

# Jason Burden: Serve a great God; see lives changed

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**Jason Burden** is senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Nederland, where he has served five 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?*

Prior to my ministry in Nederland, I pastored Dorcas Wills Memorial Baptist Church in the East Texas town of Trinity. Before that, I served First Baptist Church in Chilton as pastor.

- *Where did you grow up?*

I was raised in Hico.

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

I grew up attending First United Methodist Church in Hico. When I was 12 years old, I attended confirmation classes in the Methodist church. Bro. Ron Albertson led the meetings. In one of our discussions, Bro. Ron stressed the difference between knowing about Jesus and knowing Jesus in a saving way. There, in Bro. Ron's office, with a couple of other young men, I prayed to receive Christ as my savior.

I was baptized publically some years later after I married my wife, Kristi,

and joined First Baptist Church in Iredell.

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

I received my bachelor's degree from Tarleton State University in 1997. I earned my master's degree from Truett Theological Seminary in 2005 and my doctorate from Truett Seminary in 2011.

## **Ministry/church**

- *Why do you feel called into ministry?*

In the late '90s, Kristi and I were attending First Baptist Church in Iredell. We served as volunteer youth leaders there several years. As I had opportunities to minister to the youth and take part in church life, I realized a calling God had for me. I was eager to serve God, and I was encouraged by the growth we saw in our youth group. I resigned my secular job in 1999, enrolled in Truett Seminary, and God opened up opportunities to minister.

Why I got into ministry is the reason I stay in ministry—to serve a great God, and to see lives changed.

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

My favorite part of church life always has been worship. Good worship—worship that is biblical and sincere—accomplishes a lot of ministry. When someone catches me at the end of a worship service on Sunday and tells me the music and the message gave them comfort or peace, it blesses my soul. Our staff works diligently each week to lead our congregation in worship, and it is the best feeling in the world when we sense that our work has brought people closer to God.

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

I love table fellowship. The churches I have pastored have certainly been blessed with wonderful cooks. Eating delicious food is only a small part of the joy I experience when sitting down with a small group, a large group or another person to share a meal. Mealtime conversations are where we truly get to know each other. The more I get to know the people I serve as pastor, the more I love them.

Kristi and I enjoy having couples over to our house for pre-marriage counseling. We also look forward to opportunities to gather with our church's Sunday school classes and community groups for fellowships. Table fellowship is part of the church culture that authentically connects us to the picture of the church in the Book of Acts. I think God made us to enjoy, and long for, the kind of relationships that are established and nurtured around a table.

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

The church is too busy! I'm not just talking about the church I currently serve. It is an epidemic. Churches everywhere have too much going on, too many meetings, too many programs, require too many hours from volunteers and have too little room for God or for encouraging healthy relationships.

I don't know how to change this part about congregational life. There is no doubt churches have a lot to accomplish, but I fear in many cases, we have exchanged good ministry for ministry meetings. We are robbing the people of our congregations of the time and energy they could, and should, be using to engage with their neighbors, love their families and serve their communities in the name of Jesus.

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

I always have loved conducting ministry, whether that be preaching, hospital visits or mission trips. Over the last few years, I have seen the

importance of handing ministry off to others. In the past, I felt the more I was able to do, the better off the church would be. Now, I see my role as pastor is not to do all of the work but to share as much of the work as I can. I am more of a player/manager, in the baseball sense. I have work to do, but my greatest contribution to the congregation lies in equipping the saints and cheering on their good work.

- *How do you expect congregational life to change in the next 10 to 20 years?*

Perhaps I should preface this part with a statement about what I hope stays the same in congregational life over the next 10 to 20 years. I hope corporate worship remains strong among our churches. I hope Bible study remains a priority. I hope the Bible will still be our authority. I hope, as Christians, we will be defined and identified by our love for the world and for one another. I hope we still will be evangelistic.

In the future, I expect big congregations to get bigger. The fastest-growing areas in our state are home to the fastest-growing churches.

I expect technology to help us minister to people better than we can imagine. A small congregation can reach an infinite number of people through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. Even today, a Facebook page is more important than a sign on the front lawn of the church. How much more important is that going to be in the future, when we are even more reliant on technology than we are today?

I expect social justice causes to be the new missional rallying cry of the church. Millennials are championing causes such as human trafficking, adoption, sustainable agriculture and protecting the environment. The Millennials, the largest generation present in our population, are putting their money where their passion is. In 10 to 20 years, we will see the Millennials at the helm of many of our institutions and churches. I don't

expect their passions to be different from what they are today.

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

I would love to start a ministry that leads congregations to remember the value of Sabbath. I did my doctoral work on the topic of Sabbath and found a wealth of information about what Sabbath means—and a paucity of Sabbath practice in the church.

