what we preach. The world is watching our actions and reactions, and they're judging us ruthlessly.

For instance, the 2021 Southern Baptist Convention was televised, and much of the infighting had to deal with sexual assaults within the church, potential cover-ups of sexual abuse, issues with [Resolution 9](#) and trying to rebuff critical race theory.

While all three of these topics do warrant attention, the spirit in which each one was addressed across the board left many things lacking, and sadly, it left us with a black eye before the world.

We must remember that being a Christian isn't always convenient. We must be Christian, and demonstrate our Christianity even when topics, subjects and issues pop up with which we vehemently disagree. We must be an example to the world, not a cautionary exhibit for the world to see and think: "I don't want to be part of that group. They don't show the love of Christ among themselves."

## **About Dr. Malone**

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

Pastor Michael C. Davis of Greater Zion Missionary Baptist Church was my first pastor and the man who birthed me into ministry. He also inspired me



to seek spiritual education.

Bishop Larry Brandon of Praise Temple Full Gospel Baptist Church taught me excellence in ministry.

Pastor Roy Cotton, former director of Texas Baptists' African American Ministries and current director of Texas Baptists' Ambassador Program, keeps me focused and my eyes on the prize.

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

My favorite Bible verse changes with the issues I am facing in life at a particular moment in my life. When I was young in ministry, it was Philippians 1:6—"Being confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."

When I was dealing with various trials, it was Job 19:25-26—"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and he shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God."

As of late, it's David's words in Psalms 37:25—"I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread."