

Jerry Smith: Stewarding a place where God saves people

November 19, 2018

Jerry Smith has been the executive director of [Big Country Baptist Assembly](#) since 2015. From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on camp 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](#).

Background

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

- Camp manager at Plains Baptist Assembly from 1985 to 1994
- Camp manager at Latham Springs from 1994 to 2008
- Chaplain at Dalby Federal Prison

Where did you grow up?

I was born in Lamesa and lived in Seagraves, Garden City, Big Spring and Midland. My dad, D.D. Smith, pastored bi-vocational country churches while I was growing up.

How did you come to faith in Christ?

My dad led me to the Lord when I was 8 years old.

Where were you educated, and what degrees did you

receive?

I have a bachelor's degree from Howard Payne University in sociology and theology and a master's degree from Baylor University in business administration.

Ministry

Why do you feel called into camp ministry?

I was called to ministry when I was 17 and started working right away at what is now Circle 6 Baptist Camp.

What is your favorite aspect of camp ministry? Why?

Seeing people come to know Christ as their Savior and Lord.

What one aspect of camp ministry gives you the greatest joy?

When people come by and say: "See that tree or that rock over there? That's where I accepted Christ," or, "That is where I was called to ministry."

What one aspect of camp ministry would you like to change?

We've become too much about entertainment instead of learning God's word. We don't need to have six hours of Bible studies followed by a service, but we do need to spend time learning God's word and having wholesome recreation.

How has your ministry or your perspective on ministry

changed?

Times have changed; so, we need ministry now more than ever. My dad made a forecast that if the American family was to break up, that's how America could be defeated. We see more family distress than ever before. The real way for families to be encouraged is through a strong loving church family. Retreats and camps can help do that.

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

The same way it has changed before: through creative Christian leadership. This past summer at our camp, we have seen some pretty big numbers of people being called to ministry. I have been doing this long enough that I've seen this happen before. God is calling out new ministers to help his church grow in the future.

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

1. **Camps never received Cooperative Fund dollars.** However, with all the discord in our two conventions, competition for funding is a big reality. Most camps don't generally have someone who can concentrate just on funding.
2. **Associational degradation.** With competition between the conventions, the local association is declining. That means associational camps have more difficulty in a unified camp program.
3. **Training of youth ministers and pastors.** Some feel they have to have big entertainment to draw kids to camp. If only they could realize they are the ones who set the tone for camp, not the entertainment.

What do you wish more people knew about camp ministry?

Camp ministry is a lot like a 24-hour-per-day Vacation Bible School. The real secret is that you take young people away from the TV, telephone and peer pressure, surround them with people who love the Lord, and amazing things happen. I tell pastors and youth ministers that you can do more with a person in a week of camp than you can in six weeks of Sunday school.

About Jerry

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

My first mentor was my dad. He taught me more about theology than I thought I was receiving.

Second is Bob Dixon, the former executive director of Texas Baptist Men. I was fortunate to be a summer missionary under his leadership for most of my college years.

Third is Cameron Byler, who worked with Bob Dixon. He originally recruited me to Texas Baptist Men.

Fourth is Jerry Bob Taylor, another staff member of Texas Baptist Men. He was my supervisor for two summers, and he helped me get my first camp management job.

The fifth most important person who had a big impact on my life was James Shields, who taught systematic theology at Howard Payne while I was a student there. I really think if a majority of pastors could have learned from him, we would not have the convention problems that we have.

What is the impact of camp ministry on your family?

My wife Jan has been my partner in camp ministry. Our two daughters got to grow up at camp. I loved to be able to tell them to “go play in the street” since at camp, it was a safe place for them to play. They got to participate in most of the programs that were held at the camp, and some of the lessons they learned have had a wonderful impact on their lives.

Integrity has always been a big thing to Jan and myself, and our oldest daughter is now a manager for one of the world’s largest accounting firms. Our youngest daughter, before being a stay at home mom, was the director of math and science at a 5A high school.

They both married godly men, and we have grandkids who love to come to camp.

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

Max Lucado for inspiration and Clive Cussler for fictional adventure.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

Romans 8:28-39 because there is true victory in Christ.

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

Moses. He had the Egyptian army behind him, the Red Sea in front of him, and nothing he could do about it but trust in the Lord. And the Lord made a way. Not a small way, but a way for all the Israelites to walk through.

Just an opinion.

For the last several years, with two conventions, we have developed a “circle the wagons” attitude to protect what each one has. The problem is

that with the wagons circled, we are not really going anywhere. To me, we need to develop an “expendable” attitude. We may wear ourselves out, but at least we are doing things to spread the gospel. I believe someone very important said, “He who loses his life for my sake....”