

Jack Bodenhamer: Seeking God's will on earth as it is in heaven

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Jack Bodenhamer has been pastor of First Baptist Church of Elm Mott six years. From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on ministry. 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?

First Baptist Church in Comanche—youth intern

Trinity Baptist Church in Sweetwater—youth and education minister

- Where did you grow up?

My younger years were spent in the Dallas suburb of Duncanville. I went to junior high and high school in the bustling burg of Comanche.

- How did you come to faith in Christ?

I grew up in the church—in every musical, at every service, being thumped in the back of the head at every turn. My parents prayed with me and taught about Jesus in the home. Even though I was a young child when I made my decision, I still can remember every step I took down the aisle at First Baptist Church in Duncanville to begin my faith journey with Jesus.

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

Bachelor of arts in Christian studies, Howard Payne University, 2005

Master of divinity, Logsdon Seminary at Hardin-Simmons University, 2008

Ministry/church

- Why do you feel called into ministry?

The call to ministry came from God after my freshman year of college on a mission trip in Kentucky. I had begun a career path in coaching that I was pursuing passionately when God interrupted.

It was a true Gideon experience in my life, where I threw out the fleece, and God answered in dramatic proportion. As I lay on an air mattress one evening, I prayed that if God was indeed calling me to ministry, I needed to hear it in an audible and real way. The following day, God spoke through three individuals, in three “unrelated instances,” expressing that I should be in ministry.

When I struggle or doubt my ministry in the everyday realities of church work, I recall this experience and am encouraged.

- What is your favorite aspect of ministry? Why?

Seeing God’s will being done on earth *as it is in heaven*. There is nothing better than seeing God’s people impacting this world for the sake of the kingdom. Meeting the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional needs of our little community has been something that our church has excelled at doing and is the very definition of ministry. Being part of the work that is done by God through this church is the best part of my days.

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

The greatest joy in my congregational life is being in the family of God at Elm Mott. We are a small congregation, and so we share in every aspect of life. Every member's sorrow is a shared one, so that every death is felt, every sickness suffered together and every struggle significant. It can be overwhelming at times; however, in the same way, every birth is celebrated, every success is communal and love abounds.

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

Congregations can often lose sight of the work God is doing by focusing on less-important facets of church life. When we value buildings over people, or myopic ideologies over the cause of Christ, we fail. When personal and church politics supersede the sacrificial care for the marginalized, we fail.

If I could remove this temptation from congregational life, I believe church members would be much happier, and the impact of the church in the world would be far greater.

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

When I entered ministry, I believed my work with youth would be the singular purpose of my call. I had a vision of myself as some Holden Caulfield character from *The Catcher in the Rye*, saving kids from going over the cliffs in life.

My understanding of ministry quickly evolved and has deepened in two ways: (1) My call is to ministry. Any descriptors that I place in front of that word, be it "youth" or "pastoral" are arbitrary in comparison to the more general understanding of service. (2) Any ministry is, and should be, intergenerational. When you are working with youth, you also are ministering to their parents and younger siblings. When you are the senior pastor, you hear people's struggles as parents and children of aging parents.

People need hope, whether they are 9 years old or 90.

About Baptists

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

Denominational programs and cooperative giving will be a continual conversation moving into the future as my generation grows into leadership in churches. We already have seen the slow deterioration of denominational ties, whether it is in the scope of associations, state conventions or national alignment. The baggage associated with ties will continue to challenge younger generations, because they do not have the shared memories of the “good old days.”

Cooperative programs will need to shift and evolve in order to continue to meet the changing needs of the future.

About Jack

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

My mom, *Ann Bodenhamer*, shaped the person I am and the perspective I have in ministry in deep ways. As I began in ministry, I served in a church in the same community where she taught eighth-grade English. I remember early on recounting a story of a young man who I was teaching in Sunday school. He was the “perfect” youth; he was a well-behaved, good-looking, athletic kid from a good family. My mother then asked me about another student, one who wasn’t well liked, from a rough family and who needed to be loved. She told me I needed to minister like Jesus and love the unloved. This conversation remains one of the most transformative moments in my life.

Dr. Van Christian at First Baptist Church in Comanche and *Dr. Ward Hayes*

at Valley Grove Baptist Church in Stephenville are pastors who have spent long years mentoring me. I wore out the phone lines in my first few years of pastoring with questions, concerns, hurts and joys. I still call them on a regular basis for coaching and their expertise.

Dr. Bill Tillman invested in me as a seminary student and has shaped my thoughts and beliefs throughout the years. He introduced me to the depth of biblical ethics and ethicist T.B. Maston, for which I will ever be in his debt.

Father Jared Houze, my Episcopalian brother, and I have invested in one another's ministries in such ways that there is a mutual blessing and kinship.

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

Self-care was often the subject of discussion in seminary but never modeled. In fact, the time in seminary can be the very antithesis of self-care. In my experience, I was in a ministry position while also working at the seminary, attending class, doing homework and attempting to have regular times of exercise, not to mention some modicum of a social life. Such habits of over-extending were, and still are, difficult to overcome.

Modeled self-care throughout seminary would encourage ministers to have a healthier lifestyle, thereby increasing their ministry and longevity.

- Name some of your favorite books (other than the Bible) or authors, and explain why.

The Lord of The Rings or anything by J.R.R. Tolkien. I love the expanse of this fantasy world and the themes of hope and endurance in the midst of suffering that are explored throughout the novels.

T.B. Maston, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Eugene Peterson are authors who

continually compel me to be a better Christ follower, husband, father, pastor and friend.

- What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

Galatians 6:9, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time, we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

This Scripture was preached at my ordination. At the time, I had little idea of how profound it would be to my life and ministry. Doing good is exhausting work, especially when the fruit of your labors may be years in the making, or even never seen at all. And yet, *never tire of doing good* is the instruction. I have worn out the phrase among my church and staff, because when that due season does come, the harvest is so much the sweeter.

- Who is your favorite Bible character (other than Jesus)? Why?

I love Elijah’s story. For all the supernatural miracle work that is done within his story, he remains an example of success and struggle. He shows a depth of faith as well as frustration. We see Elijah be bold before King Ahab and then flee. He is fed by birds and shows deep compassion for the widow. He performs miracles, and his boldness is unmatched. He has a funny, sarcastic side to his taunts of the priests of Baal. What happens after he has these great successes? He flees; he is still scared and isolated. He has “down” moments and searches for the voice of God. Elijah’s authenticity toward God, his successes and his struggles speak to me and to my own ministry experience.

- Name something about you that would surprise your church.

I once got thrown out of an intramural basketball game at Howard Payne for arguing with the official and taking my shirt off in protest of the call.

What may be more disturbing is the fact that this might not surprise my church at all.

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