

# **Evan Henson: ‘We are never not being disciplined.’**

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Evan Henson has been the associate pastor of student ministries at [First Baptist Church in Lubbock](#) since 2018. 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 did you grow up?**

I grew up in Duncanville.

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

I was the youth pastor at Western Heights Baptist Church in Waco during seminary (2012-2015). I returned to my home church—Duncanville’s First Baptist Church—following my former youth pastor, Greg Bowman, and served there 2015 to 2018.

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

My parents instilled in all of us a faith tradition that has sustained me to this day. We were shown the significance of their faith through their words and actions daily.

My parents modeled to us what loving God, family and the local church meant. My mom has been a member of Duncanville's First Baptist Church since 1969, and my dad joined there when he got saved in the 1980s.

The love for the local church and the prioritizing of it was a nonnegotiable as long as I can remember. Through that upbringing, and a church that challenged and grew children and youth, I came to a saving faith in Jesus while in elementary school.

One thing I took for granted then, but recognize the significance of now, is the care and nurturing that continued throughout my time at home with my parents and under the care of that church and ministry.

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

I received a Bachelor of Arts in practical theology from Howard Payne University and a Master of Divinity in ministry leadership from Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary.

## **About ministry life**

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

The summer after my senior year in high school, I finally surrendered to a call to ministry. I had been wrestling with this call for more than a year. When I finally recognized the significance of my call, I completely rerouted my plans.

I was intending to head to Texas Tech University, where I planned to play baseball and pursue a degree in architecture. I unenrolled, applied to Howard Payne and began considering what this call meant for my future.

I knew I loved athletes. So, I thought I would serve through parachurch organizations and serve athletes specifically. Throughout the next few years, I continued to pray for clarity, and the Lord continued to place the local church on my heart.

I still love parachurch organizations and have many friends who serve them. But, I know God has called me to serve his church. This clarity in my call has allowed me to weather storms I think might have sent me elsewhere.

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

My favorite part of ministry with students is watching them dream. The world hasn't jaded them into skeptics yet; so, they dream in ways I wish I still could. They don't understand the word impossible; so, they will try anything. They feel invincible; so, they'll pursue crazy endeavors.

I think maybe that's a part of Jesus' command to have the faith of child. Not a faith that sees all the obstacles in front of us, but a faith that can't sit still long enough to notice them.

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

Seeing students take hold of their own faith is immensely rewarding. There might not be anything better than watching the shift from a faith they were given graciously by their parents and family to a faith they own and cherish.

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

One frustrating trend that seems to be taking hold in student ministry is a desire to be entertained. Students are told they should never be

bored—they should always have a device in their hand, a headphone in their ear, and a task to accomplish.

When we talk about student ministry, there is a great deal of reteaching that has to take place to show them discipling is our focus, not entertainment. We want them to have fun, and we certainly don't want them to be bored at our events, but if that is our sole focus, it will lead us to make choices that may not be biblically backed or discipleship-focused.

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

Growing up with a desire—albeit one driven from the community, not the content—to be at every event ever done, it was difficult at first to realize that no longer is the mindset of most youth. They are busier than they ever have been or should be.

Nothing about Wednesday night is sacred in the eyes of high school coaches; Sunday morning no longer is off limits to sports leagues. Ministry has had to shift from come-and-hear to training them to go-and-tell, even if that training only happens for two hours a month rather than four hours a week.

We simply cannot expect the majority of our students to be at every Sunday school and every midweek service in a month. We have to understand we have them less, and for most of them, they are around lost people more. So, I want to empower them to minister when they're not with us, not guilt them into higher attendance records.

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

## **seminary?**

People don't care about the current theological arguments in academia. People just want to know how to serve the Lord in today's culture. People want to be seen, heard and loved. They don't particularly care how much you know.

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

I think over the next 10 to 20 years we're going to watch churches begin to shrink some. I think the day of megachurches may be coming to a close. Let me be clear, I don't think this is necessarily a negative thing.

I think what we're already seeing is a culture that no longer views church involvement as a socially beneficial endeavor. Along with that, the only motivation to church involvement will be a deep desire to grow in one's faith.