Christians get so busy working for the Lord they miss out on relating with the Lord. Our culture doesn't help. We've been told our entire lives that time is money. Christians need to recognize time is sacred. I think a better understanding, and practice, of Sabbath holds the keys to being saner, healthier and more effective for God in this world.

- *What qualities do you look for in a congregation?*

I was reading a blog last week about hiring staff. A line stuck with me that I think can apply equally to church staff and congregational life. The author asked, "Can you see yourself traveling with this person?" Every congregation is on a journey. If you feel like you are all headed the same direction and you can put up with each other, you've found a congregation worth sticking with.

- *Name the three most significant challenges and/or influences facing your congregation.*

The church has suffered from a loss of influence in the culture of our communities. In previous years, school districts and civic organizations would not schedule events on Sundays or Wednesday evenings. We currently find ourselves competing with a variety of organizations for the precious little time our people have to gather for worship and study.

The church is in a battle in the political arena. The state is putting pressure on Christians to only be Christian in the church. Sadly, we have broadly accepted that we should be politically correct. The church needs to teach Christians how to be “politically Christian.” This isn’t about who to vote for or which political party to align with. Being politically Christian is about practicing our faith wherever we are. It’s about teaching our kids they can be proud to be a Christian when they go to school. It’s about not being afraid to pray in public. It’s about not being ashamed to share our faith.

This church faces the challenge of finding ways to connect with people in the 21st century. We live in a time when people do not interact with their neighbors, they are annoyed by knocks on the door, and fewer and fewer people publish their home phone number, if they even still have a home phone. It’s easy for people to remain isolated and cut off from the community life the church offers. The church needs to be creative in finding means to engage our neighbors and make connections with the people around us.

### **About Baptists**

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

The popularity of nondenominational churches has injured our denomination across the board. As a leader in a Baptist church, I confess my own culpability in not adequately educating my congregation on why we are Baptist and what we accomplish together with other Baptist churches. Many of the people in our congregations do not know about the education we fund, the hospitals we support, the missionaries we keep on the field or the orphans we care for.

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

I would like to see a change in the way churches participate in denominational life. It seems like the larger a church grows, the less involved it is in the denominational life and the less likely it is to contribute to the denominational causes. Of course, there are exceptions to this statement, but all of us know of large and influential churches that only nominally participate in the life of the denomination.

If large churches contributed to the denomination at the same rate small churches contributed, we would experience an incredible revival of missions and ministry locally, across the state and at the national level.

### **About Jason**

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

Bob Ray and the late Bill Schibler were men who took me under their wings in the beginning days of my ministry. They allowed me to preach in their pulpits and encouraged me as I sought ministry opportunities.

Joe Stewart introduced me to missions. During one of the Stewarts' furloughs from their field in Africa, Joe and I had lunch together. He challenged me to join him in Kenya with a group from our church in Trinity. The subsequent trips we took to Kenya made for some of the best, and most powerful, ministry events in my life.

I have been encouraged and influenced by countless lay leaders in the churches I've served. God has always provided wisdom and support for me through the kind words and gentle leadership of strong Christians in the congregations I've pastored.

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

Congregations assume that since a minister is a godly, biblically sound person, that minister will make for a great office administrator, effective PR

representative, a proficient project manager, and a host of other duties that are more common in the business world. These areas of church life can be real pitfalls for ministers. It's hard to train ministers for all of the administrative duties they will find in their church settings.

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

I believe most ministers' children hate living in the fishbowl scenario. I'm extremely proud of the way my wife and kids have not only survived the fishbowl, but have found places to serve in the churches we have been a part of.

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

My favorite authors are Eugene Peterson and C.S. Lewis. I find myself rereading many of the books I own by each of these men.

I love reading and listening to books about history. I recently completed William Manchester's multipart biography on Winston Churchill. That took about 150 hours of listening. I'm eagerly awaiting Robert Caro's next installment on the life of Lyndon Johnson.

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

"I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live for the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" Galatians 2:20).

This passage inspires and directs me. It inspires me in that it helps me focus on the sacrifice Christ made for me to purchase my salvation. It directs me by reminding me to live a life of obedience to Christ's words and example.

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



I always have been intrigued by Elijah. He is a mixture of courage and cowardice, boldness and meekness, faithfulness to God and fearfulness of men. Elijah's life makes for a great character study of someone God used in a powerful way in spite of their personal frailties.

- *Name something about you that would surprise your church.*

I'm introverted. Crowds don't make me nervous, but they tax my emotional energy level. I find myself recharging by escaping into books, study and journaling.

- *If you could get one "do over" in ministry, what would it be, and why?*

There are a number of projects in church that I would love to go back and "do over." Rather than focusing on the outcome of these projects, I would go back and focus on the process. I have come to realize the importance of getting the process right rather than pushing for the right results.

## **Bonus**

- *Where can we find you on the internet?*

I'm on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. I also have a blog: [www.pastorburden.com](http://www.pastorburden.com).

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