

Dr. Edward Wagner: From a military career to God's call

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Dr. Edward Wagner has been senior pastor of [Cornerstone Baptist Church](#) in Killeen since 1996. From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on church and ministry. To suggest a Baptist General Convention of Texas-affiliated minister to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

Background

Dr. Wagner was pastor of Gospel Congregation at West Point from 1980 to 1982, pastor of Camp Red Cloud Korea from 1986 to 1987, assistant pastor of Providence Missionary Baptist Church from 1990 to 1992 and assistant pastor of Comanche Chapel from 1992 to 1995.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Rayville, La.

How did you come to faith in Christ?

I had a Sunday school teacher, Ms. Della Woods, who taught me about Christ and never gave up on me. When I did not go to Sunday school, she would come and find me and bring me to Sunday school.

Every day, I walked by her house on my way from public school. She would call me onto her porch and make me read the Sunday school lesson to her. She lived a Christian life and she modeled Christ in my life. This led me to accept Christ into my life.

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

- Bachelor of Science in mathematics from Southern University
- Bachelor of Science in civil engineering from Louisiana Tech
- Master of Arts in management from Webster University
- Master of Arts in civil engineering from Louisiana Tech
- Ph.D. in philosophy of religion from Trinity Theological Seminary

About ministry life

Why do you feel called into ministry?

My calling was an experience I shall never forget. I was reading the book of Revelation, and I began to cry as I read about the “End-Times.” The Lord spoke to me clearly and told me he was calling me to the ministry. I was not accepting at first because I had a great military career, and I had planned to spend 40 years in the military. Each assignment after that, the Lord placed people into my life to confirm his calling; so, finally in 1978, I accepted the call.

What is your favorite aspect of ministry? Why?

My favorite aspect of ministry is preparation—when I spend time with the Holy Spirit and he speaks clarity into my spirit—so I can preach with clarity and simplicity.

What one aspect of ministry gives you the greatest joy?

Helping people. It may be helping them understand a Scripture with which they have been struggling, helping them heal a broken marriage, helping them reconcile a broken relationship or helping them just by listening. I get so much joy out of helping people.

What one aspect of ministry would you like to change?

Nothing! There is nothing I would like to change. Sure, I have challenges, but I have learned to accept challenges are just God's way of growing me and building my character.

How has your ministry or your perspective on ministry changed?

I used to assume every preacher I met was just as loyal and devoted to the call of Christ as I am. I no longer have that assumption, and that has led me to work to get them to that place.

Do you mentor anyone?

Yes, I do. I mentor several young ministers. I have teaching meetings with them twice a month and have breakfast with them once a month.

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

I expect we will have smaller congregations, or at least smaller groups within the church body, because needs are increasing constantly, and the level of biblical knowledge within the general population is decreasing constantly. Therefore, the structure of the church must change in order to meet those needs.

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

A health ministry because I find we are not taking health seriously. Young people are spending too much time with video games and social media, and the rest of us are not getting proper exercise and taking care of our health.

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

1. Leadership—getting all of the leaders to embrace servant leadership.
2. Leadership—getting the right people on the bus and in the right seat on the bus.
3. Leadership—functioning without a sense of entitlement, not thinking you are entitled to a level of respect different than that which you give simply because you are the president of the auxiliary.

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

I wish they knew the love and passion I have for the people of God, the hours I spend in prayer for them.

About Baptists

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

Change is the greatest issue facing us denominationally. We must not get stuck in a paradigm. We must embrace change and work to have change work for us.

Congregationally, I think the key issue we face is being relevant. The young generation has many questions, and one of their main questions is, “How does this relate to me?” Therefore, we must be focused on application as we preach the word of God.

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

I would have the national convention model what Texas Baptist are doing. I

sincerely believe we here in Texas have it right. We are a convention that is inclusive and celebrate our diversity.

About Dr. Wagner

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

Dr. Author S. Kubo was my greatest mentor. He had a great work ethic, he was constantly working to improve himself, and he had great respect for the contributions of others. He influenced me to take an assignment to teach at the military academy at West Point. This assignment prepared me for the ministry because I learned how to teach at West Point.

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

How to use the Logos software.

Not very much. My road to ministry came through the military. I spent almost 22 years as an officer in the military. You learn a lot when leading men and women, and that experience gave me a great education.

What is the impact of ministry on your family?

The impact has been all positive for me. I have a wonderful wife of 49 years who appreciates the fact that I get to come home every day. It was not always the case during those years in the military.

I have three children who know the power of prayer and never hesitate to call dad when they need spiritual counseling. I have six grandchildren who are growing up to know Christ. It cannot get any better.

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

- *Good to Great* by Jim Collins
- *The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth* by John Maxwell
- *The Audacity of Hope* by Barack Obama
- *Soar With Your Strengths* by Donald O. Clifton
- *A God-Centered Church* by Henry Blackaby
- *The Culture Code* by Daniel Coyle

I am an avid reader. Reading is my greatest pastime. I mostly read books about leadership, because I believe this is what the church needs most. My second reading interest is books that inspire, encourage and compel people to action.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

Galatians 2:20. It keeps me humble knowing who I belong to and the price he paid for me.

Who is your favorite Bible character, other than Jesus? Why?

Jeremiah the prophet. His life was a “pedagogy in biography.” It took great discipline to do the things God told him to do; yet, he faithfully did those things.

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

I was a high school quarterback.

If you could get one “do over” in ministry, what would

it be, and why?

I would have accepted my calling much sooner than I did.