While raw numbers may decrease, I think we'll see resilient disciples—to borrow Barna's term—increase. I think we'll see more people who want more than this world has to offer and will turn to a faith that doesn't just ask you to sit in a pew but to be on mission where your feet are, wherever that may be.

## **What's a significant challenge and/or influence facing your ministry?**

We get the most engaged church folks for about six hours a week. Social media and news networks—on both sides of the aisle—get much more of their attention. We are trying to disciple a people who give much more time and energy to other endeavors.

A friend of mine used to say a lot, “We are never not being disciplined.” Our people are constantly being trained up in something. We hope it’s through the reading of Scripture, prayer, engaging with community, reaching the lost, and participating with the local church, but all too often that’s not the case.

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

I wish people recognized the depth of care we have for people. I know even in the 10 years I’ve been serving in full-time ministry, we have had people leave our church for another one down the street and never tell us why.

I don’t think their intention is to hurt us. They probably think it’s the best decision for themselves and their family. I make decisions the same way. But, because we have walked through crises with them, and laughed, cried and celebrated with them, it’s a wounding experience for us when they walk away.

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

My kids have had the opportunity to be poured into by students in a way most kids don’t get. They absolutely love getting to be a part of my ministry and be loved by students much older than them.

My wife always has been my partner in ministry, and she does such a fantastic job of it. She helps me in ways I often take for granted, keeping me accountable, challenging me to give my all, and supporting me in struggles.

Ministry also is a strain on my family, but only when I lose sight of what is most important. When I begin to place my identity in my ministry “success,” my family suffers.

# About Evan

## Why are you Baptist?

I had to wrestle with this question in my undergrad, particularly during Howard Payne's School of Christian Ministry course titled Baptist Identity.

I remember calling my dad and asking why they would make us take this class. I think I said something about how I didn't want to be a Baptist; I just wanted to love Jesus.

Then I learned about the rich history of Baptist life. Not all of it is pretty, and some of it is downright appalling. But it was a history of people seeking to serve the Lord to the best of their ability.

The concepts of the priesthood of every believer and the separation of church and state appealed to me particularly. I deeply appreciate the understanding and teaching every believer has the responsibility and privilege to serve as priest—both by being able to pray directly to God and by being able to serve God by serving people—and we don't need an earthly intermediary between God and us.

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

My dad was the single greatest influence on me and my faith and continues to be that today.

I also recognize the people who came alongside my awesome parents to disciple me. During my teenage years there were four men who spoke into my life in significant ways: Greg Bowman, my youth pastor; Rupert Robbins, the leader of our Challenger group; and Sunday school teachers Jack Fox and Jaime Strain. They encouraged, challenged and walked with

me.

In college and since, Rusty Wheelington, a professor at Howard Payne, has been my biggest role model. Rusty and I read books together while I was at HPU, and he even let me be the assistant coach on his son's tee-ball team. I have spent countless hours on the phone and too many meals to count with Rusty. He continues to be my go-to phone call when I need help or encouragement. Rusty's humility is what I most want to emulate, and I hope someday I can be that model for a young minister coming up after me.

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

My favorite novel is *The Gentleman in Moscow* by Amor Towles.

As far as ministry books, I was most impacted by *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis.

*Cost of Discipleship* was deeply meaningful for me due to its charge to take discipleship so seriously. Churches often emphasize getting into heaven and out of hell as the motivation to get saved. Bonhoeffer notices discipleship here on earth is something that costs. "Nothing can be cheap to us that is costly to God," he wrote.

Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* emphasizes our regular patterns of living should be centered around Christ and his example. The most powerful statement is in the first few pages: "I would rather feel contrition than know how to spell it." I often get obsessed with knowledge and miss out on the relationship with Christ offered to us at salvation.

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

2 Timothy 2:1-2 has been a huge part of my ministry. It lays out such a



simple design for disciples who make disciples who make disciples. “You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

Ministry is hard, but it isn't complicated. We are called as pastors to lead others to the Lord. The end game is not that they would bring more people to us, but that they would lead people to the Lord themselves. It's almost as if we are working ourselves out of a job.

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

Peter. Peter screwed up over and over and over again, and I do, too. I have a little trouble relating to someone who learns lessons quickly. I need to be wrong many times before I finally get the picture. I wish this wasn't the case, of course, but alas, here I am.